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**The Coptic Orthodox Church under Pope Shenouda III  
Observations about his Theology and Biography.**

**Review of the thesis of Matthias Gillé**

Author: Fabian Weinert

Reviewers: Cornelis Hulsman (Editor-in-chief Arab-West Report), Emily  
Stacey, Matthias Gillé

Edited by: Cornelis Hulsman, Emily Stacey, Matthias Gillé

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90 Road 14B El-Maadi, Cairo, Egypt

Telephone: +20 (0) 2 27510268

URL: [www.arabwestreport.info](http://www.arabwestreport.info)

E-mail: [info@cidtegypt.com](mailto:info@cidtegypt.com)

**Arab-West Report, June 30, 2014**

**Title: The Coptic Orthodox Church under Pope Shenouda III Observations about his Theology and Biography. Review of the thesis of Matthias Gillé**

**Author: Fabian Weinert**

[Reviewed and edited by Matthias Gillé, Cornelis Hulsman and Emily Stacey. Second revision by Matthias Gillé and Cornelis Hulsman, August 4, 2014]

For his thesis, which was part of his State Examination [in Protestant religious education], Matthias Gillé wrote about the life and work of Pope Shenouda III, the late but still influential, and beloved pope of the Coptic-Orthodox church. Therefore he used different sources, including interviews and material provided by Arab-West Report (AWR) and former AWR interns. Gillé wrote 118 pages (without literature and the attachments) in German. I will not deliver an entire translation but an extended summary of his work.

Matthias Gillé has, upon the recommendation of Prof. Dr. Wolfram Reiss, made much use of Arab-West Report and on October 4, 2013, interviewed AWR editor-in-chief Cornelis Hulsman, which was recorded and transcribed. See for an overview of these references [here](#).

Summary of Matthias Gillé's thesis:

## **0.Preamble**

In his preamble Matthias Gillé defines the structure of his thesis and how he became interested in the work and life of Pope Shenouda III.

Through his Egyptian wife and her sister he heard, during his time as a student in Cairo, a lot about the admiration people felt towards Pope Shenouda III. During this time, he visited a lot of Coptic churches and attended at least one lecture of Pope Shenouda III in the St. Mark Cathedral in Cairo.

The purpose of his thesis is – after a short introduction about the Coptic church – *on the one hand*, to gather and evaluate the scattered biographic information about Pope Shenouda III, chronologically and thematically. *On the other hand*, the thesis attempts to give a precise explanation of the Christology and Soteriology of Pope Shenouda III from a Protestant point of view.

The thesis is subdivided into three parts. After a brief mentioning of the history and structure of the Coptic-Orthodox church, he mainly focuses in his main parts on the biography of Pope Shenouda III, with a special emphasis on his church politics and reforms, including a discussion on the relationship of church and state. The complex and complicated relationship between Islam and Christianity in Egypt is dealt with only historically. It includes a brief reference to Pope Shenouda's position on Israel but without mentioning his relations to other religious groups. Pope Shenouda's sermons, poems and his role in Egyptian media are not included in the focus of his work.

Gillé further explains how he collected and gathered his material and information.

He stresses that some details in Pope Shenouda's biography might be controversial because every source is providing an interpretation of what happened. His primary sources are mainly texts, sermons and interviews about and with Pope Shenouda III. As secondary sources, he uses books and articles.

Gillé provides a list of the books that he used as sources and stressed that the number of sources in English, and even more in German is very small. Therefore, he further explains is he very thankful for the online archive of Arab-West Report, which he used extensively.

Another important part of his research were his visits to Egypt, where he was able to interview many people who knew Pope Shenouda III, like Anba Boula, an important Bishop.

Gillé describes again the division of his thesis, with 4 chapters and an appendix.

## **1. Introduction**

In order to understand a Coptic Orthodox Pope, you first have to understand the basics about his church. The Coptic Orthodox Church belongs to the so-called family of Oriental-Orthodox churches. They separated in the 5<sup>th</sup> century from the Western church (long before the schism between the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Church) during a dispute about the doctrine of the person of Christ (Christology), especially the nature of Christ because the Coptic-Orthodox church believes in a miaphysical Christology, which means they believe that Jesus has one nature, unlike “western” churches that distinguish more distinctively between two natures of him (human and Divine). Since then, the Coptic-Orthodox Church has been relatively isolated from Western churches.

### **1.1 The term “Coptic”**

The word “Coptic” means “Egyptian.” The Arabs used it first when they conquered Egypt to distinguish the native population from the byzantine Greeks. During the next centuries, the term became a synonym for the Christians in Egypt. The name Coptic-Orthodox Church is used in reference to the biggest and long-standing Church in Egypt.

### **1.2 The advent of Christianity in Egypt**

Copts believe that the Coptic-Orthodox Church started in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, when the Evangelist Mark came to Egypt where he became the first patriarch, or pope of Alexandria.

Western historians see the development of Egyptian Christianity as strongly connected to the rest of Christianity, until the synod of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., when the Oriental-Orthodox Churches separated from the Western church. Therefore, you can to some extent see 451 A.D. as the beginning of the Coptic-Orthodox Church.

Christianity came very early to Egypt. The oldest transcript of the New Testament was found in Egypt but because of the few sources you cannot really say very much about the development and dissemination of Christianity in Egypt in the first two centuries.

### **1.3 The Holy Family**

The Holy Family also plays an important role in the tradition of the biggest church in Egypt. The infancy story of Jesus, especially the flight to Egypt is seen as an historic event.

This is the reason why Coptic Christians believe that the child Jesus visited various places in Egypt. Through these traditions they developed a travel route of the Holy Family.

Cornelis Hulsmann, head of Arab-West Report and an expert in this area, does not question the flight of Mary, Joseph and child Jesus to Egypt, as it is stated in Matthew 2,13-18. But he noted critically, that the reconstruction of the places says more about the beliefs of the Copts in the different centuries than about historical events. The Coptologist Gawdat Gabra also notes that route developed throughout centuries, always in connection with upcoming traditions.

#### **1.4 The Monasticism**

Monasticism was founded in Egypt and became a universal church phenomenon. Pope Shenouda III himself, after he became a monk in 1954, lived some periods as an eremite in the desert.

Monasticism had a huge impact on the Coptic Orthodox Church through the centuries. Through Pope Cyrill VI, the predecessor of Pope Shenouda III, through the reformer of monastic life Matta al-Maskin, and also through Pope Shenouda III himself, monasticism witnessed a huge revival in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and through this an integration into church life.

#### **1.5 The official theology versus popular piety**

The main sources for the theology are the Bible, the writings of the church fathers and the Canon law. Tradition and charismatic leaders are also very influential.

In the popular piety, it is not just devotion to the saints that is very important but also miracle stories and Marian apparitions.

#### **1.6 The Liturgy and Eucharist**

The peak of the Coptic mass is the Holy Communion. Easily spoken, everything that is important in the Coptic Orthodox Church is part of the Liturgy. In Egypt, the mass is practiced in Coptic and Arabic.

#### **1.7 The Church of Martyrs**

The Coptic-Orthodox Church has a long history of facing persecution and discrimination. Therefore, the Church sees itself as the Church of the Martyrs. That is the reason why throughout the year the Church commemorates martyrs and saints.

After Christianity became state religion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, ascetics took the place of martyrs because monasticism is seen as a sort of bloodless martyrdom.

#### **1.8 Church after the Arab conquest**

After the Islamic Conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century there were no direct persecutions, like it happened from time to time under Byzantine rule but discrimination took place. Muslims and Copts lived mostly peacefully together but some Islamic rulers proceeded against Copts through heavy discrimination and sometimes, even persecution. After Arabic replaced Coptic as official language in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and Copts, as non-Muslims, had to pay the Jizya, a tax every non-Muslims had to pay, a lot of Copts converted to Islam. At the same time, Coptic uprisings took place that were bloodily beaten down.

