

The Forbidden Pilgrimage:

Pope Shenouda III's Ban on Coptic Travel to Israel,
and its Religious, Political, and Cultural
Interpretations and Implications for the Coptic
Orthodox Church

Author: Alexander Wamboldt

Edited/Supervised by: Cornelis Hulsman

Introduction:

The 1967 Six Day War with Israel changed the face of Coptic pilgrimage to Jerusalem. With the loss of East Jerusalem from Jordanian control, pilgrimage to the Holy City rapidly came to a halt as pilgrims now would have been visiting a country with which their nation was at war, hardly offering the Israeli administration good incentive to provide a visa¹. For the next eleven years, the state of war continued to prevent Coptic pilgrimage as a matter of national law and wartime politics, condoned by Pope Shenouda III. However, starting with the 1978 Peace Accords of Camp David, the clarity of why the pilgrimage could not be undertaken vanished².

The agreements made at Camp David paved the way for the 1979 Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt, brokered by President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel and witnessed by President Jimmy Carter of the United States of America on March 26, 1979³. While the treaty itself did not contain any explicit mention or specific clause relating to Christian pilgrimage in Jerusalem or the Coptic Orthodox population, Christian participation in the treaty appears to have been an underlying tacit part of the agreement. Israeli tourism to Egypt had boomed following the treaty, with little to no reciprocal effect on the part of Egyptians⁴. The treaty was unpopular in Egypt making the Egyptian visits that would normalize Egypto-Israeli relations as outlined in the treaty unlikely from the majority Muslim population⁵. Thus, the Coptic Orthodox pilgrimage could have provided the necessary solution: an Egyptian group with pre-existing impetus to visit Jerusalem (and therefore Israel) that could be utilized to normalize relations without requiring a massive change in popular opinion from the Muslim community in Egypt⁶. However, Pope Shenouda III did not sign on to this plan to restore the pilgrimage; in 1979, as the Treaty of Peace between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Israel was going into effect, Pope Shenouda III decreed a papal ban on Coptic Orthodox visits to Israel⁷. While the ban certainly came at a critical political juncture in the modern history of Egypt, the ban's exact origins, implications, and underlying authority are hardly clear within the Coptic Orthodox Church itself⁸.

¹ Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality. Hassan, S.S. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. 109.

² *Ibid.*

³ The Treaty of Peace between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Israel, 26 March 1979. The Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Government of the State of Israel. 1979. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.mfa.gov.eg/MFA_Portal/en-GB/Foreign_Policy/Treaties/Treaty+of+Peace+between+the+Arab+Republic+of+Egypt+and+the+State+of+Israel+26+March+1979.htm>

⁴ Hassan, 108.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Egypt: International Religious Freedom Report 2007, The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2007. 3 Aug. 2009. <<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90209.htm>>.

⁸ Although the ban in theory prevents all Coptic Orthodox travel to any place in the state of Israel, including Bethlehem, Nazareth, et cetera, it is often simply referred to as the "Jerusalem pilgrimage ban,"

Now in 2009, thirty years after the original post-war decree came into being, the ban continues to exist in the forefront of Egyptian national discourse, as well as within the Coptic Orthodox community's own private discourse. As shall be seen, Pope Shenouda III himself has been both highly praised as well as sharply criticized for this decision. Nevertheless, to this day, the ban remains an elusive policy within the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The reason(s) for its existence remain(s) subject to multiple interpretations and it seems improbable that the exact intention(s) of Pope Shenouda III in 1979 will ever be perfectly clarified. However, what remains to be examined is the dynamic discourse of the policy itself. How has the debate around the Jerusalem pilgrimage and its ban formed and changed within the last thirty years? With what tropes and themes is the ban discussed (e.g. as a religious, political, economic, social issue, et cetera) and are other debates framed within the context of the ban (e.g. Pope Shenouda III's legitimacy, papal authority, creation and maintenance of sacred space, the orthodoxy of the Coptic Orthodox tradition in comparison with other Judeo-Christian traditions, nature and jurisdiction of the Coptic Orthodox Church within the lives of its believers both in Egypt and abroad, et cetera)? What are the effects of the ban on the Coptic Orthodox Church itself? In summation, what is the contemporary discourse about the Israeli travel ban in the Coptic Orthodox Church and how does it relate to other ongoing debates and discourses with the Church?

It is with such framing questions in mind that the following research has been undertaken, drawing on Egyptian journalistic articles and interviews with Pope Shenouda III published in Egyptian papers within the last twelve years as primary source documents, as well as personal interviews conducted by the researcher throughout Egypt as well as in the Coptic community abroad during the summer of 2009 with informants ranging from laypeople to bishops with a variety of professional training and experiences⁹. These materials are contextualized using scholarly research previously undertaken on the Coptic Orthodox Church and Egyptian history. Because of the nature of these sources, this work does not seek to answer the question of why the ban was put into effect in 1979, but rather reflections upon the original decision through a series of historiographic accounts told by informants. Again to stress the point, the purpose of this paper is not a historically accurate account of the origin of the policy but rather a depiction of the ways in which the ban is used and what it represents in Coptic Orthodox discourse today. Any conclusions drawn from this work should therefore be understood as ethnographic reflections upon the state of contemporary Coptic Orthodox discourse as of 2009, and not necessarily indicative of this discourse in 1979.

What follows has been organized into several sections for clarity. First, a short background is provided on the history of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Coptic Orthodox pilgrimage, and a brief biography of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. This is followed by a summary of the frameworks in which the ban is currently discussed, each of which

the largest site of Christian pilgrimage in Israel. As such, this article will use the term interchangeably, with the understanding that the colloquial name of the "Jerusalem ban" in effect refers to the entirety of the modern state of Israel.

⁹ The author would like to specifically thank Efthymia Georgiou, without whose assistance a complete compilation of articles on this topic in such depth as well as scope simply would not have been possible.

is then treated in depth, based off of the primary source texts and ethnographic interviews taken. The broad conclusions drawn from this evidence then makes up the final part of this article.

Part I: Background and History

The Coptic Orthodox Church: A Brief History and Background¹⁰

The Coptic Orthodox tradition traces itself back as the earliest incarnation of the Christian Church, placing its foundation in the legendary visit of the Holy Family to Egypt when Christ was still a child prior to his ministry in Palestine¹¹. This event, however, crucially lacks incontrovertible Biblical basis; the only visits of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Saint Joseph discussed in the Bible take place in commands or dreams, but not descriptions of the physical visit¹². The formal introduction of the Gospels into Egypt is said to be from the Apostle Mark the Evangelist, who founded the See of Alexandria, where church tradition states he was martyred in the year 68 CE¹³. The intense Roman persecutions of early Christians in Egypt characterized its next three centuries, giving Egyptian Christianity a distinctly strong connection to the idea of martyrdom¹⁴. Indeed, the Coptic Orthodox Church still maintains a distinct calendar, which separates its eras at the first year of the Emperor Dioclesian's reign during which massive persecutions against the Christian population of the Roman Empire took place; thus, the year 284 AD becomes as the Year 1 *Anno Diocletiani* (Diocletian Year) or *Anno Martyrum* (Year of the Martyrs)¹⁵. After the legalization of Christianity (313 AD – The Edict of Milan) under the Emperor Constantine, Egyptian Christianity would reveal other aspects of its distinctive heritage.

