**A Brief History of Orthodox Evangelism IV,**

**“Contemporary Coptic Evangelism In Africa”**

**5000 Joined the Coptic Church In South Africa:**

After fourteen centuries of virtually no missionary work done by the Coptic Orthodox Church, the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a new dawn with a great light in evangelism.   It began in 1950 by the joining of 5000 people from South Africa the Coptic Orthodox Church and ordination of bishop Morcos as a metropolitan for South Africa and Nigeria   Unfortunately, the service did not last for long.

**Bishop Antonius Markos:**

The Beginning of his service:

When he was a student in the Medicine College in Cairo, Egypt, he was assigned to a serve as a Sunday school teacher in a small village.  When he started serving people there, he saw the needs of others in remote areas and across the cultural barrier to hear about the Lord.  He decided to go to evangelize in Africa.  .  At that time the focus of the church was in the pastoral area so he received no encouragement.  However, he did not give up, but continued to pray and communicate with those who could help him.  One time he went to the airport at 2:00 AM to talk to two bishops, who were traveling to Ethiopia to ask their assistance in finding him a way to start his missionary work in Africa.  The call to evangelism was very strong in his life that it became his dream, his passionate desire, and his heart longing.

One of the two bishops obtained an agreement from the Department of Health in Ethiopia to let the new doctor work as a physician.  He welcomed that offer based on the fact that St. Paul worked as a ‘Tent Maker’ and as an evangelist at the same time.  However, a few days before leaving to Ethiopia a presidential decree was issued, forbidding doctors to leave Egypt.  In his sadness he went to his room and cried to God for a long time.  In the middle of his prayers, he saw a great vision, a luminous person standing in the center of the room looking at him.  This person was dressed in white vestments, his face was shining and a hallo of light surrounded his head. He lifted his hands and said: “**You shall go to Africa and God will be with you and work through you.**”

**His Ordination As a Bishop:**

Afterwards he went to Ethiopia to work as a physician and at the same time to lead a revival in the ministry to children and youth that reached tens of thousands.  Not before long, he returned to Egypt to become a monk. Then, in 1975 he traveled to Kenya to start his long missionary work that was full of tribulations and dangers. After having a back surgery, he returned to Egypt.  In 1976, he was ordained as a bishop and was given the name of Bishop Antonius Markos.

**Characteristics of Bishop Antonius Markos:**

Bishop Antonius Markos is one of the great missionary workers of the Orthodox Church.  His name and his life should be recorded in the history of evangelism.  I consider him as “The father of missionary work of the Coptic Church in the Twentieth Century.”  For the purpose of this quick study, I would like to summarize here what I have noticed about his characteristics, his evangelistic work, and what I think is very important for evangelists to observe.  First, let us start with his characteristics:

1-     **A man of prayer**: You always see that he retreats to pray before his service, during it, and after it. You read about his prayers for the conversion of Africans. His prayers intensify in times of tribulations.

2-     He **has a passion for evangelism:** In many parts of his diary you feel this passion, you touch, and hear it coming out from his heart.  This passion gives him the energy to move around and to travel for long hours to remote areas to evangelize, even when he is in great physical pain.

3-     A man who **finds in the Bible an answer to his questions** in hard times.  Whenever he has a problem, he opens the Bible and considers what he reads as answer from God.  Although, I don’t recommend this method to everyone, but definitely it is a great way for a spiritual person who truly believes God will send him an answer through the verses he reads.

4-     He has a **great ability to learn new languages**. The number of languages he mastered in Africa amazed me.  He translated many prayers books into many African languages.  He mastered these languages to the degree that he could use it in writings, sermons, and translation.  In addition to his mastery of both English and French, he also mastered the following languages: Tigrenia, Amharic, Kiswahili, Kuso, Zulus, and Suto.  He mastered these languages to the degree that he could use it in writings, sermons, and translation.  He translated many prayers books into many African languages.

5-     Through his **dynamic and loving personality**, he established many friendships, which he used fully to promote evangelism.

**Characteristics of his missionary work:**

1.     **The concept of planting churches is very clear** in his mind. In a conversation with Fr. Morocs, he was trying to convince him to leave America and return to Africa. He gave him the example of “St. Mark who converted many thousands, out of whom the base of the base of the church was formed, from which there could be chosen deacons full of Holy Spirit and wisdom to serve the people. Then form such deacons could be chosen those who are qualified and meet the criteria of priesthood, according to the conditions of the New Testament, to be ordained into the priesthood to serve the deacons and people.  And then the church would be in need of a bishop to oversee the church’s affairs.  And the same can be observed in all the nations where the Coptic Church is to be established. All should be following the See of St. Mark in Alexandria.” 1

