

Chapter II

The Spiritual Value of Hymnody

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1- The Spiritual value of hymnody

Hymnody in both Old and New Testaments:

St. Basil said: “Singing hymns is calmness to spirit, pleasure to the soul, and prevalence of peace. It calms the waves, silences the storms in our hearts, appeases the rage of the enraged, restores the debauchees, creates friendliness, expels controversies and reconciles enemies. For who can consider an enemy one who participated with him in singing praise before God’s throne?”

Chanting hymns drives away the evil spirits and attracts the angels’ ministry. It is a weapon against the horrors of the night, and rest from the daily tedious fatigues. It is for the child a friend, a pleader and a protector; for man a crown of glory; for elders a balm¹ of comfort, and for women a suitable ornament.

Therefore the church made hymnology part of worship to create fervor in the faithful, renew spiritual zeal in their hearts, refresh them and kindle the fire of the Holy Spirit in them to worship their redeemer.

The effect of chanting hymns evil spirits:

It is written in the biography of the great St. "Paula El Shamy": [One day, while wandering in the desert of Jordan, the saint met the devil, and having bound him with the sign of the Holy Trinity, the saint asked him: Do you

¹ The balm (or balsam is a tree that gives white flowers like clusters, from which is derived sweet-smelling ointment that soothes and calms down pain.

ascend unto heaven and hear the sound of chanting hymns? The devil said: No, for since we have fallen we could not return or attain the high places except once when Satan (Satanael) our leader entered with the angels into God's presence. At that time, the Lord said to him: "from whence comest thou?" And Satan said: "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it". Then he asked the Lord to permit him to lead Job into temptation, and the Lord permitted him. Ever since he could not enter into heaven another time. As for the angels, they do not utter but hymns and glorification².]

From the biography of "St. Paul" we perceive that wherever there is chanting of hymns, there will be no demons; for they flee away from that place. Hymns are a proof of God's presence, and wherever God is present satan cannot approach.

The effect of hymnody on the faithful:

Contemplating on hymnody, some said, [Navigators shout gladly when they lift up the anchors because they will sail and the ploughman whistles in the morning while driving a cow to the farm; and when the soldiers leave their beloved to go to the battle field they play their instruments melodies of joy and pleasure. Likewise the spirit of praise and thanksgiving does the same like those songs and music. If only we decide to chant God's praise we will overcome many difficulties which cannot be overcome when we are in a state of distress and anxiety. We will be able to perform double the work we do in case of distress.]

²

The reference: Hegumen Youhanna Abdel Messeih Salib, "The life's journey and what after death", P.53

The words of church hymns are but entreaties, supplications and praise brought before the Holy One to gain His blessing and gifts, to seek His pleasure, and to thank Him for His exceeding love.

With these words the hymnists' hearts converse with the Lord, and on their wings the thoughts ascend high unto the heavenly places. In this regard late Hegumen "Youhanna Salama" says: " the aim of the hymns is to stir up the ardor of the faithful as the soldiers in the battle-fields are stirred by means of trumpets and flute and encouraged to face the terrors with steady mind and undismayed soul. For the faithful are surrounded by various enemies who watch to have a chance to hunt them. So, unless they are ready to face the spiritual enemies, their struggle and their patience will be in vain³."

Sound spiritual hymns have a great effect on the soul, for they go deep into the hearts stimulating within them due love to the creator for His rational creation. And because God is pleased with the hymns and songs composed to glorify Him in worship, He prescribed chanting hymns and praise songs in the various books of the Holy Scripture.

When Moses and his people crossed the Red Sea, he sang praises to the Lord with the children of Israel (Exod 15). Those praise songs continued resounding high even unto heaven. They are still sung by whoever overcomes the beast, by those standing by the sea of glass, and those having the harps of God!

³ Hegumen Youhanna Salama "The Precious Pearls in explaining the church rituals and beliefs" Vol.I, P.184.

The greatest orchestra in the world:

David, whom God granted the kingdom and the prophecy, and who was the best of all in composing divine psalms and praise songs inspired by the spirit of the Lord in the Old Testament, compiled impressive melodies and appointed a huge number for singing in the house of God. For it is written in (1Chronicles 23:5), " '... four thousand praised the Lord with the instruments, which I made,' said David". And David divided them into divisions.

It is evident from this verse how huge was the number of the players on the musical instruments; for the number of players in any great symphony orchestra does not exceed one hundred and twenty divided into four divisions: stringed instruments, wooden blowing instruments, copper blowing instruments, and harmonica.

It is also evident that though the musical instruments industry at that time was primitive, and cutting and forming metals and wood was to a great extent difficult, yet the verse here states that these instruments were made for praising. It seems that there were no instruments suitable for praising the Lord, so the hymnists invented those instruments to be of a different type from those of worldly songs. They certainly surpassed the worldly instruments since what is offered to the Creator must be much better than what is offered to people.

Perhaps this conclusion is right, for "David" the sweet singer of Israel said in Psalm (151), "I was small among my brothers ... my hands made a harp; my fingers fashioned a lyre." With such great patience was David, though king and prophet, wasting his precious time when making an instrument to praise God? Nay. For "it is good to sing praises unto our God".

May I see David before dying?

When the Lord Christ visited the cave of St. Karass the hermit before his death in 451A.D, He asked him what he wanted Him to do for him before his repose. The holy Amba Karass Said: My God and Lord, I kept iterating the psalms of David the Prophet and Psalmist day and night, so if I would find favor in Your eyes, let me be worthy to see David the Prophet while I am still in the flesh before my departure.

