

Introduction
by
His grace Amba Matta'os
Bishop of El-Soryan Monastery

Dear reader, the book in your hands entitled “Coptic Hymnody, its spirituality and tunes” is a very precious book, it is written by deacon, engineer and musician: George Kyrillos, the Maestro of David Ensemble for Coptic hymns which visited most of the countries of the west and fascinated the audience in the west with its majestic glow.

The book discussed many issues related to the Coptic hymns, like the Coptic language of the hymns, the praise songs in the Old Testament, and the role of the church to preserve its heritage which is inscribed in both our hearts and minds. The heritage was transmitted orally for almost two millenniums and the church preserved it cautiously and never squandered it away.

The author also wrote about the spiritual and musical value of the Coptic hymns, revealing how rich, impressive and serene they are. He also added some spiritual contemplations and musical paraphrasing of eight Coptic hymns. He excelled in their explanation and wrote them in a musical note form.

It is an invaluable research, perhaps the first of its kind in this field, and we are eager to have more, especially spiritual and musical contemplations on the Coptic hymns. we wish that these studies be recoded in a book to

benefit the Coptic hymns admirers, bearing in mind that deacon George Kyrillos is a skilful musician, who knows how to delve deep in the meaning of the hymns and come up with great contemplations, new and old which we take no notice of while we repeat hymns as an ordinary ritual on specific occasions.

We thank brother George for this great effort presented to the church children to benefit from, to encourage people to learn hymns and preserve them as a precious ecclesiastical heritage.

We ask God to bless this work for the glory of His Holy Name, and for the benefit of whoever reads it through the intercession of our mother the holy Virgin Mary and the venerated martyr St. Mark the Evangelist, and the prayers of our blessed father His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the successor of St. Mark the Apostle.

May the grace of God be with us all. Amen.

Amba Matta'os

Bishop and head of the surian Monastery
Christmas 7 January 2000/ 28 Kiahk 1716

Another Introduction
by
His Grace Amba Raphael
General Bishop of Down Town Churches.

The Coptic library has been waiting anxiously for this book ...when musical talent is accompanied by good performance, love, sincerity and honesty in transmitting the information which is the essence of the Coptic heritage, the work then should be described as great, something which always characterizes our beloved brother, deacon George Kyrillos.

The author has soared with us in a spiritual tour so as to make us get acquainted with the origin of the Coptic language, its development, and the impact of other languages, especially the Greek, on it. He also highlighted the spiritual value of the Coptic language by citing verses from the Holy Bible: Old and New Testaments, and from the lives of the fathers and of the church....

He indicated how the Coptic hymns were preserved in our church delineating the splendid roles of the talented choir singers in spreading our marvelous heritage honestly and effectively.

The author has not neglected the cultural value of the Coptic hymns, reflecting the effect of the ancient Egyptian, the Greek and the Hebrew cultures. The issue of the use of musical instruments in church is also discussed.

Finally, he presented wonderful models with musical explanation and spiritual contemplation on some hymns: Ebooro, Golgotha, Hiteni Bresveya, Arihoo Chasf, Amin ton thanaton, Arebsalin and Agios (the joyful tune).

Thanks to the beloved author and to his talented choir 'David Ensemble' and congratulations to our Coptic library for this prime work, which we consider an initiative that enlightens the way before many researchers and interested people.

We consider this book a call for every Copt to benefit from this rich spiritual heritage since strange hymns began to creep towards our church and we fear one day they will tarnish the beauty and eloquence of our immortal Coptic heritage. Let us know more our church and be nourished by its fat, through the blessing of the prayers of our beloved father H.H. Pope Shenouda III and the venerable bishops.

Amba Raphael
General Bishop
15/12/1999

Dedication

To... my beloved traditional Coptic Orthodox Church, which preserved the Coptic hymns heritage throughout two millenniums...

To ...my beloved wife who shared me the love of hymnody, and passed the nights awake with me in my ministry and in preparing this book, who accompanied me during training, in ceremonies, recording and trips.

To ...my little daughter, who is nourished by the love of praise songs since her birth, God blessed her with a talent, which excels mine so as to be responsible to carry out my mission after me.

To ...all the members of my family...my late father, my pious mother and reverend brother, father Kyrillos Kyrillos, and the rest of my brothers and sisters, who taught me how to sing God's praise.

To ...all those who supported me, whether by composing words, or by playing a musical instrument, or by a moving consoling voice or even by listening to the songs of praise I chanted ...to those who offered any kind of spiritual, technical, administrative or financial help.