Foremost among the gifts of Egyptian Christianity to Christendom is the advent of monasticism. With the end of the vicious persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian, many Christian spiritualists were at a loss of how to fully serve their faith without being able to literally die for it. The question became, “How do you ‘take up the Cross’ when one is not readily presented?”¹⁶. In such an environment, the rigid asceticism of the early Egyptian monks provided a format by which the gap between the martyrs and legalized Christians could be bridged; one could no longer die for Christ, but one could certainly sacrifice the socially accepted version of normal life in his service¹⁷. Out of these Desert Fathers, as these early monks are collectively known, the twin traditions of anchorite monasticism (or hermitic monks) and coenobitic monasticism (or communal, rigidly-

¹⁰ The word “Copt” is derived from the Greek *aiguptos*, the same root for the modern English “Egypt.” The terms “Coptic” and “Egyptian” are therefore roughly synonymous, although “Coptic” is predominantly used to refer to an Egyptian Christian (or of Egyptian descent) of any denomination. This work is concerned only with the *Coptic Orthodox Church*, a distinct sect of Christianity.

¹¹ Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages. Meinardus, Otto F.A. Cairo, New York: The American University of Cairo Press, 2002. 13-14.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* 28.

¹⁴ *Desert Root and Global Branches*, McCallum, Fiona. *Bulletin of the Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies* 7 (2), Fall/Winter 2005, 69-97. 70-71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Christianity in Late Antiquity*. Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. Providence, RI: Lectures at Brown University. Spring 2007.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

organized monasteries) developed¹⁸. Monasticism would soon spread across Christendom, and its success is still highly valued by Coptic Orthodox Christians as one of “their” best contributions to Christianity.

While Egyptian monks were advocating for a complete withdrawal from civilization in the desert, in Alexandria, the Christian community could not have been more involved with the politics and religious debates of the Christian empire¹⁹. Alexandrian theologians had long made a name for themselves at the forefront of Christian scholarship, and the city itself was ranked with the Primacy of Honor system of Holy Cities at the First Council of Nicea giving it a patriarch alongside Rome and Antioch (in 381 CE, Constantinople and Jerusalem were added)²⁰. It is from this same Patriarchate (or See) of Alexandria that the Coptic Orthodox popes still claim their authority²¹. However, during the debate over the nature (*physis*) of Christ in the mid-5th Century, the Alexandrian scholars would be dealt a major blow at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE²². Their position of Miaphysism (or one, unified nature of Christ, both divine and human) was struck down by the Dyaphysite (or two, distinct natures of Christ, one divine, one human) case as articulated by the Tome of Pope Leo I²³. Unwilling to abandon their beliefs, Egypt became a divided Christian territory, as the Hellenized, Greek-speaking, Chalcedonian (adhering to the verdict of the Council of Chalcedon) elite continued to rule the metropolitan Alexandria, Coptic-speaking (a variant of Demotic, the late Pharaonic language) Christians continued to hold to their Miaphysite beliefs²⁴. Thus, the Egyptian Christian community entered into another period of persecutions as the Chalcedonian rulers of the Empire tried to force doctrinal submission upon non-elite Egyptians with possible penalty of death²⁵. Ironically, the doctrinally-separate Coptic Orthodox Church was saved by the coming of Islam in the 7th Century CE, which, free from Byzantine influence, allowed a restoration of the Coptic Orthodox See of Alexandria²⁶. The Coptic Orthodox community thus collectively entered into the Islamic polity as *dhimmi*s, or protected people, who paid *jizya* (poll tax) in exchange for self-autonomy within the group and freedom to worship their religion²⁷.

...they [Coptic Orthodox Christians] were dealt with collectively and were effectively categorized as an ethnic group on the basis of their religious identity. As head of the community, the patriarch was responsible for the actions of the whole group.²⁸

¹⁸ Meinardus (2002), 35.

¹⁹ Harvey.

²⁰ Indeed, in the Arian heresy debate, of the most famous controversies of beliefs of the 4th Century, all the major participants came from Alexandria. Saints Alexander and Athanasius defended what would become the accepted *homoousios* Christology (of *the same* essence) of Christian Orthodoxy against the Presbyter Arius whose *homoiousios* Christology (of *like* essence) was denounced as a heresy at the two Councils of Nicea, in 325 AD and 381 AD respectively (*Ibid.*).

²¹ *The Political Role of the Patriarch in the Contemporary Middle East*, McCallum, Fiona. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 6, November 2007, 923-940. 926.

²² McCallum (2005), 71.

²³ Meinardus (2002), 53.

²⁴ McCallum (2005), 72.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

This systematized treatment of the Coptic Orthodox as a quasi-ethnic group under the head of the patriarch was further enforced by the introduction of the Ottoman *millet* system, which institutionalized the role of the patriarch as the administrative political representation of the believers of his church²⁹. It is thereby important to remember that historically the functions of the Coptic Orthodox pope are not the same as the modern Catholic pope of the Vatican; not only has the Coptic Orthodox papacy blurred the lines between a religious and political leader as the Vatican papacy has historically, but it actually did not differentiate between its temporal and religious authorities in terms of governmental administration. The Coptic Orthodox Church however was not entirely distinct from its surrounding cultural milieu; by the early Middle Ages, Arabic had been adopted as the chief language of communication and theology, leaving Coptic for ritual use only, and nearly abandoning Greek altogether³⁰.

The modern Coptic Orthodox Church continues in its separation from other Christian denominations, although under Pope Shenouda III it reconciled its Christological differences with the Catholic Church of Rome³¹. As such, the Coptic Orthodox Church has had the full right and ability to expand and evangelize internationally (though it should be mentioned that Christian evangelization is illegal within Egypt itself), something it has been exploring more in the last half century³². The first international Coptic dioceses were made in the 1990s, and today there are estimated to be anywhere between three to four hundred thousand to as many as an estimated one million Coptic Orthodox Christians living outside of Egypt³³. The Coptic Orthodox Church is thereby undergoing a change from a national institution with geographic boundaries to becoming a universal church.

...the Coptic Orthodox Church has entered the twenty-first century not only as a strong and unified Egyptian national Church, but also as a universal Church offering a tradition, liturgy and practical benefits to attract new adherents whenever Coptic evangelism takes place.³⁴

This is a strong and radical change within the Coptic Orthodox Church however, as religious doctrines begin to become separated from their original cultural and social milieu.

The History of Coptic Pilgrimage

Egyptians have literally visited Jerusalem since the days of the Bible³⁵. The Gospel of Luke mentions a foreign presence, which includes Egyptians, at the *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues) of the Pentecost; indeed, it is the presence of these foreigners that gives significance to the miracle³⁶. As Christianity spread, pilgrimage to foundational sites became a fixture of the religion, particularly to Jerusalem following the Empress Helena's invention of the True Cross in 328 and subsequent establishment of the Church

29 McCallum (2007), 928.

30 Meinardus (2002), 56.

31 *Ibid.*, 125.

32 McCallum, personal correspondence.

33 *Ibid.*

34 McCallum (2005), 93.

35 Meinardus (2002), 2.

36 Acts 2:10

of the Holy Sepulchre³⁷. Egyptian Christians certainly joined in this movement, as witnessed by the accounts of prominent pilgrims like Saint Mary of Egypt³⁸. Indeed, her miraculous conversion merited the establishment of her eponymous chapel within the Holy Sepulchre³⁹. Egyptian pilgrims were no strangers to Jerusalem, and, by the 9th Century, the now-independent Copts had their own church in the holy city, dedicated to Mary Magdalene⁴⁰. The growth of the Coptic Orthodox presence in Palestine continued throughout the Middle Ages.