In the above conversation you notice that **he has a complete understanding of the upbringing of new churches in Africa**. He speaks of spreading the faith among thousands.  Then, out of the people of the local churches in Africa, he will choose deacons.  Then, from the deacons, he will select priests, which means they are from Africa. In other words, **the deacons and priests should be children of the local church, and not imported from Egypt**.  Then, he talked about a need to ordain a bishop. And later he mentioned: “the establishment of a General Bishopric of African Affairs opens the way for the **establishment of many national churches and bishoprics in many nations** of Africa.”1

He said all of the above just a few days after he was ordained a bishop.  This thought reflects a great apostolic view of planting of new churches. He sees clearly the future conversions of thousands of Africans in such a way that would spur high spirituality among the converts, out of whom deacons full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom would be come. Then out of those deacons, priests would be ordained according to the high level of competence that practiced in the days of the apostles. I can’t help but view him as having the apostolic church in mind while he was talking, and also he was envisioning an evangelistic time similar to that of the days of the apostles.

Then he talked about the national churches, where bishops would be ordained in those national churches.  **National church (indigenous church) is a term used to refer to a church in a specific culture.**  **It is great that he acknowledged the need to have churches whose Christian faith incarnated in the fabric of the national culture.**

Finally, he mentioned that **all these national churches would follow the See of St. Mark in Alexandria**, as if he was recalling the great day of the Coptic Church when our missionary work extended to Nubia, Ethiopia, and parts of North Africa.

**2.**He did not have this concept as a theory only, but he applied it in Africa. **He converted thousands in many countries of Africa. Then he chose deacons from those countries, afterwards he chose priests from the local. So, the churches were indeed national churches.**

3.     **The concept of national church (indigenous church) was so clear in his thinking that lead him to refrain from imposing any outside cultural influences.**  For example, he knew that **music and melody is a culture product, so he did not try to impose Coptic music or melody on the indigenous churches that he established**, **left them to use the drums in the churches, and let them also to use the melody that comes out of their inner feelings. Even, he let them clap in the church**, which is out of the ordinary in the Coptic Church in Egypt.  Watching the videotapes that were recorded during the Divine Liturgy in Coptic Churches in Africa, you easily notice the words of the congregation still the same; however, the melody is different from the traditional Coptic melody.  I think one day some people will attack him for what he did.  But, based on the bible, history, and theology of missions, he did the right thing.

4.     At the end of his conversation, you noticed he said: “ And the same can be observed in all the nations where the Coptic Church is to be established.” 1

It is clear that **he thinks the same rules could be applied worldwide, and not only in Africa.**

***My Personal Opinion:***

Since we are serious about evangelism in America, I think we have to ask ourselves the same questions Bishop Antonius Markos asked about the new indigenous churches.  Here I offer my personal opinion.  **I think an Egyptian church with its Egyptian culture would help a few converts only, and we would continue to have only a few converts until we start establishing indigenous churches that should have a strong faith and spirituality incarnated with the culture and psychology of the American people**.  Of course, **the Coptic Churches that serve the immigrants from Egypt would retain the same Egyptian culture and that should not be changed.  Some of the new generations who absorb the Egyptian culture from their childhood, they will continue preferring the same Egyptian cultures elements.**  However, the new converts should encompass a true indigenous church.

As regard to allowing clapping hands in the church or other habits that are not exist now in the mother church in Egypt, I would like to say, **the norms of our culture write what we accept and not accept as human being, therefore, it is dangerous to judge people from different national background based on our Coptic (Egyptian) norms of behaviors or to try to impose on them the norms of the Egyptian behaviors as if they were the standard for their norms; Nor should we condemn any other behavior that is not a part of the norm in the Coptic behaviors**.  Back to clapping hands, if clapping hands is their way of expressing their joy, let them express their joy in the Lord by clapping hands and don’t condemn this behavior based on the fact that the Egyptians don’t use it.  **In different cultures we face different norms that are essential** in dealings not only in the social life but in the spiritual life too.  **We need to incorporate them, as long as they are Biblical, traditional, and agree with the teachings of the Church Fathers and the canons of the church**.  In some cultures there are some important aspects for their people, like touching or holding hands in prayers or clapping hands or having the whole family sits together in the church.  Are we going to say no to these norms just because they are not part of the current Coptic norms or we are going to study them before we say no.  In truth, **evangelism should concentrate on giving the indigenous the power of the word of God and the sacraments and let the Spirit of God lead and reveal.**

To show the impact of the norms, we, as Egyptians, when we read the words of David in Psalm 15o, in which he clearly invites all the faithful to praise the Lord using many musical instruments. Even with this great-inspired invitation, we still restrain from using these instruments while we sing the same psalm that asks us to do so.  Our reasons for not using musical instruments in the church are as follows: the Coptic melody can’t be played well on these instruments because of the existence of tones with less than one complete tone. The second reason is: we prefer God to listen to our voices than listening to instruments or sometimes we say that God prefers to listen to our voices than listening to the instruments.  In all these answers you see clearly the impact of the current norms of the Coptic characters on the rites despite the Biblical inspired invitation of David the prophet that openly invites the faithful to do so.