To...all those who exerted effort in this book.

To...all my professors and teachers who influenced me spiritually and musically.

To...all those who, moved by hymns, played a tune that affected the hearts of others.

To...all those who listened to a Coptic hymn and wanted to understand it with their minds and live it with their hearts.

To...those who desire their songs to be filled with the Holy Spirit Who sanctified such songs at those days.

To...all of you. I present this book including the most beautiful hymns on earth, hymns which the world knows now and boasts in just listening to them and seeks them everywhere. We are proud of our church, the source of these hymns, and who was keen on preserving this heritage until now despite our negligence. Indeed, all the nations of the world envy us for such a treasure we possess.

Let us together understand the mystery of these hymns.

The author

Acknowledgment

Coptic hymns are our immortal spiritual heritage, the miracle before which the world stands fascinated and overwhelmed by these tunes which grew in the bosom of the deep-rooted Orthodox Church on the mouths of the singers and in the ears of the listeners deep in the hearts of all Copts.

Ages of persecution have come to an end, whereas the Coptic hymns lasted until this day. Many and various songs intonations totally disappeared and were buried in history, but the Coptic hymns continued throughout ages, penetrating the hearts even of those who know nothing about their language. They feel when listening to them that they have transcended time and space and are soaring high even unto the heaven of heavens.

People of different creeds and religions hear them, and behold all the barriers fall down and disappear. Could this be its spiritual magnificence? Why not!! Were these hymns not derived from the prophets Moses and David, Asaf, Himan and Yadothon? Have the Lord Christ not taught them to His disciples: to Paul and Silas? Did St. Mark not carry them to Egypt after he had learned them from Lord's mouth in the upper room?

Did Athanasius not repeat them while defending faith and all saints received and chanted them after him throughout different ages? What songs did saint Anthony and the saintly Patriarchs chant? Is it not these hymns? It is not strange then that they have such spiritual charm! Bring me one musician who belongs to one of the old or modern musical schools from any country, and let him listen to one of the Coptic hymns and see how he is moved within, the tunes tickling his heart lift him up high, and beyond the

language which he does not understand or the musical school which he belongs to.

We do you injustice, O hymns, we tarnish you ...we mar you when we fail to understand your meaning ...we make you without shape or rhythm without any clear beginning or end ...we destroy your sublimity and waste the import which our fathers have intended by them. That is why I wrote this book; if it sometimes wounds, it heals often. it was necessary to write it so as to change some conceptions regarding the genuine Coptic hymns. I was encouraged by the love and admiration I have seen in the eyes of people of different nationalities, who soared up by these hymns above the noise and troubles of the earth. I will never forget the day when I performed with my brothers " David Ensemble " before the Christian young women Association in 1999, at All Saints Cathedral in Zamalek, Cairo. I will never forget that most of the audience, who were 800 ladies coming from one hundred nations from all over the world, announced that these hymns have brought them up even unto heaven.

I am therefore, grateful first to those saintly fathers who composed these hymns. I am grateful to the Coptic Orthodox Church, which kept these hymns in her bosom, that they might survive for us and within us.

I thank the cantors who learnt these hymns and handed them down to others throughout ages, without perversion. I also thank my brothers the members of " David Ensemble " with whom I was able to present these hymns to those who loved them as well as to others who also loved them through our performance. I thank my beloved country, the fertile soil for

music and hymns since the dawn of history and the lighthouse from which spread musicology and hymnology to all parts of the world.

I could not have come up with this book without the support and the encouragement of many. My dear wife offered me the first hand in computer work. I also appreciate the efforts of engineers ‘ Akmal Hanna’, ‘ Maher Christo’, ‘ Hany Magdy’.

Mr. ‘Albert Youssef’, Mr. ‘Ayad Hakim’, Mr. ‘ Nagy Nasif’, Mr. ‘Rai’f Emile’ and Mr. Iliya Kyrillos together with the librarians of St. Mark church in el-Maadi have helped me with a great deal of references, not to mention the assistance of Dr. Ahmed el-Maghrabi, the cultural attaché in Paris, who adores the Coptic hymns and considers them, not only a private property of the Christians Copts, but of all Egyptian Copts. I am really grateful to him, for he opened to me the gates of ministry abroad beyond my beloved Egypt.