By the middle of the thirteenth century, a Coptic archbishopric of Jerusalem was well established to serve Coptic pilgrims to the Holy Land, among them Pope Gabriel III (1268-71). Beginning in the fourteen century, European pilgrims mentioned the Copts as one of the communities in the Church of the Resurrection. Coptic pilgrimages to the Holy Land continued throughout the Mamluk and Ottoman administrations. With the help of Archbishop Theophilus of Jerusalem (1935-45), a Coptic Orthodox Society for the Promotion of Pilgrimages to Jerusalem was established. Facilities for Egyptian pilgrims in and around Jerusalem were constructed to accommodate the increasing number of Coptic visitors.⁴¹

With the development of a pilgrimage infrastructure, Egyptian Coptic Orthodox pilgrims also began the creation of specific ritualized practices as well. While Coptic pilgrims could be expected to visit many of the major Christian sites (e.g. the Holy Sepulchre, Mount of Olives, et cetera), they also developed exclusive traditions, sites, relics, and miracles as well. These include the invention of a relic of the Chains of Saint George by the Archbishop Abra'am (1820-54), which, similar to other relics of the saint's chains across the Middle East (including another Coptic copy in Cairo still extant today), were used to bind the mentally disturbed or possessed, who were said to be miraculously released after the relic has cured them⁴². In 1956, the visiting Metropolitan Banyamin of Egypt experienced a vision of the Holy Virgin Mary while officiating in the Divine Liturgy at the Coptic Chapel within the Holy Sepulchre⁴³. The experience of the pilgrimage was even recorded upon the pilgrim's body with a specialized tattoo that served both as a commemorative souvenir as well as an apotropaic symbol⁴⁴. Most

³⁷ Meinardus (2002), 2.

³⁸ One of the more fascinating early pilgrims as well, Saint Mary of Egypt was born in Alexandria, where she was abandoned by her parents at an early age. Turning a life of prostitution, she became a lascivious courtesan. Saint Mary impulsively decided to join in a large-scale pilgrimage to the site of the True Cross (the Holy Sepulchre) as a form of irreligious personal pilgrimage as she looked to "expand her business" among her fellow pilgrims. However, at the entrance to the Holy Sepulchre, she was denied access to see the True Cross (her desire to see the relic is great, despite her lack of faith) by an icon of the *Theotokos*, the Virgin Mary. After being mystically prevented from entering the building multiple times, Mary beseeches the Virgin to allow her to see the Cross in exchange for her devotion to Jesus Christ and commitment to a life of asceticism. At this, she is allowed entrance and witnesses the glory of the Cross, after which she forsakes her old life to live in the desert as an ascetic and clairvoyant. ([Vita of Saint Mary of Egypt](#). Sophronios of Jerusalem. 3 Aug. 2009.

<<http://www.monachos.net/content/patristics/patristictexts/182-life-of-mary>>

³⁹ [Jerusalem – Map of the Holy Sepulchre](#). PlanetWare Inc., 1995-2009. 3 Aug. 2009.

<<http://www.planetware.com/map/jerusalem-church-of-the-holy-sepulchre-map-isr-holysep.htm>>

⁴⁰ Meinardus (2002), 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 2-3.

⁴² Meinardus (2002), 87-88.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 96.

⁴⁴ [Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity](#). Meinardus, Otto F.A. Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1999. 265.

notable for the modern pilgrimage ban was the acquisition of the monastery *Dayr al-Sultan* following the reconquest of Jerusalem by Salah al-Din (Saladin) in 1187⁴⁵. During the Jordanian occupation of Jerusalem in the late 1950s and 1960s, diplomatic ties between Egypt and Jordan worsened, resulting in the monastery briefly changing hands to the Ethiopian Church in 1961 before reverting to Coptic control⁴⁶. Following the 1967 War, Israel gained control of the entire city and pledged to respect pre-existing religious control of sites⁴⁷. However, unlike the Egyptian government, the Ethiopian government had maintained friendly relations with Israel, resulting in growing pressure to yet again change control of the monastery⁴⁸. On Easter eve of 1970, Israeli police forces occupied Dayr al-Sultan, changed the locks and handed it over to Ethiopian control⁴⁹. Despite two Israeli supreme court decisions (1971 and 1977) granting control to the Coptic Orthodox Church, the monastery remains in Ethiopian hands to this day⁵⁰. The Coptic claim upon this property in Jerusalem as part of their heritage is a reoccurring theme within the pilgrimage debate.

However, as Coptic pilgrims participated in the greater Christian consecration of Jerusalem as well as their own distinct sanctification of the city, a simultaneous process was underway locally, joining the divine to the geography of Egypt itself.

Unlike Palestine, Egypt is not unquestionably held to be of foundational significance to Christian events; the Bible does not specifically mention any portion of the New Testament to explicitly take place there⁵¹. The experience of Egypt drawn from the Gospels is rooted wholly within the realm of the visionary. "... the Coptic traditions about the flight of the holy family to Egypt are based exclusively on dreams and visions. In Joseph's second dream, the angel of the Lord orders him to take the young child and mother and flee into Egypt (Matt. 2:13)"⁵². Such texts began to be understood by the Egyptian Christian community as evidence of the journey of the holy family (Jesus Christ and the Saints the Virgin Mary and Joseph) to Egypt, providing the basis not only for its consecration, but consecration as an integral part of the Holy Land itself, connected to the same foundational figures that provide the sacred basis of Palestine⁵³. However, these mentions fail to concretely establish whether or not the actions described in these visions were ever realized, leaving the connection of Egypt to the holy family a hermeneutical process that cannot be gleaned from a literalist reading of the Bible.

Although the Holy Family's stay in Egypt is central to the Coptic religious imagination, neither the length of the Holy Family's stay in Egypt, nor the route they followed, is mentioned in

⁴⁵ The Coptic Encyclopedia. *Dayr al-Sultan*. Archbishop Basilios, Atiya, Aziz S. (ed.). New York: Macmillian Publishing Company (Volume 3), 1991. 872.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 873.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 874.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Be Thou There: The Holy Family's Journey in Egypt the Sacred Geography of the Coptic Church. Bertram, Carel. Al Jadid, 2003. 3 Aug, 2009. <<http://www.aljadid.com/reviews/Bertram%20-%20The%20Holy%20Famillys%20Journey.html>>

⁵² Meinardus (1999). 13.

⁵³ Bertram.

the Gospels.⁵⁴
Indeed, Eusebius in the 4th Century is the first to explicitly link this doctrine to the Gospel of Matthew⁵⁵.

The process of Egyptian consecration represents a rather unique geographical position in Christendom, whereby the Coptic Orthodox Church claims not only the experience of the localized miraculous, but also its necessary connection to the religion's foundational figures (despite the lack of acknowledgement by other Christian denominations to the reality of the holy family's visit).

Thus, Coptic Orthodox pilgrimage has been and continues to be torn between both the inexorable draw of the greater Christian holy land of Jerusalem and Palestine, explicitly mentioned in the Bible, as well as the local religious experience, fiercely held to be of equal source and value to its much more widely respected and acknowledged neighbor to the northeast by official church doctrine. These two forces within Coptic Orthodox pilgrimage still inform the discourse surrounding the modern debate around His Holiness Pope Shenouda III's ban on the Jerusalem pilgrimage.

Biography of Pope Shenouda III (born Nazir Gayyid):

In 1923, Nazir Gayyid was born in Asyut, a province in Upper Egypt along the banks of the Nile, where he was raised⁵⁶. He became an early participant in the Sunday School movement, a Coptic revivalist campaign started by the lawyer Habib Girgis, which focused teaching on Coptic heritage, the lives of saints, and Biblical stories⁵⁷. He joined the Sunday School center at the St. Antonius Church in Shubra in 1940, at the age of 17⁵⁸. The St. Antonius school was characterized by its intensive study of internal spiritual development, Bible study, and non-involvement in larger socio-political questions, in comparison to the Giza center, led by Sa'ad °Aziz, which combined religious, social, economic, and medical instruction with active individual involvement in the world⁵⁹. Gayyid later was to become the first editor-in-chief of the influential Sunday School magazine (*Magalat Madrasat al-Ahad*) from its founding in 1947⁶⁰. Gayyid obtained a degree from Cairo University in history, and served in the army during the 1948 war against Israel as an officer⁶¹. During this time, Gayyid continued his involvement with the Sunday School movement as a teacher at the Church of St.