Because of this and because of the alleged mass conversions during the Mamluk era, the Coptic-Orthodox Church entered a deep crisis.

## **1.9 Egypt in Modern Times**

When Napoleon conquered Egypt in 1798, the discrimination against the Copts did not end. During the French occupation, the Muhammad Ali dynasty/Khedivate (1805-1881), the British protectorate (1882-1922), and the Muhammad Ali dynasty kingdom (1922-1952), many restrictions and much discrimination against Copts remained, even when in the constitution of 1923, the Copts were granted equality and some restrictions were eased beforehand.

After the military coup in 1952, which followed a phase in which a lot of attachment between Copts and Muslims was shown to strengthen the unity of Egypt, an era of military-tied governments ruled Egypt until the Revolution in 2011. The situation of the Copts became increasingly worse, which is also connected to the increase and spread of Islamist movements.

Today, around 85 million people live in Egypt. The number of Copts differs depending on the source, varying from 5.5-20%. Pope Shenouda III himself said in 2008 that 15% of the population are Copts, Western media often talks about 10%. Cornelis Hulsman argues strongly, based on his 2012 study for MIDEO, that the number is much lower, somewhere between 6-7%.

## **1.10 The Renewal movement in the Coptic Orthodox Church**

When in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Coptic-Orthodox Church was challenged by successful missionary activities of American churches, Pope Cyrill IV (1854-61) started various reforms. These reforms became a model for a lay movement with huge effects on the community life until today. This renewal movement is directly connected to the Sunday school movement of Habib Girgis, which Pope Shenouda III was also a part of.

## **1.11 The Bishop of Alexandria**

The hierarchy of the Coptic-Orthodox Church was very early, strictly monocratic aligned to the Bishop of Alexandria. The Alexandrian bishop was the first one to hold the title *Pope*.

Despite the title *Pope*, there is no claim of superiority over the other traditional Patriarchates (Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople and Antioch).

The Patriarchal see moved in the 11<sup>th</sup> century from Alexandria to Cairo, but until today the official title of the Coptic Orthodox pope is “His Holiness Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.”

## **2. Observations on the Biography**

### **2.1 Childhood and Adolescence**

Pope Shenouda III was born on the third of August 1923, as “Nasir Gayid Roufail Gad,” the youngest of 8 children into a pious family from Upper Egypt. His parents died very early, so he and his brother were raised by the family of his oldest brother Raphael. Because of the work of his brother, the family moved a lot around Egypt until they finally settled in Cairo, where Nasir finished school. As a boy he did not have many friends to play with at first, instead he showed a real interest in reading. Later, he also took pleasure in poetry, which made him quite popular around his teachers and co-students.

Since 1939, when he was 16, he started to teach at different Sunday schools. Since 1946, he taught at the St. Anthony Church in Shubra (Cairo), where he according to Wolfram Reiss took part in various assemblies since 1940. This church became the main place of his ecclesiastical work before he entered a monastery.

## **2.2 Student Days**

After Nasir graduated in 1943, he started to study History and English at Cairo University. During this time, he was trained by the army as a reserve officer. During his summer breaks, Nasir liked to spend time in the monastery Deir el-Suryan, the Syrian monastery, in Wadi el-Natrun. He graduated in 1947 with a B.A. in History. One year later, he fought in the first Arab-Israeli War as infantry officer.

After his Bachelor's degree, he worked as school teacher for English, history and social sciences, worked partially as journalist and started a postgraduate program at the Archeological Institute.

## **2.3 The Theological Seminary**

Since 1946, Nasir visited the evening classes of the Coptic Orthodox Seminary. He graduated in 1949 with a bachelor of Theology. After his graduation, he became Lecturer for exegesis in the Old and New Testament.

During this time, he also became editor of the *Sundayschool Magazine*. The magazine published mainly about spiritual topics but it also partly dealt with political issues and also sometimes even criticized former Popes (for example Pope Yousab II.).

In 1947, Nasir took the *Takris*, a vow to serve the church in celibacy without signing up for monasticism or priesthood. For him that meant to give up his school teacher job and focus totally on his lectures at the Seminary, and the care for the children in the Sunday schoolhouse at the Archangel Michael Church. In 1950, he became the principal of the Sunday schoolhouse, and in 1953 lecturer at the monastic college in Helwan.

At the same time, Nasir and other activists worked on strengthening the Sunday school movement and a youth group at the St. Anthony Church in Shubra, which became very successful and inspired the founding of other Coptic youth groups. With this, he continued the work of Habib Girgis, the founder of the Sunday school movement and became the initiator of the youth groups of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

## **2.4 Joining the Monastery**

At the age of 30, Nasir Gayid became a monk. He joined the Deir el-Suryan [the Syrian] monastery, in Wadi Natrun. This was possible because Bishop Theophilus, the prior of the Syrian monastery, encouraged educated Copts to join the monasteries, which was very uncommon at this time.

Nasir also joined the monastery because he was very impressed by Father Matta al-Maskin, who influenced his early spiritual life and ideology. This close relationship broke later because of their different views on the connection between religion and politics. When Nasir entered the monastery, he changed his name to Antonius el-Syriani, later *Abuna [Father] Antonius*.

At first, he lived together in a group with other monks but later he decided to live more by himself.

Living as a monk had a huge influence on Abuna Antonius, and he impressed a lot of people that he was almost taken as a candidate as the new pope after Pope Yousab II had passed away. But in 1956, a new electoral law changed the minimum age to 40 plus 15 years life experience as a monk to become a candidate in order to deter Abuna Antonius and Abuna Matta al-Maskin from becoming candidates.

## **2.5 Ordination**

On August 31, 1958, at the age of 35, Abuna Antonius was ordained as a priest. He stated himself that he did not want to become a priest but instead preferred to live the life of hermit in the desert. According to Pope Shenouda III the reason for accepting the priesthood was the lack of confession fathers in the monastery. Cornelis Hulsman adds that it is not that clear if that is true or not if, as he suspects, Pope Shenouda III wanted to create a specific image of himself as a humble but learned hermit, just as he had seen Father Matta al-Maskin obtain huge popularity among Coptic youth in those days after he had been for a decade or more living in a cave in the desert. Also other hermits, such as the later Pope Cyrill VI, were seen by the Copts as in particular holy men. Hulsman sees the fact of Abuna Antonius becoming secretary to Pope Kyrill VI in 1959 as support of his thesis as - how Gillé points out - it remains unclear how he managed to live on the one side in the desert and work as a secretary on the other side.

## **2.6 Episcopal Consecration**

On September 30, 1962, Abuna Antonius was called to Cairo by Pope Cyrill VI. to be consecrated to bishop. Then he became Bishop Shenouda. He was with Bishop Samuel the first *general*-bishop. Until 1962, all bishops were tied to a specific geographical diocese. The general bishop, however, does not have a geographical diocese but a specific task for which he is responsible. Bishop Shenouda's domain was religious and Christian teaching including the Sunday schools, the theological seminary and the Coptic Institute. Before him there were just diocesan bishops, who were "married" to their diocese for a lifetime.

Pope Shenouda always stressed that he did not want to become a bishop. He wrote in a letter that the Episcopal consecration is a "disgrace," yet he accepted this. Hulsman adds that this can again be seen as a very clever effort to look humble as this is how many Copts like to see their religious leaders. Pope Cyrill VI had indeed resisted his election as Patriarch and kept his focus on a life of prayer, also during his patriarchy.