One could never forget Dr. ‘Fakhry Sadek ’ and Dr. ‘ Ephraim Emile ’ who collected and revised the Coptic texts and their translation in Arabic and English.

Amba Daniel, Bishop of el-Maddi has honored me with the revision of the ritual material of the book, while father ‘Markos Yassa ’and father ‘ Makarios’, the priests of St. Mark church in Maadi have revised the spiritual and historic material of the book.

Engineer and artist ‘Edward Hanna’, my colleague along the way of hymnody for more than twenty-five years, has revised the Arabic language

and the cover design. Artist 'Iliya Kyrillos' added the artistic touches throughout the book.

My deep thanks to Amba Matta'os, Bishop and head of Soryan Monastery who introduced this book, having first revised it accurately, and gave important comments that enriched its spiritual content.

Thanks also to Amba Raphael, General Bishop of Down Town Churches for his wonderful introduction that added much to the spiritual value of the book.

I am honored also by the contribution of the great American professor Dr. Martha Roy who took much trouble in revising the musical material the book.

Thanks are also due to Mr. Iliya Tharwat Bassili who played a prominent role in publishing this book, which has been locked for quite a long time in drawers. I thank Dr. Joseph Maurice Faltas who revised the theological material of the book. I also thank engineer Rafik Samy and George Fouad from Design Co-ordinators Office for Marketing and Advertisement, and the Office Executive Manager Sherine Raouf.

May God repay all those who shared in making this book hundred times now and in eternal life according to His true promise! May God bless all those who read it, that they may understand and realize how great are these hymns! I ask God that many of those who read the book are moved with love towards hymns and offer a hand that we all may convey these hymns

throughout this third millennium in a magnificent form that fits their
sublimity.

The author

Preface

Why do we Praise?

I do not consider myself tendentious, if I say that any human is born musically from the very beginning through his feelings, heart impulses, movements and rhythms. If this symphony performed inside his body pleased him, he would grow up in search for other instruments outside, by which he transforms his musical potential to ingenuities in several fields of science and art, enriching different aspects of life.

I imagine that Adam and Eve when they were at the Garden of Eden they used to hear angels praising, and when they were cast out they exited searching for this kind of praise between the thorns and thistles the earth produced for them, in an attempt to retrieve the sweet memories of the past by praising. Wherefore, I do not wonder when I find Jubal and Tubal, grandsons of Cain, could invent harp, flute and all kinds of instruments out of bronze and iron in this early rudimental age, for Jubal “was the father of all who play the harp and flute ... Tubal-Cain an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron” (Gen. 4:21,22)

The reader may wonder how sons of Cain were able to form iron, bronze and wood to make musical instruments and to sire an elementary form of an Orchestra¹ with its four subclasses: wooden blowing instruments (flute),

¹ “Orchestra” originally a Greek word, used to mean (dance and sing), then it was used to mean the place assigned for the musical group that accompany the singing performed on the stage (i.e. area between the stage and the audience). By the start of the Opera in the sixth century, the term

bronzy blowing instruments, chorded instruments (harp), and rhythmic instruments which were available in nature around them (striking earth with foot and clapping are simple examples).

Jubal and Tubal were able to establish for all the coming generations the main basis of a praising orchestra, which were exploited afterwards by David the prophet.

Some historians confirm that the term “Jubilee” is a derivative from the name “Jubal”², since blowing of trumpets was accustomed during the celebration of the Jubilee year and was called “trumpet of the Jubilee”.

What the history mentions about the origin of the harp, describes the human need to make an instrument for praise. As soon as the early human saw a turtle moving near, the idea was generated, he captured the animal, evacuated the body, covered the shell with skin, fixed on it a lever and an arch, tensioned chords through it, and the first harp was invented demonstrating the human need for music and praise.

Human interest in music at this rudimental age, and especially the interest of Jubal and Tubal confirm that Adam and Eve received the importance and value of praise from God and angels and consequently passed it to their children and grandchildren.

Orchestra was used for the accompanying group and from that time the term was widely used all over the world. At the mean time “Orchestra” is used to present a complete musical group that are composed of the four subclasses: Chorded, wooden, bronzy, and rhythmic instruments. The symphony orchestra did not take its present form (80 to 120 or more musicians) except through several stages of development in the time between the classical & romantic eras. Orchestra may be composed only of chorded instruments and called Chorded Orchestra.

² Reference book “Ancient Egyptians Music and singing “ by Fekry Boutros

Music does not relate with the soul and spirit only but also with the body, it can move it regardless of its state of sloth and inert and even can cure its organic disease through music therapy.