54 *Ibid.*

55 Personal communication with Cornelis Hulsman.

56 H.H. Pope Shenouda III. "Biography." Father Mikhail E. Mikhail. CopticChurch.net, 1998-2005. 3 Aug. 2009. <<http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/pope/#Biography>>

57 McCallum (2005), 78.

58 *Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church: notes of the Ph.D. thesis of Revd. Dr. Wolfram Reiss*. Summarized translation of History of the Coptic Orthodox Sunday School movement and the acceptance of their reforms in the renewal movements of the present day Coptic Orthodox Church. Reiss, Wolfram; Hulsman, Cornelis (trans. & ed.). Arab West Report: 2002. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=9412&ayear=2002&aweek=46&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>.

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Ibid.*

61 McCallum (2007), 929.

Antonius in Shubra⁶². He started to study anew at the Coptic Orthodox Theological Seminary, from which he graduated in 1949, and was hired by the same institution to teach New Testament Studies⁶³.

Disenfranchised by the Coptic Orthodox ordained clergy, the Sunday School movement of laypeople became increasingly vocal against church policy, primarily coming from Nazir Gayyid as editor-in-chief of its magazine⁶⁴. Frequent among the criticisms was the right of laypeople to choose the clergy that represented them (which presumably would give authority to Sunday School members)⁶⁵.

In 1954, at the age of 31, Gayyid decided to take his monastic vows, joining the spiritual father (and Sunday School participant) Father Matta al-Miskin (born Yusuf Iskandar) under the name Father Antonius⁶⁶. As a monk, Father Antonius followed his namesake's (Saint Antony) example, becoming an ascetic and hermit in the Nitrian Desert in the monastery's vicinity, where he lived for six years⁶⁷. Even after his consecration as Bishop of Church Education under Pope Kyrillos VI, these years would be remembered longingly⁶⁸. "His Holiness always feels a yearning for his monastic life, inside the monastery alone with God in continuous prayer. He said of his first visit to the monastery, 'I wish I could stay there.'"⁶⁹. It is common for clergy in the Coptic Orthodox Church to refer to their monastic time as the fondest in their lives; the pope's comments to this effect thus may be simple politesse belying his ambition⁷⁰.

During Father Antonius' monastic stay, larger forces were at work in the Coptic community. On July 25, 1954 (a mere seven days after Father Antonius took his monastic vows) Pope Yusab II was kidnapped by members of the Umma al-Qibtiyya, a Coptic nationalist organization⁷¹. The first issue of the Sunday School magazine following the event (penned by the same editor-in-chief of course) did not denounce the kidnapping, but rather laid out the importance of appointing a successor from the monastic community and not from among the bishops⁷². This act is seen as a tacit

62 Hassan, 76-77.

63 Meinardus (1999), 4, 80.

64 Reiss & Hulsman.

65 *Ibid.*

66 Father Mikhail.

67 *Ibid.*

68 A novel ecclesiastical development under Pope Kyrillos VI, the "general bishoprics," as they are known, represent an issue of field, instead of a geographical area. They occupy an unclear status within the Church administratively (although geographic bishops cannot become pope, Pope Shenouda III as a general bishop could achieve this position). Bishop Shenouda of Church Education and Bishop Samuel (born Saad Aziz) of Public, Ecumenical, and Social Services were the first two general bishops consecrated [McCallum (2005), 79].

69 "Pope Shenouda: 31 Years on the Papal Chair." Salamah, Usamah; °Atif Hilmi. Rose al-Yusuf (editions of November 2-8) 2002. 50-53. Arab West Report, 2002. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=9376&ayear=2002&aweek=44&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

70 Hulsman, Cornelis. Personal conversation on July 28, 2009.

71 Reiss & Hulsman.

72 *Ibid.*

acknowledgement of the kidnapping as just⁷³. Father Antonius has been implicated in having affiliations to members of the Umma al-Qibtiyya as well, but such statements have never provided exact information as to the nature of the relations between them⁷⁴. Pope Yusab II was eventually left powerless as a pope, replaced by a quorum of bishops in 1955 until his death in 1956⁷⁵. The resulting papal elections brought up a fierce contest between the older generation of bishops and the Sunday School monks in a power struggle for the papacy that ended in 1959 with the old guard successfully curtailing the entrance of a Sunday School candidate by making it necessary for papal candidates to be over forty years of age with a minimum of fifteen years of monastic life⁷⁶. Father Matta al-Miskin (Yusuf Iskandar), Father Makary (Sa^cad ^cAziz), and Father Antonius had all been candidates⁷⁷. Father Antonius' rise to power may have been delayed, but it was hardly prevented.

One of Pope Kyrillos VI's first actions as patriarch was the recalling of all anchorite monks from the desert to rejoin coenobitic monasteries⁷⁸. While both Fathers Makary and Antonius agreed and joined Dayr al-Suriyan (the name of the Syrian Monastery is a misnomer; it is located in Wadi Natroun, Egypt, the name stemming from its history as a Syrian Orthodox monastery before becoming property of the Coptic Orthodox Church), while Father Matta al-Miskin refused and continued to live in Wadi Rayan, marking not only the official break between Fathers Antonius and Matta al-Miskin, but also the beginning of Father Antonius' rise in the church hierarchy⁷⁹.

In 1962, following his consecration as the first Bishop of Church Education, Bishop Shenouda rapidly re-adjusted to social, public life⁸⁰. He created the popular *dars al-jum^ca* (Friday lesson), a public meeting and forum for spiritual questions. "His willingness to answer questions from ordinary members of the community, often with humorous remarks, not only illustrated the difference from traditional clergy but also helped to ensure that he became well known within the community"⁸¹. They were certainly successful. In 1971, following the death of Pope Kyrillos VI, Bishop Shenouda was one of three candidates whose names were placed inside the altar box (despite Bishop Samuel (Sa^cad ^cAziz) having received more of the popular vote beforehand)⁸². Bishop Shenouda's name was selected, and on November 14, 1971 he became Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria and All Africa on the Apostolic Throne of Saint Mark⁸³.

Almost concurrent with the succession of Pope Shenouda III to the papacy was a shift in Egyptian national politics as well, as Anwar Sadat became president of the Arab

73 *Ibid.*

74 *Ibid.*

75 *Ibid.*

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*

78 *Ibid.*

79 *Ibid.*

80 McCallum (2007), 930.

81 *Ibid.*

82 *Ibid.*

83 Father Mikhail.

Republic of Egypt just a little over a year earlier⁸⁴. The two men would come to define each other's reigns over their respective institutions.

In 1972, instances of illegal church building (a highly regulated act in Egyptian bureaucratic law that as a result is often circumvented) led to violent sectarian clashes in al-Khanka⁸⁵. The new pope sent 100 priests and monks to pray over the site in a highly public act, then called a five-day fast in solidarity and mourning of those affected by the event⁸⁶. President Sadat negotiated an end to the Coptic demonstrations with the pope, offering permits for the construction of fifty new churches in exchange for the pope's cooperation in calming the tensions⁸⁷. Although this first test was resolved, the two men remained adversarial.