During his time as bishop, Shenouda started his weekly gatherings where he held lectures and answered questions about religious and social topics. These gatherings became very famous and belonged to the most famous Christian gatherings in the Near East.

Bishop Shenouda participated in various conferences and congresses around the world and was elected as the president of ATENE (Association of Theological Education in Near East) in 1966.

Shenouda was not just liked during his time as bishop but also harshly criticized. He even had a huge falling out with Pope Cyrill VI about his ideas of elections of bishops and priests. This led to a temporarily suspension of Bishop Shenouda in 1966, Hulsman reported in his in-memoriam of the Pope. Hulsman explained he was informed about this by a monk in the Monastery of Makarios. When he became pope, Shenouda was able to make the changes he demanded.

## **2.7 Election for Pope and Patriarch**

On March 9, 1971. Pope Cyril VI died in the age of 69 because of a heart attack. The Holy Synod announced shortly afterward the formation of an election committee to create a list of 9 candidates. This list was given to all churches that the Copts could announce if they had any objections to one of the candidates. After this process, the elective college had the job to decide for three finalists, who had to be a monk with extraordinary spirituality. Technically, he was not allowed to be a bishop, but not all former popes met the criteria. There also was a huge discussion about the newly created general-bishops, whether they could be a candidate for the papacy or not.

On October 31, the new pope was elected. After the liturgy, a five-year old, blindfolded boy took one of the three names out of a crystal box and handed it over to Metropolitan Antonius. He declared: “Shenouda, the 117<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria, all of Egypt, Jerusalem, Nubia, Ethiopia, the Pentapolis and the realm under the Sermon of St. Mark, the most holy Pope Shenouda III, was chosen through the Guidance of God.”

### **Excursion A: Critics about the Election**

In the literature was also considerable critique about the election. Many people thought that a bishop should not be allowed to be a candidate. Arab-West Report, for example has an article about a pamphlet of Father Bishoi Kamel, a widely respected pious priest, against the admission of bishops for the election.

After the election of Shenouda, rumors came up that he was the favored candidate of Sadat, the Egyptian president at that time, and that the election was faked. But these rumors could not stand that long because Sadat and Shenouda never met before Shenouda's enthronement, and also because a public election by altar lottery is not that easy to fake.

### **Excursion B: Did Shenouda want to become Pope?**

Author and expert of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Cornelis Hulsman, believes that it is very likely Nasir Gayid had a plan to become pope. From the beginning, he was an activist, who wanted to get as much influence in the church as possible to establish his reform ideas. Gillé does not share Hulsman's explanation entirely because as far as he knows Shenouda III always stated the opposite. Hulsman knows this but explains this more as clerical talking to present the Pope in the best possible light. The same discussion comes back on Pope Shenouda's ascension to the papal throne.

It is obvious that Gillé and Hulsman interpret Pope Shenouda's rise to power in conflicting ways. Hulsman has spoken with a lot of people who knew Pope Shenouda personally well, both clergy and non clergy, and who described him as ambitious, a man who has carefully planned his career to the highest position in church. Gillé, however, says Pope Shenouda himself always stated the opposite. He presents in his thesis a poem of Pope Shenouda published in 2008 that says that he never sought the highest position in church.

Hulsman comments that this is not a contemporary source. Gillé responds that although the date can be discussed as with all online sources, for him the real issue of Shenouda's poem is not the date but the content.

Watson writes that the election of Pope Shenouda was a real “disaster for him.”

Hulsman refers to an interview with Tarek Heggy who knew the pope personally, and believes he worked arduously to become the head of church. Heggy saw his beliefs confirmed by Father Rafael, secretary of Pope Cyrill VI, who told him that Pope Shenouda’s ambitions for the Papal throne date to when he entered monastic life. Father Rafael told Heggy that also Pope Cyrill VI was convinced abuna Antonios, later Bishop Shenouda, had these ambitions.

Meinardus, Watson and even a Coptic cleric think that the ambitious Shenouda III already wished before 1953 to become pope later in his life.

In 1954, when Pope Yusab II was abducted by the Umma al-Qibtiya, Nasir Gayid (later Pope Shenouda) started a debate about his successor in the *Sundayschool Magazine* without denouncing the abduction. Shortly after, Nasir Gayid joined monastic life. Only a monk or bishop is eligible for the highest position in church, the papacy. Whether this motivated Nasir Gayid to become a monk or not is not known but it remains remarkable that he became a monk *after* initiating the discussion about the succession of Pope Yusab.

Hulsman spoke about this with Bishop Qulta who explained this discussion about succession in the *Sundayschool Magazine* as Nasir Gayid indirectly supporting the violent abduction by the Umma al-Qibtiya. Qulta told Hulsman also that he believed there were links between at least some leaders of the Sundayschool movement and the Umma al-Qibtiya. Nasir Gayid was the head of the *Sundayschool Magazine* at this time and the bishop says it is possible, however, without being able to provide evidence, that Nasir Gayid was either himself in contact with the Umma al-Qibtiya or he was close to someone in the Sundayschool movement with contacts to the Umma al-Qibtiya.

Gillé, however, remains cautious and prefers to depend for motives on the Pope’s own statements.

Independently from Shenouda’s real motives, it is obvious that Nasir Gayid, respectively Bishop Shenouda and later Pope Shenouda III, was very concerned about the spiritual direction of the church which he proclaimed openly.

## **2.8 The Teacher of the Church**

Pope Shenouda saw himself at first as the teacher of the church. That means that he saw his main concerns with the church and Christian education of his people. Teaching the people about spiritual life was way more important to him than a political agenda.

Therefore, it is significant that he was the first pope after the 5<sup>th</sup> century, who was at the same time dean of the theological seminary. He also established more seminaries in other cities in Egypt and abroad.

He also was able to recite huge parts of the Bible and was against every kind of biblical criticism.

## **2.9 The Church Politician**

The term of Pope Shenouda III covers roughly the terms of the two presidents Anwar al-Sadat (1970-1981) and Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011). This time was very defining for his political role as pope.

### **2.9.1 Pope Shenouda III. under the era of President Sadat (1970-1981)**

The time during the rule of Sadat was a mixture of conflicts and cooperation. Shenouda III tried, like most popes before him to establish a good working relationship with Sadat and even, so K.S. Kolta, supported a re-election of him.

Pope Shenouda, who himself was nationalistic-minded, supported the October war in 1973 and Sadat's Palestine politics. But the early and late years of Sadat were characterized by conflicts and violence between Muslims and Christians.

#### **2.9.1.1 1972**

The first main-conflict took place on November 6, 1972, in the village of Khanka, when a church was built without permission, (those permissions were very hard to get for Copts and were in those days limited to 25 per year). Some Muslims protested against this and the violence escalated into the burning of the church. Pope Shenouda III sent some church dignitaries to Khanka to celebrate a mass on the church ruins. This provoked riots in Khanka that resulted in the destruction of a lot of Christian property.

Sadat was very angry but still increased the number of church permissions from 25 to 50. Some Copts also were not that happy with the behavior of Pope Shenouda III because they feared that a stubborn pope would aggravate the already tense situation.

#### **2.9.1.2 Review: Copts under Nasser and Sadat**

All in all, you can say that the situation of the Copts became more and more difficult. During the land reform of Nasser, many Copts lost land and work opportunities but because of the good relations between the president and Pope Cyrill VI religious conflicts were mostly prevented.

Although Nasser was a devoted Muslim himself, his political ideology was very close to socialism, therefore he was not very fond of Islamism (political Islam) and worked harshly against the Muslim Brotherhood.