Immediately the Good Savior commanded the holy Archangel Michael to bring David with his harp to play it before St. Karass. And Archangel Michael immediately brought David, who played his harp saying, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it". Then our Savior sat down and said to St. Karass: Here is David the Prophet and Psalmist has come to you with what you have longed for in order to hear from you. And David the Prophet said to him: What hymn do you like me to chant to you? And what melody shall I play? Amba Karass said: "I wish to hear the ten strings together and the hymns with the tunes together". So David the Prophet moved his harp playing, and raised his voice, saying "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. O Lord, truly I am Your servant, and the son of Your maidservant."(PS.113: 15)

He chanted also Psalm 37:25, “I have been young, and now I am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken...” And while David was singing loud with his sweet voice and moving his harp, Amba Karass gave up the spirit in the bosom of our Lord savior Jesus Christ. And the Savior received the soul of the saint, kissed it and gave it to Michael the Archangel ⁴.

This is the influence of the hymnist on the listener: that the listener draws images in his imagination for the hymnist, expecting to see a face bright like an angel. But what if he finds him different; the face is not like that of an angel, and the conduct is not like that of David? Truly, a hymnist of this type; will be a stumbling block to whoever hears him.

Chanting God’s Praise in the lives of the father anchorites:

Hegumen "Samaan Al Soryany", in his book "The Father Anchorites" states that St. Ghaleon the anchorite said, [... I remained on the mountain, not knowing where to go and how to be saved from this temptation, so I opened my mouth and I chanted Psalm 17(18): “I will love You, O Lord, my strength the Lord is my rock and my fortress ”. I repeated this psalm thrice, so my fright calmed down and my heart became firm; I turned around but

I found no one. Then I chanted Psalm (6): “ O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, neither chasten me in your hot displeasure. Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak; O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed....”

⁴ Augnostos (Reader) Rafik Ragheb, "Biography of Amba Karass the hermit ".

Then I lifted up my hands unto heaven praying: “ Make haste, O God, to deliver me; make haste to help me, O Lord.”

I then moved to Psalm (19), “the Lord hear you in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend you; send you help from His sanctuary.”; and Psalm (120) “I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence comes my help. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not suffer your foot to be moved; he that keeps you will not slumber ”

Then I turned round and saw three monks in white clothes, reciting some parts of Psalm (98), “O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He has done marvellous things ...”. Their voices were like angels’ voices. I knew the hymn they were chanting, so I chanted with them. However, I was on my guard, lest they be of the host of satan sent to destroy me, but I remembered that Satan cannot recite the Psalms of David the Prophet. And while thinking, those people drew near chanting with good melody. I responded with the same. We stayed the whole night chanting the psalms of David the Prophet, responding to each other till the morning. Neither did they ask me about myself, nor I about themselves!

Only when we all sat down that I asked them and knew that they were monks from the Monastery of Amba Shenouda, and were wandering in the mount.]

Again about Amba Ghaleon the Anchorite, Amba Isaac the Abbot of the Monastery of Kalamoun, says, [No one in the Monastery was like him in

reading and in memorizing the hymns and the psalms.... so I went to him, and said: “ Take young Moses the reader and instruct him in the church rituals, constitution, and hymns.” And he took the child, embraced him, and said to him: “My son, receive from me the Spirit, which is within me, for on the seventh day I will repose.” So Moses received from him the Spirit, and grew in reading and memorizing hymns.

From the biography of Amba Ghalion the Anchorite, it becomes evident that:

- 1- Itirating Psalms delivers a person from tribulation and diabolic wars.
- 2- The life of those anchorites is continual praise, and psalms never quit their lips.
- 3- The hymns chanted by the three monks anchorites of the Monastery of Amba Shenouda are the same hymns chanted by St. Ghalion the Anchorite of the Monastery of Kalamoun.
- 4- The voices of those anchorites were sweet and similar to the Angels’ voices.
- 5- Satan cannot utter the psalms of David the Prophet.
- 6- Those father anchorites chanted hymns with the octave method, because Amba Ghalion the Anchorite says: “I responded with the same hymns. And whenever they recited a psalm I recited it with them...”
- 7- Those father anchorites were skilful in memorizing hymns, and Amba Ghalion also. There was no one in the Monastery who could read, or memorize, hymns and psalms like him.

8- Coptic hymns were handed down from one generation to another, not only orally but also by the Holy Spirit who acts always in the church, preserving her tradition. For when Amba Isaac, the Abbot of the Monastery of Kalamoun asked St. Ghalion to instruct young Moses in the church rites and hymns, he embraced him and said to him: "My son receive from me the Spirit that is within me, for on the seventh day I will repose." And immediately Moses received the Spirit from him and advanced in reading and memorizing hymns.

The necessity of praising God:

When bringing up the ark of God from the village called Ba a-le to Jerusalem, they brought it up with songs and hymns and playing of music on all kinds of instruments. And when King Solomon came to the throne of the Israeli Kingdom, he brought singers into the house of the Lord as in the time of his father David.

And in the time of King Hezekiah, Nehemiah and Ezra, the sons of Israel and their priests used the hymns of David in their worship. They used to gather together in the house of the Lord, and when beginning to offer the burnt offering, they chanted the song of the Lord with the instruments of David. They never ignored that.

In the New Testament the church followed this same sound system. She introduced hymnody, praise, glorification, and singing to His holy name in His house. The purpose is to implant such religious facts in the worshippers' minds. This, the church derived from His commandment in Psalm (148:12),

"Both young men, and maidens; old men and children: let them praise the name of the Lord; for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and heaven."

The priests of both the Old and the New Testaments excelled in adhering to praise and glorification, believing that man, being composed of body and soul, is inclined to sing praise of his creator and his glories, not only with the spirits' emotions but also with utterances of the mouth and sounds of the body.

What the Orthodox "Manar Magazine" wrote in this regard affirms the above, for it says, "the church hymnody on musical bases and with suitable melodies, harmony of tunes and voices, pleasant voices, delightful rhythm, serenity and veneration ... all this makes hymns enter readily into the heart of the worshipper, move within him all the sacred and sublime qualities, and lift up all his emotions and thoughts and meditations towards the Lord invoking him to spiritual struggling. When the ears of the person, who stands praying with serenity and veneration, become delighted with such impressive chanting, he will rise above all worldly concerns and attain thoroughly the heavenly places to be among its inhabitants, where there is no sorrow, no pain, no sighs but inexpressible joy and delight.