Pope Shenouda III became increasingly vocal about the perceived Islamicization of Egypt under Sadat, including the legalization of Islamic groups in 1974 and the permission for the *Ikhwat Muslimim* (Muslim Brotherhood) to publish their own magazine in 1976⁸⁸. In 1980, the government proposed amending the constitution to acknowledge *shari'c* law to be the main source of Egyptian jurisprudence, giving the state an official Islamic basis⁸⁹. In response, Pope Shenouda canceled the year's Easter celebrations, giving rise to international Coptic demonstrations in the following weeks⁹⁰. The angered Sadat extracted his revenge in 1981; following the Zawiya al-Hamra' (a lower class Cairene neighborhood) sectarian conflict, he arrested and detained 1536 people⁹¹. While the vast majority were Islamists, of the 150 Copts arrested, one was His Holiness Pope Shenouda III⁹². Twenty-seven years after Father Antonius had penned his famous article calling for the replacement of a deposed pope, the now Pope Shenouda III now found himself in the same position, facing an exile as a figurehead in Dayr Anba Bishoi in the Nitrian Desert while a quorum of five bishops ruled the ecclesiastical hierarchy in his stead⁹³. Even more insulting than the irony was the relative popularity of his exile. Father Matta al-Miskin, once the pope's spiritual advisor, told *Time* magazine,

Shenouda III's appointment was the beginning of the trouble. The mind replaced inspiration, and planning replaced prayer. For the first years I prayed for him, but I see the church is going from bad to worse because of his behavior... I can't say I'm happy, but I am at peace now. Every morning I was expecting news of more bloody collisions. Sadat's actions protect the church and the Copts. They are from God.⁹⁴

84 On October 15, 1970.

85 Reiss & Hulsman.

86 McCallum (2007), 930.

87 Reiss & Hulsman.

88 *Ibid.*

89 McCallum (2007), 930.

90 *Ibid.*

91 Reiss & Hulsman.

92 Meinardus (1999), 85.

93 Reiss.

94 Father Matta al-Miskin, as quoted in "Egypt's Copts in Crisis." Medina, Sara; Wurmstedt, Robert C.; Harrison, Nathaniel. *Time* (September 28), 1981. 3 Aug. 2009.

<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,953135,00.html>>

Also in "Reviving an Ancient Faith; two strong-willed reformers bring Coptic Orthodoxy back to life." Hulsman, Cornelis. *Christianity Today* (December 3), 2001. 16 Aug. 2009.

<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/december3/2.38.html>>

It was fate itself that appears to have delivered Pope Shenouda III from this exile, as Anwar Sadat was assassinated October 6, 1981⁹⁵. Expatriate Copts remained predominantly loyal to the exiled patriarch, and over the course of several years, the council of bishops in Egypt lost their advantage⁹⁶. Sadat's successor, President Hosni Mubarak, released the pope for the Christmas of 1985, ending the exile⁹⁷.

The patriarch began a consolidation of papal power upon his return, dispatching bishops in the Holy Synod that had supported his exile, beginning a slow process of reducing the size of diocese to thus diminish their corresponding bishop's power, and limiting the publication of Father Matta al-Miskin's works⁹⁸. In the early 1970s when Pope Shenouda III became the patriarch, there were twenty-three Coptic dioceses. As of July of 1995, there were eighty-three⁹⁹. These developments and policies continue to this day.

95 Reiss & Hulsman.

96 *Ibid.*

97 McCallum (2007), 931.

98 Reiss & Hulsman.

99 *Ibid.*

Part II:

Multiple Discourses and Constructions of the Ban

As must be expected, different occasions and different speakers give rise to different reasons and notions of any one policy or decision. The expedient in one circumstance is often detrimental in another. The ban on Israeli travel is hardly an exception to this rule. However, statements such as those above often imply a certain elite-bias in power dynamics, which this article shall explicitly seek to avoid. Not only do policy makers and authorities reserve this right of multiple portrayals and convenient constructions and reconstructions of history, but individuals hold the prerogative to contextualize and rationalize as well. Thus, the discourse of the Israeli pilgrimage ban cannot and should not be treated as solely an elite discourse of Church officials imposing upon the plebian populous, but rather a dynamic series of negotiations between clergy and laypeople as well as between all variations of professional and socio-economic class. As shall be seen, the varied interpretations and utilizations of this ban are often oppositional platforms and conflicts reflecting these multiparty power negotiations. As such, the following presents a brief overview of themes discussed in and through the pilgrimage ban from varying parties, although there is obvious and considerable overlap between each and every one of these categories. They are, after all, part of the same discussion. The issues addressed shall cover discourses of the appropriate sphere of the religious, the authority and responsibility of the patriarch, the creation and maintenance of sacred space as (the) Holy Land, and finally ecumenical and inter-Judeo-Christian discourses of doctrinal superiority.

Politics (and Religion) as Usual?

Chief among the criticisms launched against the ban is its overt *politicalization* of the Coptic Orthodox Church. These voices argue that Pope Shenouda III and, by proxy, the Coptic Orthodox Church, are overstepping their authority as a religious institution. However, behind this accusation lies a larger question: what is *religious* and what is *political*? Although the two are easily used terms by all manner of commentators, there is a distinct lack of agreement as to what precisely constitutes each. Indeed, the ban provides an opportunity for a negotiation of the “correct” or “appropriate” scope of the authority of the Church, as well as the discursive potential for the creation of a secular space in the community. While members of the ordained clergy uniformly envision a more encompassing authority for the Church, they are joined by a chorus of lay voices as well. The critics behind the accusations of over-political involvement and the advocates of a limited religious sphere are uniformly from lay officials; the author has not found a single example of ordained clergy advocating such opinions¹⁰⁰.

For broad interpreters, papal and ecclesiastical involvement in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is natural extension of the church’s other roles. Although the journey to the Holy City is sacred, it provides one religious concern among many, including the health and wellbeing of the Coptic Orthodox community as a whole, as well as the Coptic

¹⁰⁰ For ease of writing, these two sides shall henceforth be referred to as *broad interpreters* and *narrow interpreters* respectively.

Orthodox Church as an institution. Bishop Apollo of the Diocese of South Sinai gives a concise list of one version of these varied concerns.

Of course, in it [the issue of the banned pilgrimage to Israel] there are political things, social things, and religious things. Politically, the disagreement between Egypt and Israel, or Arabs and Israel. Socially, we live with Muslims, and religiously, Dayr al-Sultan. If we go, our rights are lost. People will be surrounded by a lot of problems. So, in order to keep peace in the church, in the country and its politics, His Holiness the Pope effectively saw that we had already banned the Jerusalem pilgrimage [in the past] and it is better to enter Jerusalem only with our Muslim brothers. And to achieve this happy circumstance, the Pope has *calculated [the worth of] keeping the church on pleasant terms with Egyptians and Arabs [to be] of vital concern.* [emphasis mine]¹⁰¹

Bishop Apollo here has clearly enumerated the multifaceted needs of the church and the Coptic Orthodox community as political, social, and religious concerns. However, the use of *political* and *social* reasons in no way excludes the right (and indeed, the necessity) of church involvement in these arenas. Rather, Bishop Apollo portrays the Pope as a rational leader, literally calculating the relative merits of these various issues to the church, before deciding that “keeping the church on pleasant terms with Egyptians and Arabs” is “of vital concern”¹⁰². Under this broad interpretation of the religious, the church’s interests extend to that of the community’s and the institution’s wellbeing, not just the individual blessing and salvation of its participants. As such, goals like the restoration of the church’s property of Dayr al-Sultan as well as civil and friendly social relations with the Muslim community of Egypt (as shall be seen later, even the consecration of Egypt as a holy land) are not only appropriate religious aims, but can actually outweigh the personal soteriological merits of the pilgrimage in terms of the church’s “best” interests. Pope Shenouda III himself has given similarly broad definitions of the church’s religious aims, emphasizing the equal status and priority of visiting Jerusalem to other concerns of the church, often by stressing the voluntary nature of the pilgrimage within Christian doctrine¹⁰³.

Pope Shenouda III, pope of Alexandria and patriarch of the See of St. Mark had warned that Copts who visit Jerusalem would face excommunication. “I understand that it is every Copt’s wish to visit Jerusalem, but there is no pilgrimage duty in Christianity and it is not a religious pillar, so *since this visit can do harm to our national cause and Muslim and Christian people then we better not visit Jerusalem.*” [emphasis mine]¹⁰⁴

Here, Pope Shenouda seeks to make clear that the pilgrimage, by virtue of not being a core doctrinal matter, is one of many concerns of the church. He offers a very broad interpretation of the religious as well as the appropriate jurisdiction of the church, implying that the blessing and redemption of individual believers (through the pilgrimage) is a *personal* desire can easily be outweighed by the *collective* good achieved by not traveling for the Coptic Orthodox community. This collective good has variously

¹⁰¹ Interview on July 14, 2009. Translation mine.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ The pope’s comments often make references and comparisons to the Islamic *Hajj*, which is obligatory, through the use of Islamic theological terms like “pillar,” and thus drawing a clear distinction between this tradition and a Christian pilgrimage of personal desire, but not doctrinal obligation.