Concerning music in general, Plato the great Greek philosopher says: “Music is nourishment for the soul and source for stability and prudence, it is a gift from the art free deities converting any bizarre movement inside us to constant succinct, depriving any incoherence to harmonic assortment and enlightening us through the good way”

He also said : “When a person does not know how to sing, that means he didn’t receive any education”. He meant that the person who does not know how to control himself or moderate his words, expressions or feelings, surely that person is uneducated.

Also about music Jacob Jost said: “When the capability of speech surceases, the music starts”, and Thayer Jaston said: “If it had been possible to communicate verbally in what easily communicated musically then there would have been no need for music”

Dr. “Michael Bedie Abdelmalek” in a lecture about “Doxology service in church” at the Patristic center said: “Music is considered one of the elements of creation composition that was emplaced in human soul to achieve soul inner balance and to attain the conjunction between human feelings, as we say in the Prime “Matins”Praise: “those who were intimated by the Holy spirit like the harp”. Music express the individual as well as the congregation

in harmony and entire unity. It was a main expedience for worship in ancient civilizations like Pharaohs and Greeks, it was a method of connection between deities and humans, and it was used in wars to unite different feelings, arouse emotions and activate human movement”.

The music listener gains an experience that plays an important role not only in cultural enjoyment but in forming palate standards, and developing the sense of culture, art and history. Music let the listener interact with life, guarantee its continuity in a better way and make him flourish in his actions.

But not all of what is intonated can be called music, St. Clement the Alexandrian classified music and circumscribed what we should listen to: “Music is then to be handled for the sake of the embellishment and composure of manners. ... but we must reject superfluous music, which enervates men’s soul, and leads to variety, now mournful, and then licentious and voluptuous, and then frenzied and frantic” (The Stromata XI)

It is important then to choose the kind of music we should listen or let our children listen to, it becomes more important when it is related to praising hymns, for these days a kind of hymn’s music is spreading, music that “enervates men’s soul” as St. Clement expressed.

Children and Music:

Plato favored ancient Egyptian rules related to arrangements of music and considered it as a role model that should be followed: “We have to let the children by a particular rule gain the knowledge that the children of Egypt learn through characters, and music must be included within these subjects, for the Egyptians comprehended from a long time the importance of

educating the youngsters on what is situated of perfected hymns, this was a result of their moderate principles that aim to control emotions and passions from the childhood”

Children in Egypt used not to receive any kind of education till the age of ten except what is transferred to them through imitation and emulation, for they were satisfied to raise them before attaining that age on general principles and known examples that brief wisdom and bestir virtues that the elders teach.

At the age of ten they used to learn reading for three years, at the age of thirteen they get trained in sports exercising and harp playing and Egyptians necessitated that they must complete for such practice three years, no more no less as stated by the law, and they did not accept any excuses from the father or the child.

Moses the prophet was raised through this system at the palace of the king of Egypt, he learned reading at the age of ten, then learned math, geometry, music - with its several forms of harmonic, rhythmic, vocal and poetry music - then learned medicine and after completing all civil and military sciences he learned philosophy and theology by the most noted Egyptian professors (Ref book : Life of Moses by Philo the Jew).

How much I wish that those who set the education programs for the children, study ancient Egyptian rules that amazed Plato – who amazed us by his redundant knowledge – for it will help in recognizing how much the fault we went through by setting up the available programs.

May be it is not known to the majority that Moses had a proficient musical personality, by which he was able to formulate the most magnificent hymn known in history, the hymn that was chanted after crossing the red sea with the Israeli people.

I personally consider that Moses the prophet is the one who established the theory of “Worship by hymns”, and David afterwards set the order of assignation in worship.

About Praise Singing:

In praise singing the most regarded music is used, and as music is nourishing the soul with melodies, the spirit is raised levels and levels towards its Creator who is “Fearful in praises” (Ex 15:11), and the body which is weak and heavy gains power and alacrity that enables it to ascend over desires and disjoin from earthly uproar to unite with the heavenly powers and spiritual beings, chanting with them.

When the child Jesus was born, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, suddenly appeared with the angel that stood before the shepherds, a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying : “Glory to God in the highest, and on the earth peace, good will toward men”.