The sweet and perfect tunes of the praise songs create inexpressible pleasure within the performer, they comfort the soul which suffers under the worldly passions, casting away every distress and sorrow, giving it rapid and continual comfort, stimulating it to entreat God, and stirring in it the longing for heavenly life. Such tunes make the worshipper glorify God, praising and giving thanks to Him for His great and splendid glory and for His deep

benefits. The worshipper thus stands with eyes lifted up towards Him, who dwells in heaven conquering the pains of both the body and the soul, and casting away, the old corrupt man and putting on the new and renewed one, following in all this the commands, the laws and commandments of the Lord God.

The worshipper, standing with fear of God, listening to the divine well-tuned and impressive chanting and the harmonious praise hymns which delight the soul, becomes once moved and impressed, at another time crying with bitter sighs before the Crucified Lord over his sins, or rejoicing at conquering sin and death with Him who arose on the third day from the tomb.

Impressed by this wonderful chanting, the worshipper beholds with his mind how Hades was in pain and embittered when the Lord Jesus Christ prevailed over all its powers. This makes him feel the great joy of the redeemed who were released from captivity, and remembers the songs of the heavenly hosts to our Lord who conquered sin and Hades and destroyed by His death him who has the power of death (i.e. Satan).

The images in his mind pass successively: the fall of man ; the voice of Mercy calling him in Eden, so he cries, "Have mercy upon me, I the sinner"; the fearful voice of the Judge inflicting eternal suffering upon the wicked, so he sighs shouting, "Let it be according to Your mercy, O Lord, and not according to my sins"; then the pleasant and delightful voice of the Redeemer calling, "come to Me".

Church hymnody has great benefits and has the power to alter any bad inclinations to good. It gives the listeners or the performers contrition and awe, implants within the soul the spirit of virtue, love of goodness, and hatred of sin, softens the hard hearts, and lifts the soul up to God to chant with the heavenly host the praise of the Holy Trinity.

Congregational praise singing:

The congregational prayers and praise songs in the church are in themselves a living and rational communion activated and given life by the Holy Spirit to make the church members, through them, one spiritual and harmonious body.

The church is aware of this fact since the beginning, for the history of the solitary fathers of the 3^d and 4^h centuries tell us that the law of common worship required them to meet on Saturdays and Sundays for praise and prayer the whole night i.e. "vigil". They end with the divine liturgy between the third and sixth hour of the day during summer and winter.

And we read in (Acts 2: 46,47), "So, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God."

And in the fathers tradition it is evident that the early fathers gave the ministry of prayers, vigil and praising a very high value in the church worship. They considered these as racing in the field, while the grace got in the sacraments they considered as the reward or prize.

This draws our attention to the fact that whatever prayer, praise or struggle in repentance we offer to God is actually the work of His grace, being the fruit of the Sacraments, which sanctified our souls and washed our hearts and eyes. This would ensure that our prayers, praise, tears and repentance will be clear from any self-righteousness.

A contemporary father asserts the importance of chanting the psalms tuned with melody, not just reciting them, saying, "...for it is suitable to praise God with the poetic books; because they are composed in such a way that enables people to express their love towards God with all their power."

Besides, when tunes are added to words, they increase greatly their spirituality, lifting them up above the sense of the word, above the literal meaning, and even above reasoning.

David the Prophet, the greatest psalmist knew this fact and out of his own experience he said in (psalm 138: 1), "Before the angels I will sing praises to You."

The Psalms are indeed a model full of praises to God from an honest heart overflowing with thanks and rejoicing. For this, the Book of Psalms has become the method of praising, prayer and ministry within and outside the church all over the world. What gives it this value is its being the beloved Book for the Lord Christ, from which He quoted and taught, and with which He prayed in the temple and praised in His Last Supper. The words of these psalms were His last words on the cross "into Your hands I commit My Spirit" (Ps 31: 5 ; Lk 23: 46).

The first chorus in the New Testament

“And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of olives” (Mk:14:26)

After the thanksgiving and the partaking of the heavenly mysteries, the hymn took a new form. It is well known that Christ memorized well the psalms, and the chorus of the disciples probably responded “Alleluia”. The psalms they used to chant were: (114) ; (115) ; (116) ; (117) ; (118).

Perhaps the records and interpretations written down in the Jews’ Books give to these psalms a prophetic eschatological character. This is evident in the "Medrash"^{5*}, the “Telmod of Babylon”, and the "Telmod of Jerusalem" under the following titles :

(Psalm 114:2), "Praising the Lord in the life to come".

(Psalm 114:9), " Zion in the last days" .

(Psalm 115:1) "Passions in the days of Messiah " .

(Psalm 116:1), "The Messiah era and the prayer of Israel for redemption".

(Psalm 116:6), "The salvation of the righteous’ souls from Hell".

(Psalm 116:9) "The resurrection of the dead and the coming age feast " .

(Psalm 116:13) "The Blessings of David’s banquet after the salvation feast".

(Psalm 118:7) "The Last Judgment".

(Psalm 118:10-12) "The war against Goug and Magoug".

(Psalm 118:15) "The beginning of the Messiah era".

(Psalm 118:24) "The redemption done by the Messiah".

(Psalm 118:25,26) "The chorus singing antiphon in the time of Messiah manifestation”.

⁵ It is the Book including interpretations for the Psalms and the other books of the Jews.

(Psalm 118:27), "God giving the light of salvation."

(Psalm 118:28), "The future of the world".

So, the hymn which the Lord sang with the chorus of disciples, on this basis, represents the true image familiar at that time.

This reveals the sensitivity, inspiration and wisdom of the ancient wise men of Israel in explaining and contemplating on the Psalms, for their hope in the redemption to come was powerful.