¹⁰⁴ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in “Pope Shenouda III: Pilgrimage to Jerusalem is not a religious duty.” °Adil, Michael; al-Dab°, Diana. Rose al-Yusuf (May 7), 2006. 1. Arab West Report: 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12850&ayear=2006&aweek=19&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Hasan, Dina.

been attributed to the humanitarian interest in the Israel-Palestine conflict, the potential manipulation of Coptic Orthodox visits to Jerusalem by Israel or internal factions to portray the Coptic Orthodox community as pro-Israeli or supporters of Sadat's peace treaty to inflame Muslim-Christian relations in Egypt, and the return of Dayr al-Sultan to Coptic Orthodox control. Thus, the broad interpretation extends the religious to a communalized setting, which is larger than individual salvation, but contains any action done in the temporal interests of the Coptic Orthodox community and its church as well. As such, failure to abide by the ban is constructed as a selfish betrayal of greater community interests (i.e. the Coptic Orthodox Church, Copts as Arabs, et cetera).

"From the Arabic national point we should not abandon our Palestinian brothers and our Arabic brothers by normalizing our relations with the Jews... From the church point of view, Copts who go to Jerusalem betray their church in the case of "Al-Sultan Monastery" that Israel refuses to give to the Copts."¹⁰⁵

The religious within a broad interpretation thus has not only prioritized a sense of the collective good of the church, but actually allows for individual seeking of redemption and salvation to be reprehensible despite the central role of seeking salvation in Christianity as they subtract from the fulfillment of the carefully calculated greater good, or "vital concern."

This tally-sheet logic also means that no one issue is consistently of enough weight to definitively decide the position of the church toward the ban. The internal "mathematics" to the calculation of the vital interest are consistently recalculated on the basis of current circumstances and situations. As such, the ban cannot be credited to any one reason or factor since such a reduction would fail to reflect the numerous interests within the religious. Thus, various issues are only *important* to the ban, but not *essential* to it. Because of this, broad interpreters value many different situations as factors within the ban and refuse to make any single event responsible for it. Simply put, all of the conditions must be correct for the collective good to encourage pilgrimage, not prevent it. As an example, the Dayr al-Sultan monastery, which the church cites as a major impetus within the ban, was allegedly offered back to the Coptic Orthodox Church in 2007 in exchange for the lifting of the ban. Bishop Bishuy explained why the repatriation of this property was refused in a newspaper interview.

Secretary of the Holy Synod Bishop Bīshūy asserted that Pope Shenouda refused an Israeli proposal to return al-Sultān Monastery to the Egyptian church in return for lifting the ban imposed by his holiness on visiting Jerusalem, in a meeting held by Coptic newspaper *Nidā' al-Watan*, in Alexandria, entitled, 'Yes for Dialogue, Love and Coexistence. No for Sectarianism and Violence.'

He indicated that Pope Shenouda refused the proposal as he cannot permit Copts to visit Jerusalem unless peace is established in the region.¹⁰⁶

The monastery, while important, seems to take second position to a peaceful resolution of

¹⁰⁵ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in "Pope Shenouda: We reject protection from any foreign country." Al-Ahali (February 2), 2000. Arab West Report, 2000. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=2621&ayear=2000&aweek=5&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

¹⁰⁶ "Pope Shenouda refuses an Israeli proposal to return al-Sultan Monastery to the Egyptian Church." Al-Maydan (January 10), 2007. Arab West Report, 2007. 3 Aug. 2009. http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=15349&aweek=2&ayear=2007&t=s&char=0>. Translation al-^cAwadi, Nirmin.

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict itself. However, it is mistaken to believe there is a type of hierarchy or prioritization of reasons within the broad interpretation of the religious; the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not necessarily more influential than the aims of the church in regaining Dayr al-Sultan. Rather, numerous factors must concurrently happen. Bishop Marqos of Shubra al-Khayma was asked what conditions would be necessary to lift the ban. Although his answer similarly valued a peace treaty, Dayr al-Sultan was nevertheless not inconsequential.

Bishop Marqos: I think after we have two separate countries: a country for Palestinians and another country for Israelis. This means there is not any problem between these two countries and the two people: Israeli and Palestinian. Then His Holiness can permit people to visit the Christian churches and the Holy Land.

Author: And the return of the monastery then would be nice but it's not necessary?

Bishop Marqos: Just [if] there are two countries, [then the] Israelis will encourage us to take our monastery.

Author: So, they'd go together?

Bishop Marqos: Yes.¹⁰⁷

It is interesting to note that the Bishop is unwilling to accept a restoration of the pilgrimage without a return of the monastery; for him, both conditions must be met in order to do so (although they are held to be somewhat interdependent). Broad interpretations of the religious thus make it difficult to tie down the pilgrimage to any certain concerns or conditions; as both Bishops Bishuy's and Marqos' answers demonstrate, the fulfillment of any one demand appears unable to fully outweigh the other concerns that determined the "vital interest" of the church. While this may make a full reversal of the ban difficult to obtain, it seemingly paradoxically opens a great deal of room for exceptions to the policy to be created. After all, if no single issue is a "deal breaker," then visits to Israel can easily be accommodated that would further the "vital interest." In this manner, certain visits to Israel can continue to hurt the greater good, while others are perfectly benign. In a newspaper interview, Pope Shenouda III describes both the betrayal of ordinary Coptic pilgrimage, while he emphasizes the acceptability of ecclesiastical visits.

"Israelis seized al-Sultān monastery [Dayr al-Sultan] and those who visit Jerusalem are normalizing relations with Israelis and weakening the church's position. They are also betraying me personally as they don't obey the head of the church, who defends Christians interests" said the pope... "The ban also includes Copts abroad and dangerously ill people," he added. However he stressed that the church and he himself will not ban Christian officials who go there on official missions.¹⁰⁸

This exception could be construed as hypocrisy (indeed, as shall be seen, it is by narrow interpreters), but it is more accurate to see the two visits as performing different functions within the religious sphere; the pilgrim seeks personal redemption at the expense of both the church's property of Dayr al-Sultan as well as social harmony in Egypt whereas the church official is tending to the administrative health of the collective Coptic Orthodox

¹⁰⁷ Interview July 17, 2009. Translation mine (when necessary).

¹⁰⁸ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in "Sheik of Azhar withdraws his call to visit al-Aqsa amid strong reactions: Press Reviews based on al-Arabi, January 21, 2001 (p. 6); Al Sharq-Al Awsat, 17&21, 2001 (P.2&2)." Lufti, Jihan. Arab West Report, 2001. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=14828&ayear=2001&aweek=3&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Lufti, Jihan.

body. Bishop Marqos states the cohesiveness of the policy, as well as its exceptions, in a humorously succinct way.

Bishop Marqos: There are no exceptions.

Author: There are no exceptions?

Bishop Marqos: No. (pause) But any person who would like to go for business.

Author: Mm-hmm.

Bishop Marqos: Not to visit the (pause) Bethlehem or the...

Author: Sacred lands?

Bishop Marqos: ...pilgrimage. Pilgrimage. Absolutely not. But for business, it's okay.¹⁰⁹

Although this description of business exceptions has a paradoxical feel to it, it reflects the broader interpretation of the ban in terms of multiple religious goals; there are not exceptions to actions or practices viewed as detrimental to the greater good, and naturally, anything that helps achieve one of the religious aims is part of the “vital interests” of Coptic Orthodoxy (even including visiting Israel) and would not be considered an exception. This type of logic, and the broad definition of the religious required to understand it however, is not universally accepted within the Coptic Orthodox community.