This changed when Anwar al-Sadat became president. He orientated his politics much more to the West and broke the ties Nasser forged with the Soviet Union. Also Sadat focused much more on Islam. He released many members of the Muslim Brotherhood, who were imprisoned during the era of Nasser and made the Shari'a a central part of the Egyptian Constitution in 1971. He also founded the Islamic student movement (Jama'ah al-Islamiyah), which became very militant, and was later responsible for the assassination of Sadat.

Because of Sadat's strong ties to Islamists, Copts had a very hard time and Pope Shenouda had a lot of conflicts with the authorities because he criticized them and their behavior often and openly.

#### **2.9.1.3 1973-1977**

This time is characterized by the October war in 1973 against Israel. Sadat and Pope Shenouda III agreed on their positions on Israel, during the war and afterward with the peace negotiations.

The situation between church and state were relatively stable during this time. They tried to foster the

relationship between Muslims and Christians, but the tensions ran already very deep during this time.

#### **2.9.1.4 1977-1980**

Between the years 1977 and 1980, a lot of anti-Christian campaigns took place in Upper Egypt. Many Muslims thought that Copts were hiding weapons in their churches and try to establish a Christian State.

Also Sadat's Islamist friendly position wasn't very helpful. He even tried to establish an apostasy-law, which would have sentenced all Copts, who converted to Islam and would wish to go back to Christianity, to death. To prevent this Pope Shenouda III called for a conference in Alexandria. Later in 1977, the Sheikh of the Azhar responded with an Islamic conference stressing the importance of the Shari'a, which should never be questioned. To the relief of the Copts, the Law was not passed after all.

On January 6, 1980, at Coptic Christmas, various bombs exploded in different churches in Alexandria. Pope Shenouda strongly criticized the missing reaction of the government and its efforts of making the Shari'a a source of the law. He withdrew with members of the Holy Synod into the St. Bishoi monastery in Wadi Natrun. This made it impossible for Egyptian dignitaries to send their customary Easter regards. This and Pope Shenouda's position in not allowing pilgrimages to Jerusalem deepened the conflict between President Sadat and Pope Shenouda III.

The final break in relations between them came in 1980, when the government wanted to make the Shari'a the one and only source of legislation. Copts feared this would have ended in heavy discriminations against them Copts. Among others because of his criticism on Sadat's plans to give the Shari'a a very prominent place in the constitution, Pope Shenouda was strongly attacked by Sadat, who was the first Egyptian leader since the 19th century to attack the Coptic Patriarch openly.

#### **2.9.1.5 1981**

In June 1981, the tensions reached a tragic climax. After a deadly conflict between a Copt and a Muslim because of a mosque that was going to be built on the ground of a planned future church, the tension exploded into a wave of violence lasting for a day, that left 18 people dead, a lot more injured and many stores damaged. President Sadat and many members of the Egyptian press blamed Pope Shenouda III for the violence, which was not an uncommon strategy (of Sadat) to distract from other problems the president faced. As part of a bigger operation to silence his opposition, Pope Shenouda III was put under house arrest at the St. Bishoi monastery on September 5, 1981.

#### **2.9.2 Pope Shenouda III in exile (1981-1985)**

After sending him into exile, Sadat withdrew his presidential acceptance of Shenouda as Pope and called him until his death, ex-Pope and a fanatic.

Instead of Pope Shenouda III, a commission of 5 regime conformed bishops were appointed to lead the Coptic Orthodox Church. For them and the majority of Copts, Pope Shenouda III was still the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The Coptic community was very divided about the commission and almost split in two.

Some Copts, and very likely Sadat himself, thought that Father Matta al-Maskin, who was very close to Sadat, should succeed on the papal seat but he refused.

The situation between the government and the church changed when on the 6th of October 1981, President Sadat and Bishop Samuel, a member of the church commission, were shot to death. The new president, Hosni Mubarak, established a good relationship with Pope Shenouda III. In 1983, they exchanged new years wishes for the first time, which was seen as a very important sign for the newly established peace between the government and the Coptic Orthodox Church. It took two more years to establish coexistence between the two leaders, but in 1985, shortly before the Coptic Christmas, Pope Shenouda III was able to return to Cairo.

### **2.9.3 Pope Shenouda III during the era of Hosni Mubarak (1981 – 2011)**

After Pope Shenouda III returned to Cairo, he stressed the love, peace and friendship between all Egyptians.

Pope Shenouda III supported President Mubarak and recommended him during one of his re-election. Cornelis Hulsman said this was because Mubarak and Shenouda shared the same enemy, Islamic extremism.

This liaison did not change. In the 1990's, the Christian community in Egypt was still victim of sectarian violence, Van Doorn-Harder named a couple of towns where Copts and Coptic property were under attack. Pope Shenouda III tried with diplomacy and attempts of reconciliation to calm down the whole situation.

During this time, the state changed the way it talked about Copts, to show that they were an important part of the Egyptian society. Pope Shenouda also stressed that Copts should stop seeing themselves as a minority but part of Egypt and loyal citizens.

Pope Shenouda was very convincing with this strategy because he was strictly against foreign interference in Egyptian affairs, and his Israel-critical opinion in the Palestinian cause gave him credibility as an Egyptian patriot. Not everyone was happy with this. A lot of Copts criticized that Pope Shenouda was loyal to an autocratic ruler like Mubarak.

Pope Shenouda III's support for Mubarak made a lot of Copts, also priests, unhappy and they decided to become politically active but unlike their religious leader.

At the end of Mubarak's term, Pope Shenouda began to criticize Mubarak. One way of protesting against him was, as earlier, to go to the St. Bishoi monastery and to publish letters of concern. For some, these protest letters were not critical enough to the regime.

During the revolution in 2011, Pope Shenouda III was initially very restrained. He emphasized his support for Mubarak, even if Copts and Muslims were demonstrating together. He did this because he was concerned that if Mubarak was ousted the regime would be replaced by an Islamic government, which would make the Copts suffer a lot.

When you compare his behavior before and after the exile, you can see that in comparison to the Sadat regime, during the rule of Mubarak and after the revolution, Pope Shenouda III mostly abstained as a critic on the government and tried to work as a bridge and de-escalator.

## **2.9.4 Conclusion and discussion about the relationship between Church and State**

The political mindset of Pope Shenouda III was always that he wanted to achieve the political goals of the Church and the Copts.

The main interests of the Copts are beside a peaceful coexistence with Muslims, the possibility to be free to perform their faith and the pursuit of equality as Egyptians.

Officially, Egypt is a secular country but the Islam is the religion of the state. Next to Islam, only Judaism and Christianity are recognized as religions. For the Copts, that means that they were allowed to build their own schools but also that in public schools it is possible to get Coptic-religious education. Therefore, state and Church had to work together.

This and the under-representation of Copts in the parliament are reasons for the strong political role of the Coptic Patriarch.

Pope Shenouda III was seen as a very political Patriarch, which also brought him a lot of criticism. During Sadat, he was seen as too regime-critical and in contrast under Mubarak as too loyal. But not just his political opinion was criticized for itself.

The monk Matta al-Maskin was of the opinion, and with him many others, that state and church should be separated. Pope Shenouda III saw that totally different. For him, his political work was necessary to reach his goal of a highly autonomous Coptic Orthodox Church.

Gillé concludes that he can understand Father al-Maskin's thesis about the separation of political and theological issues in theory but that, in his opinion, the way Pope Shenouda III used political ways and platforms to reach his goals were much more consequential as al-Maskin himself was more politically involved than his theory would suggest. Another reason for the importance of a Pope as a political figure is also the weak political representation of Copts.

## **2.10 The role of Shenouda III in the renewal movement**

### **2.10.1 The renewal movement in the Coptic Orthodox Church**

The first reforms in the Coptic Orthodox Church took place during the short papacy of Pope Kyrill IV in the middle of the 19th century. After him, Popes followed who were less reform-willingly. After about 100 years during the papacies of Pope Cyrill VI and Pope Shenouda III, a renewal movement could take place in the entire Coptic Orthodox Church.