Amazing also is the interpretation in the "Medrash" of Verse (24) of Psalm (118) "This is the day which the Lord has made", which the Church uses with its Known tune "Alleluia fai pe pi . . ." (This is the day), that the day meant is "The Day of Redemption" or "The Lord's Day".

It is portrayed as a play on the manifestation of the Day of Redemption, where the men of Jerusalem inside, and the men of Judah outside, forming a chorus responding to each other through the antiphon, while Messiah is drawing near to the doors of Jerusalem. Then both sides: from Jerusalem, and from Judah combine in praise:

"Give thanks unto the Lord for He is good and His mercy endures for ever".

See how the Jewish Medrash has portrayed through this antiphon, long before the coming of the Lord Christ, this live scene representing the moment of His appearance.

The Continual Praise in worship:

A Hymn in the traditional Churches, particularly in the Coptic, is itself worship, whether one chants it loudly or chants it silently in his heart. Therefore the hymnody extends over a very long time in worship in the Coptic Church. The prayers of the priest are tuned, the call upon the congregation by the deacon is tuned, and the response of the congregation is also tuned from the beginning to the end of service.

The same applies to the lections :

The Epistles are preceded by a hymn, the Psalm and the Gospel are chanted with a special tune. Through hymns the soul can express to the Lord all its feelings and emotions, and thus partakes of the Sacraments which the Lord has given us. This is the reason behind the importance of instructing the congregation in church hymns. It makes a believer firm in faith.

Moreover, whoever learns hymnody is considered a pillar in the church, a gifted minister of the holies, skilled in one of the church invaluable mysteries: "Praise of God". Therefore, in every generation, and in every place, God arranges for a leader who teaches hymnody to the congregation to enable them to take part in service. I often feel amazed at the words of St. John the visionary in the Book of Revelation: *"I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand, who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being first fruits to God and to the lamb*

and in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God.” (Rev.14: 2-5)

Hymnody, therefore, is an ecclesiastical mystery which unites the whole church in one body with combined movement and emotion.

Perhaps the words recorded by H.H. the saintly Patriarch Pope Shenouda III, in his book "The Release of the Spirit", affirm the importance of hymnody; for H.H says: “.... I looked, and behold before me a party of luminous angels! They lifted me on their wings upwards, and looking at the earth below me, I saw it becoming growing lesser and lesser till it turned into a bright dot in the open space Then turning around I saw many spirits gliding as I am in the endless space. Thousands and Myriads of Myriads of angels are there: Here are the six-winged cherubim and the full-eyed seraphim, the voices of all rise praising in one musical wonderful tune “Holy, Holy, Holy”. Here I could not keep myself from chanting unconsciously with them "Holy is the Father ... Holy is the Only-Begotten Son ... Holy is the Spirit". When I come to myself I hear an inaudible sublime tune that no ear ever heard before.

I immediately turned my face so anxiously towards the voice; and behold, from a great distance, a beautiful luminous city hanging in God’s Kingdom overflowing with praise and singing. Every tune I heard filled heart with joy, enraptured with anxiety!

2- Praise Songs in the Apostles' teaching

Hymnology or singing in the Church may be ascribed to the Apostles. This is evident from their Epistles, such as (Ephesians 5:19) *"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."*

Therefore, early Christians used hymns and chanted them to the Lord in their religious meetings, and the congregation used to respond together to the priest. St.Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage (200-258 A.D), mentions this in his book on "Prayer", and St. Jerome (231–420 A.D) as well in his epistle to the Galatians. Afterwards a certain party was set for singing. Those were called "Chorus" or "Choir".

Socrates, the church historian (+440 A.D), said that St. "Agnatius" who was ordained Bishop of Antioch and martyred in 107 A.D, commanded the faithful to divide themselves into "two choirs" to sing hymns to the Holy Trinity. All the churches followed his example (Book 6 – ch.8).

In the constitutions of the Regional Council of Laodacia held in 264 A.D., it is stated that "No one may sing in the church other than the canonical cantors who go up to the pulpit and sing from their books (a lecture on the ecclesiastical hymnody).

The pulpit of the cantors was usually in the middle of church near the middle door of the sanctuary. Then two places were afterwards allocated for cantors at the two ends of the sanctuary surrounded by fences. These still

exist in the Old Coptic churches and they are called "the inner chorus and the outer chorus", referring to the names of those occupying them (page 10).

Ibn Al-Assal has set in the laws section a chapter for the duties of the Aghnostus (the Readers), the Epideacon (the subdeacons), and the psaltos (the singers) [chapter 49].

And St. Gregory El-Agaeibi (the wonder-maker), Bishop of Caesarea, speaking about his master "Origen", the Head of the Theological School of Alexandria (185–254 A.D), said that Origen, besides theology, taught them philosophy, physics, logic, engineering, mathematics, astronomy and music.

The church history proves that singing was used in worship since the Apostolic era. It is thus stated, "The faithful, standing behind a bishop or a priest -in case a bishop was not present- used to recite certain prayers then read parts of the Holy Scriptures. This was followed by holy songs sung by selected persons "the deacons" during the sacramental celebration of Eucharist (The Lord's Supper). This is testified by the protestant historians speaking about the worship rituals and holy lections in the public meetings in the churches of the first generation. These were followed by prayers they used to recite in the presence of the Bishop, which represented a great part of their public worship ceremony. Then songs were sung, not by the whole congregation, but only by certain persons during the Holy communion and the "agape".