To take you another step in the analysis, I will tell you that the Coptic Church was using the flute until the days of St. Clement of Alexandria, which means we used to use other musical instruments in our church. But what happened after that was changing the norms of Coptic behaviors.  You will be surprised to know that even inside the same country or a church, you may find different norms. For example, the norms for the life of a hermit or a monk in Egypt are different from the norms of a person who lives in a big city like Cairo. Norms in some cities, like in Upper Egypt, are different from the norms of others, like in Cairo.  Therefore, what is acceptable as normal in Cairo may not be acceptable in Upper Egypt.

Another example to explain the norms, when Sunday school movement started in Egypt, the leaders, such as Habib Girgis and Nazir Gayyid (currently H.H. Pope Shenouda III) wrote many songs and some use spontaneous prayers meetings extensively. People at that time expressed themselves well in the songs and in the spontaneous prayers, which helped raising the level of spiritual lives for all members.  Today, some people fight songs and spontaneous prayers meetings, considering them as Protestant’s activities.  As a result, people lost a significant method of expressing the inner feelings, especially the beginners.  What were the norms fifty years ago are not the same today, at least in the eyes of some people.

To continue in our discussion, let me say the analysis of our current life and our past history could help us understand ourselves better, and when we do that we will understand others.**Here where we need to open the door for a dialogue about what is cultural and what is biblical and/or traditional.**  **Unfortunately, we can’t get into this dialogue until we understand ourselves, our current liturgical life, the liturgical lives of other apostolic churches, the liturgical lives over the centuries, the Biblical depth of the liturgical life, and the patristic understanding of the liturgical life.**  **Then, we can easily differentiate between what is cultural and what is Biblical or traditional. Until then, we will not be able to be effective in evangelism.**  In fact, to be effective in evangelism is to let God work in the personality as it is in its own cultural and psychological reality and to let the person meet God internally using what expresses and touches him/her the most, and not what is borrowed from a different culture or setting, which is foreign, can’t express or touch him/her, and subsequently can hinder his/her relationship with God.

**Therefore, it is not an easy job to judge the norms of others.   As a matter of fact, the most dangerous act here is condemning others’ behaviors when they do not match the norms of our Coptic behaviors**.  It is so easy to label others’ norms as Protestant’s behavior or as a heresy, but the fair way is to study these behaviors in a holistic manner that doesn’t stop at current liturgical life but extends to the past and includes understanding of human behavior and sociology.

 Finally, we need to remember that **one of the reasons behind the outstanding success of the church of the apostles; it never imposed any cultural elements on any new church.**  Their main objective was to transfer the full- blown faith and grace, and let people drawn from their own inner-person the fabric that the grace would weave together.  The Coptic Church gained the same success when evangelized Ethiopia in the fourth century.  Bishop Antonius Markos succeeded in evangelism in Africa, because he clearly see what is Egyptian cultural and what is Biblical/traditional.  In United States, we failed in evangelism until now because we can’t see these facts clearly.  The Roman Catholic Church finally learned this lesson after centuries of struggle between conflicted thoughts. In Vatican II Counsel, the local churches were allowed to use the local languages, melodies, and other aspects of the culture. The results were astonishing, the start of fast spreading of Catholicism worldwide.  For example, in Egypt, the Roman Catholic Church borrowed our Coptic deacons and cantors to teach their priests and deacons all the Coptic melodies and started borrowing some of our prayers. Today, if you visit the Catholic Churches in Egypt, you may think that you are in a Coptic Orthodox Church.  So, the Roman Catholic Church in Egypt is no longer Latin or Roman or foreign but adopted and conformed to the norms of the Egyptian culture.

    ======================== End of personal opinion ===========================================

5.     **Using the language of the indigenous people is highly important in his agenda**. First thing he did when he arrived to any new tribe or country, he started learning the new language to use it in prayers, sermons, and in dealing with people.  A great lesson that we need to understand. **We also need to differentiate between regular learning of a language and imposing a foreign language in worship.**  Learning takes place in classrooms, but in worship we should use the language we use everyday in the society.   Worship means the whole person pray and praise God using a language he not only understands but also can use it easily to express his deep feelings and thoughts.  Some Copts have this problem, when they think of using the Coptic language in worship as a way of learning the language.