#### **2.10.1.1 The state of the Church before and after the renewal movement**

Before the renewal movement, the Coptic Orthodox Church had a rather negative connotation under the Copts due to bequeathing of priestly offices, often to the least educated member of the family, corruption, i.e. buying bishop seats and similar. This and the lack of a real community life left the churches and monasteries in the 1940's and 1950's nearly empty.

Since the 1990's, the churches are often overcrowded, the community life is very diverse, including monasteries, child and youth ministry. This has led to a very high identification with the Church.

### **2.10.1.2 The Sunday school movement as the beginning of the renewal**

The reforms that started in the 20th century were in the beginning a sole laypeople movement and rooted originally in the Sunday school movement. A core member of the movement was Habib Girgis, who wanted to reform the training of priests and the education in church and school. Since then, Christian religious education classes took place in schools.

His students followed his example but until the 1930's, it remained a local initiative.

Next to some bishops, Pope Shenouda III came from the Sunday school movement.

In the 1940's, congresses took place to coordinate the work of the different Sunday schools. After the death of Girgis in 1951, Waheeb Atallah, later Bishop Gregorius, followed him as unofficial leader of the Sunday school movement.

### **2.10.2 The Church-reformer**

Under the papacy of Cyril VI, several leaders of the Sunday school movement were promoted, including Father Antonius (who became Bishop Shenouda and later Pope Shenouda III), even though he also was one of the publishers of the *Sundayschool Magazine*, which treated the church leadership very critically. Nonetheless, Bishop Shenouda was able to establish some huge reforms, like his – for orthodox churches uncommonly strong emphasis on sermons and his weekly round of questions, where he answered to the people about whatever they were concerned about. His main theme was spiritual life. He also helped in improving the quality of the monasteries, the new formation of the dioceses, the integration of laymen in various levels of the church hierarchy and in the integration of women and the youth in the lay ministry.

#### **2.10.2.1 The Reform of the Monasticism**

Like his predecessor, Pope Shenouda III supported strongly the revitalization of monastic institutions. In 2012, the number of monasteries had grown from 9 to 28 and the number of convents from 5 to 7. The number of monks and nuns had greatly increased.

This huge growth was totally new since the arrival of Islam in Egypt in the 7th century. Also new was that now nearly all monks had an academic background and were able to assist with their knowledge in the re-opening of old monasteries and other Church interior affairs, like restorations, artwork, or gardening.

Pope Shenouda III himself stood as an example for the importance of the monastic life for the Coptic Orthodox Church, by secluding himself weekly from the world at the St. Bishoi monastery.

One reason for the reviving of the old monastic tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church was that the monasteries were seen as the backbone of Church and that a strong Church could only be if there were also a strong monastic tradition.

Pope Shenouda III was not the only figure of importance for the revival of monasticism. Father Matta al-Maskin also played a very important role. He was among other things responsible for the revival of the nearly abandoned Monastery of the Saint Makarius. Through the work of Father al-Maskin, the monastery grew from 6 monks in 1969 to 120 in 2007. His teachings, with an emphasis *among others*

on the historical and ecumenical character of the faith attracted many monks. But because of Father al-Maskin's position during Pope Shenouda's exile the monks of Father Matta al-Maskin normally do not get promoted to high ecclesiastical offices.

### **2.10.2.2 The Participation of Laymen in Church Life**

One of the goals of Pope Shenouda III was to integrate the laymen-leadership into the Church. On local and national level, so-called Majlis el-Kanisa (community-councils) existed, their work included the connection between the ordinary Copts and the clerics and for example also overview the finances of the Church.

Through the strong integration of laymen into the Church also a very strong clericalization took place.

### **2.10.2.3 The Clericalization of the Takris movement**

*Takris* means a dedication of a lay-member of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

This movement is in its beginning strongly tied to Father Matta al-Maskin. Members of the *Takris*-movement were lived celebrate in houses together and tried to live and work for the Church.

Since 1948, members of this movement have been ordained as monks and priests. Through this a strong connection between *Takris* and the priesthood was created. Among the first reform monks was also the future Pope Shenouda III. Through the strong connection between *Takris* and the priesthood the laymen-*Takris* was only seen as a pre-step to the priesthood, and was therefore, not very popular under the male laymen. For women who choose the *Takris*, the work was nearly restricted to social diaconical services.

### **2.10.2.4 The Role of Women**

Against all odds, women got more and more possibilities for Church services. They could become teachers at the Sunday Schools or could become *mukarassat*, which is the female *Takris*.

Nonetheless, the Coptic Orthodox Church is still strictly against the ordination of women as priests. This is not entirely related to the theological and traditional ways of the Church but has also something to do with the patriarchal structure of the Egyptian society.

### **2.10.2.2 The Reform of the Episcopate**

In 1962, Bishop Shenouda III became together with Bishop Samuel, the first general-bishop. Their work was not tied to a certain diocese unlike the work of the diocesan bishops.

Pope Shenouda himself reestablished the old duty of the chorbishop. Those were mostly appointed as auxiliary bishops.

These reforms led to more flexibility into the office of bishops. Several dioceses had not just one but several bishops who were responsible for it. This, with a decrease of the minimum age for the bishop and an increase in education, helped to establish a network that wasn't there before.

The new bishops, new dioceses abroad and with that a greatly expanded Holy Synod increased the influence of Pope Shenouda III.

But due to the reforms, Reiss criticized, some offices that belonged to laymen were now given to members of the clergy.

Beside his democratic reforms, like the plebiscites in case of new bishops, Pope Shenouda III formed a very strict hierarchical Church structure, which was built on absolute loyalty and obedience towards the pope (which can be seen as part of the monastic life).

#### **2.10.2.6 The Office of the Youth-Bishop**

Shenouda became bishop for ecclesiastical education in 1962, which also included child and youth work.

When he became patriarch he tried to maintain this resort but he wasn't able to fulfill his standards due to other tasks. Therefore, he ordained Emil Aziz to Bishop Mousa in 1980. He became a general bishop with his main task to work with the youth. With that he was very successful. He had a huge network of co-workers, youth magazines and other media to reach to the youth. The integrative way of educating and supporting the young people in spiritual, cultural and ethical questions was very popular.

#### **2.10.2.7 The Connected Pope: New Media and Activities Abroad**

To reach the younger generations, Pope Shenouda III relied heavily on the new media. Next to cassettes with sermons, the Coptic Orthodox Church started selling DVD's and CD's but not just these are nowadays very important to spread information. There is also the homepage of the Coptic Orthodox Pope on the internet and since 2005, Coptic television.

Another important way of spreading his words were his many travels. This was also important because under his reign more and more Copts lived outside of Egypt. Van Doorn-Harder guesses that today there are about 1 million Copts outside of Egypt. Therefore, Pope Shenouda III is the Coptic Orthodox Pope who traveled more than any of his predecessors.

During his time abroad he often ordained priests and consecrated (new) churches.

Another important task for him was the possibility for all Coptic communities to be able represent themselves on the internet. Therefore, he and the Holy Synod allowed the organization CopticWorld.org to establish a webpage in 2007, where it was able to find most communities worldwide and to connect them with this page to their own homepages, if they already had one.

#### **2.10.2.8 The apologetic and ecumenical Pope**

Between the 5th and the 20th century, the Coptic Orthodox Church was mostly characterized by isolation. This isolation exists partly until today.