On the worship rituals of the second generation, the Church History states the following: "The Christians met for God's worship...and whenever they

met some prayers were recited, the contents of which were stated by Tertullian in his Defence (section 39). Holy Scriptures were read, and short sermons on Christian duties were delivered in addition to some songs. Finally comes the Holy Communion (the Lord's Supper) and the "agape" offered to the congregation."(page 74)

In the Brief History of the Church of Christ, we read that early Christians used to recite certain prayers in their public worship. And St. Justin the Martyr said "we, from all the nation, meet together on Sundays in one place." This is repeated by others also, such as Plinos, the young ruler who said to the king "Christians are used to meet on a certain day forenoon to sing praise to Christ as God."(page 1099)

A Greek Orthodox book entitled "A Pearl Precious on Church Condition" states that Saint Basil the Great wrote about what was happening in the meetings of Christians, saying "Custom running now in all God's churches are consistent and in conformity with each other. People go forth to the house of God at night, and confess to Him in pain with contrite heart and consistent words. After prayers they stand for praising; sometimes they divide themselves into two parties and praise by "antiphon", another time they let one person start praising 'individual singing' while the rest follow with responding tunes "Antiphon Chorus". Thus they pass the night distributing praise songs, and at the meantime praying".(Letter No 207 to the Clergy of New Caesara)

The system which the church now follows in the daily "Morning Incense service" with its hymns as well as in the "Evening Incense service" with its

hymns, is a genuine and a very old one. This system is included in the Didascalia "the teachings of the Apostles"; it says, "You, Bishop, should teach the people and command them to keep to the church every day morning and evening and never quit it. Command them to gather there in the defined hours so that the church would never be vacant nor the body of Christ be lacking its members ... Meet every day, morning and evening, in the Church to pray, and sing Psalm (141) (Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense) Do this in the evening, especially on Saturdays and on the Day of Resurrection (i.e Sunday). You should meet very often in the Church on that day to iterate glorifications to God."

The Didascalia further warns the Bishop himself not to be involved in any other thing or neglect the church. It is thus stated: "If, while you are sitting, bishop, some honorable person of good appearance entered, whether a foreigner or a native, you have to continue speaking God's word or listening to the cantor or reader. Do not stop the ministry of the word to flatter that person or invite him to a seat in the front. Be firm and calm, and do not stop speaking or listening to the reading or the psalmody. The brothers can receive him with the deacon's permission."

As for chanting hymns at the time of liturgy and offertory, the Didascalia says: "The Bishop shall begin the Mass Service with the Thanksgiving Prayer, then while the people are seated he teach them the words of the Holy Scriptures that would instruct them in what suits their life and enables them to be steadfast in faith. He shall reveal to them the way of piety. Then he sings the Psalmody (i.e. the Psalms tuned as hymns) with those who are gifted and are supposed to have received with understanding and wisdom

according to custom. The congregation at that time will sit aware, and listen to them in awe, following them solemnly. Then the priest holds the Bread and the Eucharist Cup, and the bishop takes the incense and walks around the altar thrice glorifying the Holy Trinity. The bishop then gives the censer to the priest who walks with it amidst the congregation, when they complete singing the psalmody, the deacon reads parts of the Epistles, part from the Psalms, and a part of a chapter from the Gospel ... etc.

Mar Isaac, Bishop of Nineveh, asserts the importance of hymnody in spiritual vigil, saying, "For we know from the book composed by St. Macarius that a beginner must not leave his cell at all during the week, nor visit his brother except on Saturdays when they leave their cells at supper time and come to the community while fasting. The whole year, summer and winter, they used to come to the service on Saturday evening. After that they go to the dining room, and after having their meal they set to pray from Saturday evening till Sunday morning without sleep. They start the day with the service of psalms, praise songs, lections and commentary on the Scriptures. Then they allow the brothers to address their questions and listen to the answers from the elders to learn from them. The Sunday Mass was always celebrated at the third hour of the day."

Creatures singing God's praise are closer to Him:

St. Athanasius indicates that the angels are the most close to God, for they always praise Him. St. Athanasius says in this respect: "How dare the ungodly speak ignorantly what is not meet! They are but human beings unable even to describe what is on earth. Could they tell us what their nature is, if they are able to examine it? However, they dare with self-conceit, and

without any fear, invent theories on things which the angels desire to look into (1Pet 1: 12) and which are beyond their intellect even with their excelling nature and sublimity! For what creation is closer to God than the Cherubim and the Seraphim! Nevertheless, they do not even lift up their eyes to Him, nor touch the earth with their feet before Him, nor uncover their faces but on the contrary they cover them and praise Him with unmitigated lips. They do nothing else but praise the divine nature which is beyond description with the Three Trisagion Hymn.

The pleasure of praising with the Coptic hymns:

When we chant these Coptic hymns, we should remember that these were the same which the Lord Christ and His holy Disciples and Apostles had chanted, and that the holy fathers composed them inspired by the Holy Spirit, then our bodies will shudder. Our tunes will also aspire unto heaven, and we will feel that they are completely different from any other tunes composed by the greatest music composer. For these hymns matured and grew in the churches throughout two thousand years.

I can never forget that day when I got the honor of leading “David Ensemble”, together with cantor “Ibrahim Ayaad” the teacher of hymnody at the Seminary. With the approval of H.H. Pope Sheouda III the Patriarch of the Coptic Church we represented the Coptic ecclesiastical hymns in the “Festival of Sacred Arts” in Paris in 1995.

The French people who had no knowledge of the Coptic language marveled on hearing it and enjoyed it so much that after the Performance

they clapped their hands strongly and incessantly as if endlessly. Some of them commented, saying, “We felt as if we were in heaven!”

The same happened in the solemn celebration to which “David Ensemble” was invited to present the Coptic Church hymnody in the great “Orient Festival” held in Sweden in June 1997, which was fully covered by the Mass Media. Radio, T.V. and Press recorded honestly the emotions of the Swedish people who listened with deep spiritual affection. They were exceedingly impressed by the music that they earnestly requested the Ensemble to repeat more than one hymn -which never happened before. My tears flowed down at that strong applause. The sweet comment I heard from some Swedish lady who was in charge of the Festival arrangements was the most beautiful my ears caught.

In December 1999 the Egyptian Opera House was celebrating the third millennium, and entrusted Professor Dr. Nabila Erian with the Performance, who invited “David Ensemble” seeing it impossible to celebrate this occasion without the Coptic hymn on the top.