6.     However, **he left some parts of the original Coptic melody alive.**For example**,**in some places in Africa, he left the Holy Week prayers using the Coptic melody.  **This tradition lived in the church for a long time.** When you visit a Greek Church in the United States, you would hear a few Greek melody and hymns in the middle of all American melodies.  Personally, I would rather to leave some Coptic melody in every service

7.     In the beginning of his missionary wok, **he adapted the wonderful example of St. Paul when he used to make tents to pay for his missionary work expenses**.  He uses his profession as a physician in making living.  Later on, he gave up using the medicine as a way of making living, however, when he visits any tribes, he examines the sick and gives them medical attention.

8.     **He uses wonderful introductions to attract the Africans to the Coptic Orthodox Church**. He always **tells them that the Coptic Church is the mother of all African churches, since it was the first to be established in the content.**  Then for those countries that are closer to the River Nile, **he tells them that we drink from the same water of the River Nile.** Finding a good introduction is very crucial to the success of any missionary work. St. Paul, for example, uses the ‘Unknown God’ in his introduction in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), while our Lord Jesus Christ, always used parables and stories that represent everyday experience of the Jewish people at that time.

9.     When the indigenous churches grew, he was ready to ordain deacons then priests from the local churches themselves.  Others in similar situations could fear loss of control over the indigenous churches or fear separation of these churches from the mother church.  His apostolic manner was revealed in his actions.

**10.**Soon after establishing indigenous churches he realized how poor the people are.  So, he **started many social and educational projects to help them raise their economical levels.**For example, he established **vocational trainings** in Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.  In addition, he built many medical clinics in many countries.

11.   He made many trips to USA and Australia to spread the awareness of evangelism among Copts and to ask for their support for evangelism in Africa.  Then he opened the door for the Coptic youth from USA to go to Africa to spend time in evangelism, which is a great idea.  I like to refer you to go to our ‘Evangelism Links’ in our ‘Evangelism Web Page (www.suscopticdiocese.org/evangelism)’ to read what those youth said about their experiences in Africa.

12. He established a **seminary in South Africa**. In addition, he built monastery in Zimbabwe, and **convention center** in Johannesburg.  This reflects a vision of building a church that covers all the needs of its members, spiritually and educationally.

13. He **helped the other Orthodox churches in Africa** to make them strong.  He helped some in starting a church and others in getting tax exempt. His vision is having a strong Orthodox existence in the content of Africa is important.

**Conclusion:**

For Bishop Antonius Markos, November 1, 2001 marks spending of twenty- five years in his evangelism in Africa.  He started alone and stayed alone for years.  He suffered a lot in the beginning of his service in Kenya. For many years he saw no fruits but he was patient. A good lesson in evangelism is patience. He offered himself as a good example of a Christian and an evangelist that attracted others.  The one- man service resulted in great harvest.  Now the Coptic Orthodox Church exists in nine African countries.  H.G. Bishop Paul helps in the service in Kenya, Tanzania, and Congo. In addition, there are many indigenous priests, and deacons. There are also Coptic priests and monks who serves in Africa, like Fr. John Ramsey in the Ivory Coast and Ghana, and Fr. Mina Salib in Namibia.  We need to support these churches with our prayers.  Some of these churches are very poor and they need our financial support.  As one of our youth mentioned about one place where people can’t find even grass to eat.

We need to encourage our youth to go to Africa to evangelize there.  Copts in USA also need to find ways to send medicine, volunteer doctors and nurses and to become more active in filling the needs of these churches. To know more about the Coptic mission in Africa and how can you help, please visit our ‘Evangelism Link: <http://suscopticdiocese.org/evangelism/mlinks.html> and then click on ‘Coptic Orthodox Mission in Africa’ or visit: <http://www.geocities.com/copticafrica/>

In regards to H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos, we pray to our beloved God to support his service.  His two books “Story of Our Coptic Orthodox Church in Africa In our present time” and “An Introduction to the Theology of Missions,” are very valuable books.  Although, Bishop Antonius Markos is one of the greatest evangelists and thinkers, however, so far he did not write about his thoughts and principles of evangelism.  Such writings would be great contribution to the evangelistic thought and theology.  We pray that God gives him the strength to write down his evangelistic thoughts.

**References:**1- H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos, Come Across And Help Us, The Story of Our Coptic Orthodox Church in Africa In our present time, book one, by, Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs, Cairo 1988, page 182

2- H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos ,Come Across And Help Us, The Story of Our Coptic Orthodox Church in Africa In our present time, book two, Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs, Cairo 1996.

3- H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos, An Introduction Into Theology of Mission, 1997, Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs, Cairo 1997

4- Two Videotapes about the Coptic Church in Africa produced by the Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs.

5- <http://www.geocities.com/copticafrica/>