One reason for that were the prior missionary efforts of other churches in Egypt. That is a reason for the apologetic attitude of Pope Shenouda III because he was afraid that his church would fall to heresy. He was especially apologetic towards different kinds of protestant churches in Egypt that, for him,

partly represented a huge danger. An elder of one of the largest Protestant churches in Egypt, who is a huge admirer of Pope Shenouda III stated that the pope did not really promote unity between the churches in Egypt. He was also very skeptical towards the ecumenical efforts of the Roman Catholic Church. A reason for the strong emphasis of the Coptic Orthodox identity was also the heavy dominance of the Islam in Egypt.

But surprisingly in his last decades, he started a never seen opening of the Coptic Orthodox towards other churches.

For the opening, you can find theological (i.e. in Father Matta al-Maskin) and economical reasons. Towards ecumenism there are two factions inside the Coptic Orthodox Church: an open and a closed one. Theologically and ecclesiastically, Pope Shenouda III belongs to the closed faction but still one cannot deny that there is also a theological motivation behind his ecumenical engagement.

Historically the strongest ties of the Coptic Orthodox Church are to the Ethiopian-Orthodox Church, which was until 1959 under the jurisdiction of the patriarchate of Alexandria. Especially after a conference in Adis Ababa in 1965, the relations with all old-oriental churches were strengthened.

Between 1948 and 1954, the Coptic Orthodox Church joined the ecumenical World Council of Churches. This led to contacts with many other churches.

In 1985, after prior meetings, the Oriental-Orthodox Churches started an official dialogue with the Orthodox Churches with a Byzantine tradition.

Also with the Roman Catholic Church, historical meetings took place. There were meetings before 1974 but 1974 and 1992, there were eight official meetings between the Roman Catholic and the Coptic Orthodox Church which have led in 1988 to a united declaration about the Christology. After a period of partial stagnation another document on agreements within the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) was signed in 2009.

A dialogue with the Protestants was at first seen skeptical by Pope Shenouda III. But between 1985 and 1993, numerous official and unofficial meetings and conferences took place between the Coptic Orthodox Church and various protestant confessions, like the Anglican Church, the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Coptic Evangelical Church in Egypt and the Lutheran Church of Sweden.

Sometimes the dialogues did not work that well. After 1997, the dialogue between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East became quiet polemic.

Pope Shenouda III was highly respected by most Christians in Egypt. He made, even with his efforts in preserving the apology of his Church, historical progresses in terms of an international ecumenical talks, especially in the topic of Christology.

## **2.11 Pope Shenouda III. in the memory of the Copts**

Pope Shenouda III died at 88 years old on March 17 in 2012. On the day of his death (according to Hesemann), hundreds of thousand people filled the streets of Cairo and the cathedral. At the next day, when the body was presented, it was even more.

Until today, Pope Shenouda III is very present in the Coptic Orthodox Church. His tomb is the

destination for many pilgrimages.

Many Copts also still have his portraits in their houses and in every Coptic bookstore you can buy his books and sermons. The sermons can also be found on the internet and are shown on some Coptic TV channels. There are also hagiographic biographies of him.

All in all, you can say that Pope Shenouda III had a great impact on the Copts in Egypt and even if he never wanted to be modern he deserves the title of a modern Church Father of the Coptic Orthodox Church.

## **2.12 Summary: Biography of Pope Shenouda III.**

*In this chapter Gillé recaps everything he wrote before about the life of Pope Shenouda III. and gives a short overview about the most important events.*

## **3. Observations on the Theology**

### **3.1 The Christology of Pope Shenouda III.**

This part will give a view on the Christology of Pope Shenouda III. It is mostly concentrated on his book “The Nature of Christ.”

But first *Gillé* explains Dyophysitism and Miaphysitism and the historical connection to the Christological dispute of the early Church.

#### **3.1.1 Dyophysitism and Miaphysitism**

The title of the book “The Nature of Christ” is with the singular “Nature” a clear confession, because that is the core of the Christological dispute that took place between the 4th and the 5th century: The core question was, that if Jesus was of one essence with God (homoousius) as the churches agreed upon based on the New Testament, what consequence does this have for his essence.

The main centers of this dispute were Antioch and Alexandria. In Antioch, they emphasized the humanity of Jesus stronger and concluded that this means he had two natures (Dyophysitism). Alexandria emphasized the divinity of Jesus and the unity of his person and concluded that he had only one nature (Miaphysitism). Although both groups believed that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, they disagreed about the terminology of the essence of Jesus. This led to the schism of the Church as both groups suspected the danger of heresy in the terminology of the other.

#### **3.1.2 The Nature of Christ from the point of view of Shenouda III.**

Pope Shenouda III highly emphasized the divinity of Jesus. At least in some of his books it is clearly more highlighted than his humanity. It is also possible for Pope Shenouda to talk about a divine and a human nature, as long as the unity of both natures is stated. The same thought, who refuses a change and a blend after the unification (incarnation) can be found in the third chapter. There Pope Shenouda III is talking about immutability of the divine and human nature.

The main accent lies on the unity of the natures.

For Pope Shenouda's understanding of the nature of Christ, the phrase "The One Nature of God, the incarnated Word (Logos)" is central. It was used before by the early church father Cyril but even earlier by the heretic Apollinaris. Pope Shenouda emphasized Cyril's formula (which was partly derived from the gospel of John 1:14).

In summary it can be said that Pope Shenouda III also assumed that Jesus had a divine and a human nature, but after the union (of the two natures) in the Virgin Mary, which happened without a mingling or alteration of the natures, one cannot talk anymore about two natures but of the one nature of the incarnated Word, as not to imply a separation.

### **3.1.3 Chalcedon from the perspective of Pope Shenouda III.**

The Council of Chalcedon is placed in Pope Shenouda's book at the end of his second chapter and with that in direct connection to heresies about the nature of Christ. The Pope also links the Chalcedon formula to the teaching of Nestorius which he sees as heresy.

For Pope Shenouda, the problem with Chalcedon was the announcement of the two natures of Christ in such a way that according to his perspective did not emphasize the unity of Christ well enough at the same time. The phrase "out of two natures" was unacceptable because the emphasis is on the *two natures* whereas "*in* two natures" would have been fine as the emphasis would have been on the "*in*" and with that on the unity. Since Chalcedon eventually voted for "out of two natures," Pope Shenouda, and the Coptic Orthodox Church reject, the statement as unacceptable because only the unity, the one nature of the incarnated word, can bring salvation. According to the Pope the one nature of Jesus (human and divine) had to die for our sins, because the human nature alone could not redeem us. Very briefly speaking, Gillé sees that the real problem lies more in a different terminology than really a different teaching about Christ.

### **3.1.4 Biblical explanations for the one-nature-tenet of Shenouda**

Pope Shenouda III connects the unity of the nature of Christ mostly with verses from the New Testament.

With the verses Luke 1:35; Matthew 1:23; Jes 9:6; Rom 8:29; Gal 4:4; John 8:58, a quotation of Athanasius and an extract from the Nicene creed, he justifies the formula "incarnated God," which is for him synonymous for "the incarnated Word." The "incarnated God" is for Pope Shenouda, the best way to describe the unity of the divine and human nature of Jesus.

In his 5th chapter, Pope Shenouda talks about the possibility of the unity in the nature by relating to the "revelation of secrets" (Rom 16,25) to the incarnation of God.

The conclusion is basically the same for every verse, one cannot divide Jesus into a divine and human nature, nor into Son of Man and Son of God, because everywhere one finds the talk of the one nature of Christ.

Gillé emphasizes that although the verses the Pope discusses really do not speak of any separation within Christ, they also do not mention the term "nature" of Christ at all. The New Testament focuses more on the function of Jesus, and not as much on his essence.