On the other side of this debate, critiques and denouncements of politicalization are often bluntly stated and imply a concrete divide in between correct (i.e. religious) action of the Church and incorrect (i.e. political or national) actions.

Dr. Mīlād Hannā said “the church is not entitled to prevent Copts from visiting Jerusalem, nor religiously punish them, otherwise it would mix politics with religion. *It is just not right to use religious authority into political matters...*”

He pointed out that Christians who go to Israel intend to visit the Holy Sepulchre, and those, in religious terms, should not be considered supporters of normalization. [*emphasis mine*]¹¹⁰

It is intriguing to note that many of these critics do not denounce the sentiment behind the action; indeed, Palestinians are frequently labeled “brothers” who are oppressed by the “Zionists.” Despite their agreement with the motive, these sources still oppose the implied divine displeasure that ecclesiastical involvement implies. A visit to Israel then is a breach of political and humanitarian ethics, but not a *religious* sin.

We know that the pope’s decree, preventing Copts from visiting Jerusalem, shows support for our Palestinian brothers in their struggle against Zionism. We also know that Israeli control over the Sultan Monastery is another reason for this decision. So, this decree is based on a national principle not a religious one. This means that those who disobeyed the pope’s decree did not commit a sin against God.¹¹¹

Even those who feel that such political and humanitarian concerns should not be ignored in exchange for the religious merits of visiting Jerusalem still criticize any overt papal or ecclesiastical ultimatum to the same effect.

¹⁰⁹ Interview July 17, 2009. Translation mine (when necessary).

¹¹⁰ “Copts disobey the pope; make pilgrimage to Jerusalem with Israeli visa.” Abu al-Khayr, Ahmad. Sawt al-Ummah (May 2), 2005. 6. Arab West Report, 2005. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=6369&ayear=2005&aweek=18&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

¹¹¹ “Jamal Asa^ˆad is wondering: Are Copts obliged to agree with the political views of the pope?” Asa^ˆad ^ˆAbd al-Malik, Jamal. Sawt al-Ummah (January 24), 2001. 6. Arab West Report, 2001. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=3581&ayear=2001&aweek=4&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

He [Andrawus^c Aziz] states that though he would criticize any decision of Pope Shenouda III, the Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, to prohibit visits to Jerusalem, because it would be a political decision taken by a clergyman, he would also criticize any Egyptian, Muslim or Christian, going to Jerusalem.¹¹²

These laypeople then are drawing a firm line between the *political* and *religious* in these statements, isolating a form of secular humanitarian values outside the realm of religious ethics from which to evaluate the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. At the same time, they imply that the *religious* itself is a personal and individualized experience, thus excluding the interests of the institution of the Church from a construction of the *religious*. For example, two French-naturalized, Egyptian-born Copts who were visiting the Church of Saint Sam^can the Tanner in Muqattam, assessed the purpose of the ban in political terms as well¹¹³.

Marqos: We don't agree with the Pope on the ban for the Jerusalem pilgrimage. It's completely political.

Ibrahim: Completely.

...

Author: And Dayr al-Sultan?

Ibrahim: Dayr al-Sultan... I mean, it's just land. It's not holy land. It's not important. Why would it play a role?¹¹⁴

It is of note that not only do these men label the ban as a political action, but also that they fail to attribute any significance to the issue of the monastery. For them, Dayr al-Sultan is merely land, and without inherent religious value, there is no reason for it to enter into this debate, even if it has been a possession of the Church in the past. In such a manner, institutional interests of the Church are relegated outside of the sphere of the *religious*, which is only wide enough to accommodate its individual believers, but not the property and resources that enable the institution to provide physical services. For the Coptic Orthodox Church to have invested interest in either the plight of the Palestinian people, or, at a much closer level, re-acquisition of the Dayr al-Sultan monastery, would be to have *political* or *national* interests. This confirms individual salvation and blessing as the only appropriate *religious* concern of the Church body.

Ironically, such a viewpoint is also articulated by supporters of the ban, including Dr. Luwa' Nabil Luqa Bibawi, a police general and prominent Copt. Although Dr. Bibawi agreed with the Pope's stance on the issue, he essentially characterized it in humanitarian-secular discourse.

Dr. Bibawi: It's the opinion of His Holiness the Pope that as long as Israel occupies Jerusalem and starts violent conflicts with the Palestinians then it imbues visiting Jerusalem with a racial issue. So when the Palestinian problem is solved and there begins to be changes between the Palestinians and Israelis, then one can start to revisit Jerusalem. The mistake in it is the oppression of the Palestinian community. Some say the continuing violent acts against the Palestinians have transfused Egyptians with the necessity of expressing their opinions on the excess of violence that is present for the Palestinians. So, expressing [an opinion] on that side, the pope [thinks that] we can influence this through the Jerusalem pilgrimage. And when the relations

¹¹² "Copts' patriotism behind stand not to visit Jerusalem." ^cAziz, Andrawus. Rose al-Yusuf (January 2), 2006. 7. Arab West Report, 2006.
<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=8318&ayear=2006&aweeek=1&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation al-Misri, ^cAmr.

¹¹³ Names have been changed for anonymity. The two men shall henceforth be referred to as "Marqos" and "Ibrahim."

¹¹⁴ Interview of July 16, 2009. Translation mine.

improve, like when there are two states as has been said before by the pope, and there is safety for the Palestinians, he [the pope] will permit the Jerusalem pilgrimage.

Author: So political peace is important to the ban itself?

Dr. Bibawi: In his [the pope's] opinion, it's not appropriate, the pressure for Palestinians. The killing of children and so forth. And if we visit this place, we help this environment in the holy places during the clashes and blows. So he says we should wait a little.¹¹⁵

Dr. Bibawi later sharply drew a distinction between a religious sensibility, which appears to be a sense of redemptive potential from visiting Jerusalem and expression of love for Christ, and an ethical repulsion and psychological guilt associated with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Dr. Bibawi: From a religious perspective, I want to go. I want to go. Because I love the Christian faith, and I love Christ, myself wants to go. [But] when I want to see my Arab brothers [being] slaughtered like that, inside me, there is a punishment.

Author: But it's personal? From a religious perspective...?

Dr. Bibawi: No, religiously, it [the pilgrimage] is a fortuitous thing.¹¹⁶

Thus, the ban provides a forum for a larger debate about the appropriate roles and actions of the church as well as religion itself. These lay voices assume that religion is an inherently personal experience, thus limiting the scope of its actions to individual salvation and redemption. The ban then becomes an inappropriate action (or at least a non-religious one for some of the stauncher supporters of Pope Shenouda III like Dr. Bibawi), as both the collective denunciation of violence against a group as well as institutional health are seen as being outside of this arena. One can agree in sentiment over the suffering of the Palestinian people, but this falls under personal ethics and morals, not religion. Gray issues such as church property rights (i.e. Dayr al-Sultan) are entirely excluded by this point of view, as they represent neither a severe humanitarian crisis, nor a direct soteriological function.

It is critical to remember that influential and prominent as these voices might be, they are absent from the church's ordained hierarchy, thus removing them from decisions relating to the ban. As a result, the policies of the ban are made within a broad interpretation of the religious within which they possess a coherent, logical rationale. However, this means that for many narrow interpreters certain issues become difficult to understand as they appear to function "outside" of rational political decision-making but simultaneously cannot be explained using a narrow interpretation of religious activity. This leads them to perceive such issues as random or even fickle. Foremost among these issues is the perceived existence of exceptions to the pilgrimage ban.