At the end of celebration –which was entirely repeated, as the tickets were over- H.G. Amba Daniel, Bishop of Maadi, and Dr. Tharwat Bassily, Deputy for the Lay Council and Chairman of Amoun Company, as well as some businessmen insisted to go up to the backstage to congratulate David Ensemble for the Coptic hymn they wonderfully performed. H.G. Amba Daniel promised to support this Ensemble with all power because of its capability to manifest the spirituality and musical beauty of the Coptic hymnody.

In January 2000 the Egyptian Embassy in Paris, in coordination with the Ministry of Higher Education, invited “David Ensemble” to present the everlasting Coptic hymns in two great celebrations at “Aghd” in south Paris. This came out of their conviction of the greatness of the Coptic hymnody and its capability to penetrate deeply into the hearts of the audience.

When the Coptic Church in Paris knew about it, they insisted, in spite of the short time available, that a third Performance be held for the Egyptian community in Paris. A Performance was then organized by a businessman “Mr. Malak Shenouda”, and attended by “Dr. Ashraf Iskandar” the Professor of Egyptian Archeology at L’image University in Paris. Dr. Ashraf, being excessively dazzled with the Coptic hymnody and the way “David Ensemble” chanted, arranged various celebrations for some French delegated in St. Mark Church in Maadi immediately after the Ensemble’s return to Cairo.

Another invitation they received from “The Italian Cultural Center” to present alone an entire Performance consisting of some Coptic hymns and some Psalms for which I composed the tune. That invitation asserted that Coptic hymns and Psalms have a deep spiritual influence on all people. Not only this, but also after that Performance, the Italian Consultant for Culture came up to the stage expressing to me his gratitude and deep thanks and sure desire that such an unmatched Performance be repeated.

Moreover, on the occasion of celebrating the “Second Millennium of the Holy Family’s Journey in Egypt” on 1st and 2nd June 2000, in Virgin Mary’s

old Church at Maadi, which was attended by the Prime Minister, the Head of People's Council, H.H. Pope Shenouda III, Imam Sheikh of Azhar, and the high State Officials, the Coptic hymnody was chosen as the most suitable for such an occasion.

Therefore, David Ensemble was invited to the opening night to begin the celebration with the "Ebooro Hymn". It was live broadcast to the whole world. This hymn was intended to be a spiritual and musical introduction to the Operetta "Blessed by Egypt My people", composed by the great writer "Mohammed Salmawi" and directed by the outstanding artist "Mohammed Noah".

All this affirm the unmatched spiritual and musical power of Coptic hymns. With such power these hymns are able to penetrate into the hearts of all people whatever their tongue, their faith or their musical approach. But, to have such effectiveness, hymns must be performed in a sound way, with the proper speed, the spiritual depth which they bear, and the awareness of their musical composition, as well as with the proper initiatory pitch.

3- Musical Performance to reveal the spirituality of hymns

I was in wonder at the response of the whole world towards the Coptic Hymns in spite of the language difficulty. So I set myself to analyze and examine some hymns to know the secret behind all this, and I came out with the following conclusion:

1. These hymns are rich with tones, reversals and pitches which can only be composed by one acquainted with all types of tones and reversals.
2. These hymns express very well the spiritual significance implied in the words. In other words they are composed in such a way as to express a certain spiritual meaning. It means that they were not hymns for certain words then quoted for other words.
3. These hymns have specific speeds, defined by the early Fathers by the Spirit. These speeds can be measured by the number of beats per minute. If these speeds are altered, the significance of the hymn will materially change. In other words, making a rapid hymn slow or the opposite, would deform the features and the context of the hymn.
4. These hymns have determined pitches based on the tonic, and any change in these

tunes whether higher or lower “Transposition”⁶ may spoil the spiritual context of the hymn. An example is: “Golgotha Hymn” chanted on Good Friday is a serene and sad hymn expressing the events of the Lord Christ burial through a slow speed and a low pitch. If we increase the hymn’s speed or raise its pitch, it will become a harsh military march bringing the congregation away from the crucifixion feelings.

Another example is the joyful and cheerful hymn “Ebooro” full of happiness. The power and joy of this hymn are clear in its vivid speed and high pitch. If the speed is decreased and the pitch dropped, it will turn into a mere sad hymn which does not express the joys of “Ebooro” – the King of Peace.

5. Performance of these Coptic hymns needs a spiritual understanding of the meanings implied in each word, so that the Performance might be convenient to the meaning. In other words, a word that needs a “Forte”⁷ singing should not be sung “Piano”⁸ or the opposite. For these ways of performance transfer the hymn’s spirituality from the chanter to the listener.

For more clarification, I quote here the words of Aristotle in his “Eloquence” Book III, Chapter I: [Eloquence means that one knows how to change the tone of his voice according to the feeling which he wants to inspire; and how –if required- to give it power or gentleness or mildness; how to use he tunes whether sharp, rough or in between;

⁶ Transposition is copying, transforming, or playing a piece of music of another pitch.

⁷ It is powerful performance and loud resonance.

⁸ The gentle low performance and sweet resonance.

and which harmony accords with each of these tunes. Actually, there are three things to be noticed: The space or extent, the harmony, and the rhythm. By these one can achieve success in competition.]

Therefore, I feel much depressed when I find some deacons in the churches disort the spiritual and musical features of these hymns with their bad performance, bad memorizing, and changing the speed (often faster for lack of time), exaggerated change of pitch (mostly to the lower for fear of sharp tunes insome hymns that need a gift to perform), and sometimes changing pitch by a sudden drop while the hymn is at its climax. This in fact destroys the holy climax which the early fathers introduced to lift the faithful to the most sublime spirituality. This is mainly due to their inability or ignorance of the aim of the rising tune.

Such bad performance of hymns in some churches gave some people a bad impression about them. Therefore some people hate to listen to these Coptic hymns in spite of their exceeding beauty. Some others turned towards new songs to find some comfort in them.