In the 6th chapter, Pope Shenouda talked about the connection between the one nature and atonement. The Lord of Glory (1 Cor 2:8), the Prince of Life (Apg 3:14), the Lord of Healers (Hebr 2:10), the First and the Last was crucified and died. It is not just his human nature, otherwise then redemption would not be possible.

In the last chapter, Pope Shenouda concludes from the one-nature tenet that Jesus also had just one will and one power. A conflict between divine and human would have been sin and therefore cannot apply to Jesus.

It is notable that Pope Shenouda III equals the will of God with the will of Jesus.

### **3.1.5 The joined Christology formula**

After centuries of isolation, in 1971, after an unofficial talk between Pope Shenouda and other theological experts, it came to a historical consensus about the Christology. This led to a visit of Pope Shenouda to Rome in 1973, where plans for a further dialogue were made. This dialogue finished in 1988 with the signing of a joined Christology formula for both Churches.

This formula stated that both Churches believe in the perfect humanity and perfect divinity of Jesus Christ and the rejection of every hybrid form, to express the idea of the incarnation of God in unity. At the same time it strongly emphasizes the unity of Jesus Christ.

Pope Shenouda had a major role in drafting this agreed formula. The diplomatic omission of Greek terms like *physis* (nature) by Pope Shenouda was a vital step to this historic formula that defined the common faith in *one* Christ, the incarnate Word entirely God and entirely human without separation or mixture.

### **3.1.6 Conclusion about the Christology of Pope Shenouda III.**

In this part Gillé reviews the efforts of Pope Shenouda in ways of an ecumenical Christology but also his traditional Coptic views on the Christology.

## **3.2 The Soteriology of Pope Shenouda III.**

The portrayal of the Soteriology is mainly based on two lectures Bishop Shenouda held in 1966 during two conferences for Sunday Schools in Baha. These lectures are collected in the book “Salvation in the Orthodox Concept.”

### **3.2.1 Context- and Supplement-principle versus sola fide**

In the introduction of his book on Salvation, Pope Shenouda argues against using just one single verse to build a teaching on. He says: “the Holy Bible is not mere verses but a certain spirit involves in all its parts.” He refers to the rule to never forget about the context. He further says: “Would we dare say then that keeping the commandments alone is sufficient to give salvation! Without faith, without baptism, and without sacraments?! Nay, we cannot do wrong against ourselves, against others or against faith itself by using a single verse alone.”

This is for itself a very good example on how his Soteriology works, that you have to take the Holy Bible as one and not just picking single verses. One reason for this is the high value of the Holy Bible

for Pope Shenouda III. The justification of faith alone, which is the (mainly) protestant teaching that someone is saved by faith in Jesus Christ “*alone*” without any connection to human works whatsoever, is rejected by Pope Shenouda as he adds to every verse of the Bible that speaks of this kind of justification another verse that stresses the works. Here one finds a major distinction in the interpretation also of Romans chapters 3 to 5, which according to Gillé should be one major focus of the exegetical discussion.

### **Excursion C: Understanding of the Holy Bible**

All teachings of the Coptic Orthodox Church have to be founded in the Holy Scripture. For Pope Shenouda III, the verses of the Holy Bible are the infallible word of God (which he views as the main basis of his Soteriology).

A historical-critical perspective is rejected as well as any form of partial inspiration. Pope Shenouda emphasized this point very strongly, also against Father Matta al-Maskin who himself believed in the divine inspiration of Scripture but was more open to the discussion of certain points within biblical studies.

One reason for his point of view is that he feared that biblical criticism could be used by non-Christians against the Church. He feared that by allowing criticism the simple faith would be endangered and could become just a philosophy.

Pope Shenouda and most of the Coptic Orthodox Church is very opposed to modern critical theology. Although it would be an overstatement to say that the Patriarch only interpreted the Bible literally, one can definitely find a preference for this kind of interpretation in many of his writings.

Although Gillé himself assumes a divine inspiration of the Bible, he emphasizes that the human dimension should not be underestimated or even overlooked. It is e.g. too easy to abandon the discussion about textual reliability of the ending of the gospel of Mark (16:9-20) with a reference to the divine inspiration as Pope Shenouda has done in response to Father Matta al-Maskin.

#### **3.2.2 No Salvation without the Blood of Christ**

Pope Shenouda emphasized that all doing is worthless without the blood of Christ. A non-believer cannot be saved by just good works but also that good works are also needed because faith without works is dead. He said: “... sin cannot be forgiven except by an unlimited propitiation. But whatever works man can do are limited.”

Gillé explains the controversial term “propitiation,” which is biblically connected to the death of Christ and believed to bring about the forgiveness of sins. Gillé also mentions some further discussions about the term.

Pope Shenouda further says: “However, we say that the blood of Christ is one thing and the merits of His blood is another thing. The blood of Christ is capable of remission of the sins of the whole world... but did the whole world gain the remission of their sins?...’For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...’ (John 3:16) [Is] the world saved because of His giving His begotten Son? Or only those who believe in Him are saved?’ So, the blood of Christ is available, ready to save and capable of that... but there are certain conditions that must be fulfilled first so that a sinner might deserve to be saved by this blood.”

These conditions are: 1) Faith, 2) Baptism, 3) The for salvation needed sacraments, and 4) Good works.

### **3.2.3 The Conditions for Salvation**

#### **3.2.3.1 Faith as a Condition for Salvation**

Pope Shenouda III includes good works in his definition of faith. He also mentions that faith is a gift given by God, which gives calmness and peace. But the connection between faith and life practice is much stronger than Protestants would see it, who emphasize the gift aspect of faith a lot more. According to Pope Shenouda, even a person full of faith is not automatically saved. Therefore, one needs to do good works to prove one's own faith in front of God.

#### **3.2.3.2 Baptism as a Condition for Salvation**

The second condition for salvation is baptism. Through baptism, Pope Shenouda III says, the forgiveness of sins takes place. He says: "This means that baptism is necessary for one's salvation, for through baptism sins are forgiven and one is made capable of receiving the Holy Spirit."

But baptism can just forgive the original sin and all sins of the past. For all the sins that happen after baptism you have to repent from these sins. That is why Pope Shenouda rejects the idea of "salvation in a moment," which some Protestants believe.

#### **Excursion D: The baptism of children and infants**

Pope Shenouda III was a strong supporter of the infant baptism. One reason is that he believed baptism is used to forgive the original sin, and not like in some Evangelical churches who see it just as a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Pope Shenouda assumes that infant baptism goes back to the apostles and he argues that although there is no clear Bible verse about children's baptism, there is also no verse against it.

All in all, Gillé sees the tradition clearly on the side of Pope Shenouda. The New Testament, however, has a stronger case for the believer's baptism. The main question, however, according to Gillé is whether one sees a difference between the baptism of water and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Very briefly speaking, Pope Shenouda sees both (almost) as one. Gillé does not as Pope Shenouda's interpretation of the verses (John 3:5f; Tit 3:5; Mk 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1. John 2:20.27) he repeatedly cites do not convince him.

Beside the theological aspects, the baptism is for Copts an important ritual to welcome a new member into their community, which has much stronger ties to "identity" than other churches.

#### **3.2.3.3 Further Sacraments that are necessary for Salvation**

Beside the baptism some other sacraments are also necessary for salvation according to Pope Shenouda.

##### **3.2.3.3.1 The Sacrament of Chrismation**

Through the Chrismation one receives the Holy Spirit. It is normally given right after the baptism.

### **3.2.3.3.2 The Sacrament of the Eucharist**

The Eucharist is important for salvation and remission of the sins that happen after baptism. It is seen as a continuation of the sacrifice of Christ.

During the Eucharist, the bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ. This transformation can just be done by a priest and does not depend on the worthiness of the priest.