What a beautiful praise of salvation the angels composed expressing the peace that came down on earth, and the joy that proceeded into people’s life through the melodies of this canticle, that the shepherds started to iterate as received from the angels, which echo will remain iterated by all humanity till the ages of ages.

The appearance of the son of God on earth among those praises assured that the kingdom of God was extended from angels world to human world, the angels started their service on earth, inviting people to share in the same service, this was the first time people were invited to accompany the chorus of angels.

God when entered our world and became with us, permitted the heaven to open on earth with all its mysteries, glories, ministers, peace, joy and praises. Wherefore our traditional Coptic church cared to let praises partake more space of time in worship rituals than readings, private prayers and preaching.

About Praising with Coptic hymns:

In the book “Description of Egypt” that was written by the savants of the French expedition I quote:

“As we return backwards in time to the ancient eras, we find that music was more prevailing, having a wider amplitude, noble and sober form, and vice versa as we go near to the modern times, musical art starts to loose from its sobriety and austerity to become more trivial and fragile”

This quotation may open the way for me to speak on Coptic hymns, that are believed to be chanted inside churches for about two thousands years. Coptic hymns are considered to be supreme, for as we praise we accompany plenty of saints that praised with the same hymns through generations, both

praises intermingle and our striving church get in contact with the victorious one, diffuses in it and gets empowered by it.

And since those hymns passed with the church all the persecution eras, and continued unmovable and eternal, the listener will recognize – if carefully listened – that they were inspired from one source - constant through generations - from the Holy Spirit.

Like the wine if kept for years and years its effect become more cordial and stronger, also the Coptic hymns as kept so many years, did gain a spiritual charm and a great influence over the chanter's emotions, by which he feels an overwhelming blessing.

And since it is not possible even by using new advanced technology to create new wine having the same attributes, taste and influence of the old one, it is also impossible for a composer to produce one hymn having the same influence, spirituality and sanctity that the immortal Coptic hymns have.

About the Coptic hymns Dr. Michael Badie Abdelmalek says: “When listening to the Coptic music, there appears at once the composers professionalism because they placed it with emotions in response to the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. As we listen we don't listen to impassive rituals but to a living (reborn) worship, because the doer in this music is the Holy Spirit who spoke in the prophets at the Old Testament and who is working in the church of the new testament”.

When listening to those hymns a personal enjoyment touches our life, happiness overwhelms us and we get attracted to music, as we follow the structure of a musical stanza - as if it is a huge edifice constructed in front of us - block over block, melody over melody, the hymn develops gradually until it reaches its peak in expression and emotion through our heart beats and internal feelings, we incorporate in this spiritual construction that is manifested at the end of the phrase.

The hymn in the Coptic church is an idea exposed in front of us to share and respond, the interaction with it leads to incorporation, we reach to the peak of the hymn by intellectual siege and responding, and the hymn being heard become linked to our internal life. Through hymns the whole church melts - bishop with priest, deacon with all the congregation - in unity and tight conjunction. This is what St. Ignatius expressed in his epistle to the Ephesians: “Wherefore it is fitting that ye should run together in accordance with the will of your bishop, which thing also ye do. For your justly renowned presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp.

Therefore in your concord and harmonious love Jesus Christ is sung. And do ye, man by man become a choir, that being harmonious in love, and taking up the song of God in unison, ye may with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ, so that He may both hear you, and perceive by your works that ye are indeed the members of His Son. It is profitable, therefore, that you should live in an unblameable unity, that thus ye may always enjoy communion with God” (The Ante Nicene Fathers volume 1)

The words notated in this modest book, is only an attempt to highlight the beauty of the Coptic hymn (that have been skulked by the poor performance of the few that iterate without understanding) , trying to dive in the music of those hymns, in its historical roots, in the hymn language, in understanding the spiritual objective beyond the music, with a spiritual and musical explanation of some. Through preparing this treatise I found myself – with no intention – to go deep in pharaohs music, its attributes and musical instruments, which had a great role in forming our Coptic music, and I found myself comparing and connecting between how the pharaohs music was and how our Coptic music became.

I found myself also contemplating in our performance of Coptic hymns, and how we sometimes (or most of the times) wipe by our performance (unconscious and unscientific) its profound spiritual and musical structure. I noticed that when the melodies ascend or descend, modes transform or change, rhythms activate or calm down, there are always a profound spiritual objective beyond the music, and since I am overwhelmed by the enjoyment of its beauty I wanted to let everyone share in that musical spiritual state, this book is the outcome which I hope to bear fruits.

The author