Some deacons, not understanding well the meanings implied in these hymns, perform them in a boring monotonous way ⁹ without expressing what they imply of joy or sorrow, power or weakness, confidence or dejection, love or hatred, pin or wholness, pride or

⁹ This discription “monotonous” is said when the performanceis repeated in a boring way, andis given to such a piece of music.

derision, power or humiliation, glory or disgrace ... and all such meanings.

The gift of musical expression, composition, and change of tunes ¹⁰ “Accentazione”, whether by low performance “Piano”, or powerful performance “Forte” ...etc., helps in understanding the meaning of the Coptic or Greek words included in the hymn.

Therefore, the priests and deacons who think that spirituality in prayer can only be achieved by weak, low, and sad voices in performance, are regrettably mistaken. Take for example the hymn “Thoak Ta Ti Goam” which means “Yours is the power, the glory, the blessing and the honor for ever”, could such a hymn be chanted with a weak and sad performance, whereas it bears words referring to power and glory, which fill man’s heart with joy and hope!

6. Whoever studies thoroughly the Coptic hymns will find them “expressionist” ¹¹ rather than “impressionist”. This requires us to

¹⁰ In composing musical stanzas and pieces, certain tunes should be diversified as in word syllables which are accentuated by being made stressed or feeble, flexible or hard, connected or separate.

¹¹ In art the term “expressionism” is a theory opposing “impressionism”. It calls for giving free reins to sentiments and emotions to express one’s feelings without being confined to reality or to the traditional rules of composing music. The history of music ascribes beginnings of expressionist music to “Schunberg” (1874-1915), the musician who invented the no-pitch system. From my own point of view, the expressionist music began with the establishment of the Coptic Church; for through my study of a great number of Coptic hymns I found that they express the feelings and emotions of the saints towards their beloved Lord Christ. And through such feelings, they became separated from reality and soared high in chanting their wonderful hymns even unto heaven. Through the tunes they translated and explained the meaning of the words.

perform them in such a way that conveys the meaning of the words, and makes performance like an explanation of words instead of doing away with both tune and words by bad performance. Furthermore, proper articulation of words has an important role in conveying the meaning of the hymn to the listener.

I admired much what the savants of the French Expedition stated in the book “Description of Egypt –Vol. IX”; for they laid down the principles of chanting, which can be summed up in the following:

- + The more wonderful and purer the tunes are, the more impressive they become on our emotions through the powerful vivid vibration they cause in our nerves rather than on our souls.

- + The voices which seize our admiration more than others, because of their purity and wonderful tone, scarcely move the feelings or touch the hearts in the same degree of their purity and wonderful tone more than the others.

- + Very often, an admirable play actor who may not have such a voice that can attract admiration but knows how to convey emotions in his tunes, can make those emotions penetrate powerfully and effectively into the depths of our hearts and feelings. On the other hand, the best singer cannot convey to us the thought or the experience he wants if he relies only on the purity of his voice and skill. Though such a perfect voice may delight our ears and please our souls, the heart remains cold, not being impressed by it.

+ It is impossible for music to achieve actual development whenever it is not subject to the rules of the heart and mind, or when it sacrifices the intended meaning for the sake of delighting ears or obeying tastes or running after futile new styles.

Perhaps these principles which those scholars have laid down give us some peace. For we can deduce from their speech that a tune is received, not only through a sweet voice, but rather through its ability to convey the thought implied in the hymn, and to please the soul. That is why we used to enjoy spiritually the Divine Gregorian Liturgy when Late Amba Benjamin, the Bishop of Menoufeia, administered the service, more than when any other priests or bishops did who perhaps had more tender voices than that of Amba Benjamin. The reason is the ability of H.G. Amba Benjamin to make the tunes of the Divine Liturgy penetrate powerfully and effectively into the depth of our souls –as those savants explained.

7. Some deacons used to sing through the nose producing a nasal twang. This way of singing very often hinders conveying the spiritual meaning. It may even suppress the features and the syllables, making them difficult to understand.
8. These hymns consist of musical stanzas and phrases, so the performer should be aware of the beginning and the end of each. This is necessary to enable him to determine the “aspiration” points and the suitable way of ending each stanza, or what we call “Close Up System”. Music stanzas resemble composition in literary writing with respect to their formation. The way of communicating a predicate phrase

differs from the way of communicating an interrogative or exclamatory one ... etc. The same applies to performance of hymns: each musical stanza differs when performing it according to its content.

Last but not least, dear reader, I'd like to remind you that the teachings of the Apostles in the Didascalia made it clear that chanters of Psalmody should be chosen accurately so as to be distinguished for prudence, wisdom and talent. In other words, they should be gifted in chanting hymns and should have received with understanding and wisdom according to tradition.

4- Methods of Praise

The early Apostolic Church, which was full of wisdom, established various methods of praise. The objective of these methods was to imitate the different ways of praise that will be used in heaven, to create a type of singing dialogue among singers, and to help the faithful concentrate their thoughts on praising in order to avoid the feeling of boredom that could be caused by monotonous performance. Among these methods are the following:

1- Singing in two choirs:

This is known as "Antiphonal Singing", which is the singing performed by two choirs, one on the north and one on the south responding to each other.

Scholars are uncertain as to the origin of antiphonal singing. Some stated that St. Peter the Apostle had a vision about it, others thought that this method was introduced into the church of Antioch by saint Ignatius the Theophorous in the first century A.D. (Socrates – church history 6:8). It was derived from the system of worship in the Jewish synagogues. This method of singing was transmitted from Antioch (i.e. Syria) to Palestine, and then to Egypt.

It is related that St. Ignatius saw in his vision angels singing, reciprocally, hymns for the Holy Trinity. This is in conformity with Prophet Isaiah's prophecy, *"I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above Him were seraphs, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered*

their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory'. At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke" (Isa 6: 1-4)

In fact, singing in two choirs is a very ancient ritual that was used in the temple, since the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, for the Scriptures say, “*When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the Lord, as prescribed by David king of Israel. With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: “He is good; His love to Israel endures forever.” And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.*” (Ezra3: 10,11).