### **3.2.3.3.3 The Sacrament of Repentance**

Because baptism just saves you from the original sin, repentance is needed for the ongoing fight against sin. Through repentance one is time and again renewed and the sins are forgiven.

For the Copts, repentance is necessary to earn salvation but only based on the merit of the blood of Christ.

Repentance can be practiced individually but like all other sacraments, repentance is mostly directly linked to a priest. According to the Pope the Protestants would only emphasize the role of grace in repentance. Gillé states that although Pope Shenouda III does not consider the differences in viewpoints in relation to repentance among Protestants, the Patriarch correctly concludes that Protestants do not see repentance and confession linked to priesthood.

### **Excursion E: Priesthood**

Pope Shenouda III distinguishes between two different types of priesthood: a common and a special priesthood. The common priesthood is open to everyone and is done by every member of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The special priesthood is just for those who are chosen and ordained.

The main purpose of the priests is the performance of the sacraments. That is why the understanding of priesthood is very closely related to the Coptic understanding of the Eucharist, which is seen as a continual sacrifice. Beside that the priests also have the duty to support, lead and guide their communities.

Gillé cannot find the idea of a continual sacrifice in the New Testament, especially the letter of Hebrews, which is often cited in Pope Shenouda's argument seems to emphasize the singularity of Christ's sacrifice (e.g. Hebr. 7:27, *He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*)

### **3.2.3.4 Salvation through Good Works**

According to Pope Shenouda good works are necessary for salvation but you cannot get salvation through good works only. They are the fruits of faith. Therefore, you need the help of the grace of God to do good works, they are the communion of our will and the work of the Holy Spirit. Pope Shenouda is convinced that a believer can lose his salvation.

Gillé questions if the (biblical) role of grace is really considered well enough, if good works are viewed as a pre-condition to someone's relationship with God (and not as its consequence).

### **3.2.4 The Role of Grace and the Free Will of Man**

This collaboration between the free will and the grace of God is essential for the Coptic Orthodox Church according to the Pope. God offers his grace and the human decides for himself, if he wants to take it.

For Pope Shenouda III, this form of synergism is essential. For him, the human being has, through his free will and the grace of God, the possibility to do good works, through this he can show that he is worthy to be granted salvation through the blood of Christ.

This remains one of the biggest differences between Protestants and the Coptic Orthodox Church, as the late Augustine and the Protestant Reformers distinguished more clearly between the free will of man (works) and grace as the free gift of God. This is also connected to the view of man. Pope Shenouda sees men as very sinful but still capable of deciding/living for God. Protestants see man as so sinful that he cannot decide for God and needs His total justification. Works are performed by both sets of believers, just the motives are different. Briefly speaking Protestants are supposed to do them in gratitude, Copts have to do them to become worthy of salvation. For the Copts it also includes the practice of the sacraments as mentioned above.

#### **Excursion F: The Theosis – the Deification of Men**

Father Matta al-Maskin wrote in 1960, a booklet with the name “Pentecost.” In it, he wrote about the consequences of the events of Pentecost. He talks about a mystical unification of divine and human nature. Through that he wanted to point out that we are all children of God and because of that we will become similar to him (1.John 3:2).

Father Al-Maskin emphasized that the Holy Spirit will be the mediator in this mystical unification between men and God. Through baptism, you will become a child of God, through the Chrismation the Holy Spirit enters you, and with the Eucharist you will be able to take part in the body of Christ. This is possible because of the incarnation of Christ. For Father al-Maskin, this participation was strongly related to the monastic practice and the liturgy.

With the help of the three main topics of his theology, incarnation, prayer and communion, he was able to integrate the Theosis into his teaching.

Pope Shenouda III was strictly against the idea of the Theosis. He used not just some of his Wednesday lectures but also wrote two books about the Theosis and why Father al-Maskin was wrong.

For Pope Shenouda, this was about nothing less than to defend the divinity of Christ. This divinity could be endangered through two options either by putting man on the same level as Christ, or by reducing Christ to the level of humankind.

He was also strictly against the idea that humans could become through any possible way god-like. The only way of salvation was to become close to God and not becoming like him. Pope Shenouda saw this idea not just as an attack on the divinity of Christ but also as a sign of human hubris.

For him this was a sinful misinterpretation of the incarnation.

Another point of this dispute was that Father Matta al-Maskin used text passages of some Church

Fathers to prove that his idea of Theosis was rightful. Pope Shenouda stated that these passages were taken out of context and therefore and were used as justification for, in his point of view, heretic ideas.

Briefly speaking, Gillé concludes that Father al-Maskin is correct in emphasizing that the church fathers taught some form of theosis. However, Pope Shenouda is right in rejecting Father al-Maskin's thesis because of his mystical language which leaves too much room for misinterpretation. This topic would need further exploration.

### **3.2.5 Conclusion about the Soteriology**

Gillé summarized what he stated in the previous chapter about the Soteriology of Pope Shenouda III and how this differs from the Protestant view of justification by faith and grace alone. He stresses the importance of the exegetical discussions on passages like Romans 3-5. Gillé questions if the Pope is always following his own context- and supplement-principle (e.g. in his interpretation of Roman 9:16). He further suggests Augustine might become an interconfessional bridge as he is highly regarded by both traditions. Gillé concludes with an appreciation of the consistency within Pope Shenouda's premises and the common ground of all Christians: The worship of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

## **4. Final Conclusion**

In his final conclusion, Gillé summarizes his whole thesis.

He tells how Nasir Gayid grew up and later became part of the Sunday school Movement. After university and his military service, he decided to become a monk, Abuna Antonius, and later became bishop. At this moment, he changed his name to Shenouda.

His life theme was the Christian education and his main topic the spiritual life. He wanted Christians to grow in faith in Jesus Christ, which was to him of course directly linked to the Coptic Orthodox Church

As bishop, he was able to revolutionize the Coptic Orthodox Church through his Wednesday lectures who brought the people closer to their faith.

Gillé among others also named the controversy, whether Pope Shenouda wanted to become pope or not. Pope Shenouda said that he never wanted any influence in the Coptic Orthodox Church and would be most happy if he could have stayed a hermit monk, but other experts, i.e. Cornelis Hulsman of the Center for Arab West Understanding state that strong indications are that he worked from the beginning to gain power and raise in the ranks of the Church. Gillé, however, leaves this question consciously open as he is not entirely convinced.

As Pope Shenouda III, he was (in)famous for using his position as a political tool, due to the lack of representation of Copts in politics. He was a harsh critic of Sadat, and later a supporter of Mubarak (for both he got a lot criticism from other Copts).

His main political issue, beside the support of the Copts, was to call for the unity of the Egyptian people.

As a spiritual leader, he was quite traditional, although he also incorporated some modern elements like new media and he made efforts in connecting his Church with other Christian confessions.

His Christology was based on the formula: "The One Nature of God the Incarnate Word." Pope Shenouda saw this as the best summary of the testimony of the New Testament. With help of a diplomatic omitting of the Greek term "nature" (physis), he made a historic contribution in overcoming the Christological schism of the 5th century. His Soteriology basically consists of two parts, on the one hand Christ's work of redemption on the cross, which opens the possibility of reconciliation with God by grace, and on the other hand, the human response of man that has to live worthy to receive this salvation by practicing the sacraments. The second part Pope Shenouda emphasized especially towards Protestants who do not share his views about sacraments. (Usually Protestants would strongly emphasize the importance of Christ's work of redemption on the cross and a God-given trust in it which leads to good works out of gratitude.)

All in all, Gillé thinks that Pope Shenouda was the most important Coptic pope of the 20th century, who revoked the old monastic tradition, included the youth into the communities and led the Coptic Orthodox Community through major reforms and difficult times.