And also, “*At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right.... The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction ...the two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God ...the choirs sang...*” (Neh 12:27-40)

It is believed that the Coptic translation of the Psalms is taken from the Hebrew text named “Massoretic”, that was in use by the Jewish hermits of

Alexandria before their conversion to Christianity. And that the Copts received from these hermits the antiphonal method of singing, that is by responding.

Philo, the Jewish scholar, in his book about the life of the early church in Alexandria and all Egypt while still retaining its first Jewish tincture (45-55 A.D.), mentions that those hermits used the antiphonal method in their vigil praise; and so the antiphona was transferred from those hermits to the church, as a ritual for divine service. The Latin churches in turn took this method of praise from our church.

It is noticed that the church organized an antiphona and a similar method of singing for Easter Day in the form of two choirs, one inside the altar and the other outside, chanting Psalm (24) " lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the king of glory may come in." This is a continuation of the tradition that aims at participating in the Lord's procession in His second coming.

The church's liturgy shows another form of antiphonal singing at the twelfth hour of Good Friday after the altar's door is opened as a sign of reconciliation between the heavenly and the earthly beings. At that hour, a dialogue starts between the group of deacons inside the altar and those outside, when they sing "Thoak The Ti Goam" alternately responding to each other.

The Gospel according to Mark and Mathew states that the crowds that went out to meet Christ divided themselves into two groups: a chorus that

went ahead of Him, and another that followed, *"the crowds that went ahead of Him and those that followed shouted (opposite to each other) 'Hosanna to the Son of David' "*(Mt 21:9).

Moreover, the Lord Himself wished to draw the attention of the disciples and the crowds that followed Him to Psalm (118) and its interpretation as contained in "Al Midrash", by saying: *"for I tell you, you will not see Me again until you say, ' Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. "*(Mt 23: 39); as if the Lord is putting on their mouths beforehand the antiphona that they were to say upon his entry to Jerusalem a few hours later.

For the Lord after the supper sang this Psalm. And the disciples shouted 'Hosanna' in a liturgical method, which is lively and realistic, as if they felt that they were singing the annual and traditional salvation praise to celebrate a current salvation-taking place before their eyes; for the disciples represent the church as a whole surrounding Christ in His Second Coming.

A salvation that was fulfilled, a current salvation, and a salvation that will be fulfilled through the Eucharist and in the Lord's presence is expressed in this Psalm, in singing it using the antiphonal method, and in the 'Hosanna' shout of joy and hope.

Also St. Basil, in his letter no.207 to the priests of Caesarea, confirms the importance of the antiphona, saying: "the people go to the house of prayer (church) by night, and confess before God in repentance and continual tears. Finally they move from prayers to chanting psalms in two groups opposite to each other. After that they turn over the onset of the hymn to one of them and the rest of the group respond back."

In the Book of Revelation also, when all creation sing praise to God's glory and the four living creatures (representing all creation) respond by saying: Amen (Rev 5:14), is this not a wonderful heavenly picture of the church singing with all her ranks, one opposite the other saying: Holy, holy, holy. Amen. Alleluia?

2- Responsorial singing:

Some historians of music wrote that responsorial singing is a method known in the fourteenth century, taken from the ancient Coptic church, where the choir or the congregation used to respond to the cantor, "the single singer". This method led to the emergence of the proficient singer "virtuose".

This confirms that the performance of the single singer "the cantor" was so wonderful that those who were from outside the church were overwhelmed and moved by his accurate sweet performance.

The single singer chanted verses while the congregation listened, then they respond at the end of each verse with the same response every time.

It is related that St. Athanasius the Apostolic used to instruct the deacon to chant the Psalm and the congregation to respond, saying: "For He is good, His love endures forever." This is to say that he instructed them to sing Psalm (136) by the method of single and responsorial singing.

Philo specifically recorded the vigil hymns they performed on the occasion of the great feast, showing that while one was chanting the others listened quietly participating only at the end. It is said that the Egyptian

monks and a number of the parish churches in Egypt did not practice, in the past joint singing, but they used to listen to the singer and respond only in some parts as in psalms for example by saying: "Alleluia".

3- Collective singing in one voice:

This is like all the responses that the whole congregation sings and the liturgy book (Euchologion) refers to by the words "the congregation says". They are generally litanies said with persistence and vigor, such as the hymn of "Amen Ton Thanaton", in which the congregation undertakes to preach the death and holy resurrection of Christ. There are also the hymn of "Erepoo Esmo Ethouab", and the hymn of "Os Pereen Ke Este Esteen", and many other hymns which the congregation sings with long and complex tunes.

4- Solo singing:

Solo singing in the church is a method of singing that distinguishes the Coptic Church. For all the prayers that the priest or the bishop says is a form of solo singing.

Other forms of solo singing are when the deacon chants the Pauline, or the Catholic or the Praxis prelude, or when he chants the Psalm during the Holy Mass, or when he chants it in the sad tune of the Passion Week.

This is also affirmed by St. Basil in his letter no.207 to the priests of Caesarea, in which he said:

" ...They start chanting psalms after dividing themselves into two groups standing opposite to each other ... and after that they turn over the onset of the hymn to one of them and the rest of the group respond back".

But solo singing should not lead to self-conceit as a result of the singer's soft voice, but should rather be a declaration of the singer's personal love towards God, whereby he promises God to love Him more than anyone else.

St. John Chrysostom stresses this meaning in his Commentary on Psalm (42), saying: "Therefore do not think that you come here to merely utter words, but when you say the response consider that as a vow. For example, when you say, '*as the deer pants for stream of water, so my soul pants for you, O God*' you promise God that you will have preference for nothing but Him, and that you have a burning love for Him."