As was previously discussed, for a broad interpretation of the religious, there are no conceptual "exceptions" per se to the Jerusalem pilgrimage ban, but rather ways in which a Coptic Orthodox person visiting the State of Israel is not conceived of as being contrary to the "vital interests" of the church. However, as multiple interests are not thought to be correctly religious to narrow interpreters (for whom the function of the religious is assisting in the salvation of individual believers), any travel to Jerusalem or Israel must be viewed as either a breaking of the ban, or, if condoned, an exception to it. As such, narrow interpreters (including those who agree with the ban as a *political* platform) find cases of permitted visits to Jerusalem both confusing and hypocritical, regardless of whether they are in favor of boycotting travel to Israel or not. One Coptic

¹¹⁵ Interview on July 14, 2007. Translation mine.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

columnist in favor of a travel boycott penned this sense of frustration and confusion around these permitted visits.

This [preventing Copts from visiting Jerusalem until the independence of Palestine] was a very positive situation for the pope as he refused to normalize relations with Israel until the liberation of all the occupied lands, however he started recently to allow some Coptic businessmen to visit Israel to hold joint projects there with Israeli businessmen. This is considered by many Copts as a contradiction on his ban imposed on Copts not to visit Jerusalem.¹¹⁷

The element of “contradiction” present for narrow interpreters forces them to awkwardly confront the political motives to which they have attributed the ban.

What is the kind of business that would force contractors to go to Israel? Is this business related to the church or is it just business and trade? If it is commercial, would not that be considered a strong version of neutralization with Israel?¹¹⁸

These exceptions make the politically conceived ban (a boycott of Israel until some objective goal – peace, right of return, repatriation of Dayr al-Sultan – is achieved) seem disregarded. As such, the institution of the church, as well as Pope Shenouda III, seem hypocritical, further removing them from the realm of the religious. Indeed, as shall be seen in the following section, the Jerusalem pilgrimage ban also provides ample discursive space for negotiations of papal authority, power, and responsibility, in which a normative example of the papacy is debated.

Papal Authority, Limitations, and Responsibilities:

Tied into the questions of political and religious jurisdiction and authority is another pressing issue to the modern Coptic Orthodox Church: the nature of papal power and responsibility. Within this debate are two distinct, if intertwined, issues: the relationship between the person of the pope to the papacy itself and the ability of the pope and church to punish flouters of the ban.

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church of the Vatican, Coptic Orthodoxy has no doctrine of infallibility surrounding its patriarch¹¹⁹. However, the pope’s opinions and judgments today still seem to carry a heavier weight than that of any other commentator within the church. These two issues create an interesting position of authority for the pope: both restricted in action by examples of canon law and precedence, but also invested with large personal discretion in action and policy. For Pope Shenouda III in particular, the issue of papal authority and prerogative has also been present since his exile. These debates are played out through the pilgrimage ban as Pope Shenouda III attempts to open interpretative space and empower the patriarch’s personal discretion, whereas other elements within the church seek to curtail the pope’s actions to strictly doctrinal matters of the papacy.

The most obvious manner in which papal authority is discussed in the context of

¹¹⁷ “Why Pope Shenouda allowed only businessmen to visit Jerusalem?” Sa’d, °Adil Girgis. Rose al-Yusuf (May 19), 2006. 84. Arab West Report, 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12947&ayear=2006&aweek=20&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Salah, Shadi.

¹¹⁸ “Love your pope.” Sa’d, °Adil Girgis. Rose al-Yusuf (March 28), 2007. 6. Arab West Report, 2007. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=16408&ayear=2007&aweek=13&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation °Ismat, Nuhayr.

¹¹⁹ McCallum (2007), 927.

Israel can be seen as Pope Shenouda III attempts to advance a church prerogative to be *civilly* active, if not *politically*. In an interview in 1999, Pope Shenouda III provided the most complete statement of this right for all members of the ordained clergy.

I distinguish between political activity and civic activity. The Church is not involved in politics. Indeed, it does not have time for politics. It has other responsibilities. But, at the same time, it has a national and civic duty. The Church is bound by loyalty and love to this country and to the [Arab] region. We [the Church] perform our national role without getting involved in politics. We openly encourage people to participate in elections and we consider it a national duty. All men of religion are citizens who have voting cards which they must use to express their opinion. How can I decline to vote, on the grounds that I am not a professional politician? That would be irrational. Expressing an opinion and working in politics are two different things.¹²⁰

To summarize, the pope is articulating a space for clergy members to express *opinions* as citizens that are separate from the church engaging in greater activities. This might initially appear to be a form of the narrow and broad interpretations of the religious discussed above (i.e. the church is concerned with only salvation but its administrators still have a right to political opinions and actions); however, this type of discourse actually provides a much more specialized service. To demonstrate, let us compare three statements made by Pope Shenouda III on the tactic of suicide bombing, made within half a year of one another.

Q [Interviewer]: Could the incidents [of New York and Washington] be a result to the over-dominating policies America practices on the third-world countries?

A [Pope Shenouda III]: People who support and found reasons to feel good over these incidents are doing more than one wrong thing: first, ignoring the tragedy of killing an innocent group of people. Second, not thinking about the reaction of showing they found satisfaction in the incidents. Third, they are considered accomplices in the crime. *Fourth, they are committing a wrongful act not approved by religion...* [emphasis mine]¹²¹

*The pope said he only wanted comment on Palestinian martyrdom operations from a political and not from a religious point of view. He said that such operations are the natural reaction to the pressure and depression in which Palestinians live. They do not see any alternative but to explode themselves in the face of an enemy that uses all the means of power with no mercy. [emphasis mine]*¹²²

The Pope chose to comment on the Palestinian resistance operations from a political point of view, saying that it is difficult for a man of religion to comment on such operations. He

¹²⁰ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in "Marriage, politics, and Jerusalem." Jindi, Husni; Shukr Allah, Hani; Tadrus, Mirz. Al-Ahram Weekly (April 1-7), 1999. Arab West Report, 1999. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=1038&ayear=1999&aweek=14&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

¹²¹ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in "Shenouda: Palestinian resistance is not terrorism." Al-Sa'id, Sana'. Al-Musawwar (October 12), 2001. 44. Arab West Report, 2001. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12324&ayear=2001&aweek=40&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

¹²² Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in "Christian anger for attacking the Church of the Nativity: Press review based on Al-Ahali, April 3, 2002 (p.1); Al-Gomhuria, April 3,5&8, 2002 (pp.5,4&2); Al-Akhbar, April 3&8, 2002 (pp.10&1); Asharq Al-Awsat, April 4&8, 2002 (p.2&3); Al-Ahram, April 5&8, 2002 (pp.13&1); Watani, April 7, 2002 (p.1); Sawt Al-Umma, April 8, 2002 (p.14); Al-Usubua, April 8, 2002 (p.25)." Fawzi, Nirmin. Arab West Report, 2002. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=15799&ayear=2002&aweek=14&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>.

said that such operations are a natural response to the pressure on the Palestinians. They have no alternative but to explode themselves in the face of an enemy who has all the means of power, which are used without mercy against the Palestinians.¹²³

What is so fascinating about these three statements is not only the completely different conclusions that the pope draws on the ethics of suicide bombing (i.e. in the first instance, reprehensible, and in the second two justified), but rather that he uses different sources of ethics to decide these cases. Thus, for the pope, the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon in the United States on September 11, 2001 are “wrongful” as they are not “approved by religion.” This would imply that the action itself (i.e. suicide bombing) would not be “approved by religion” in general. However, in the second and third instances (which refer to the same original interview), he condones this tactic as “a natural response to the pressure on the Palestinians.” The crucial difference than in his judgment seems to stem from the pope’s verbalized “choice” to comment from a *political* and not *religious* point of view. In accordance with the pope’s aforementioned statement on *civic opinions*, one can then construe that, by commenting upon these issues from a *political/civic* basis, the pope is expressing his personal opinion on the matter, and is thereby not obligated to base his statement on the religious doctrine that made the American case reprehensible. In a nutshell, the pope has articulated a way to speak and act outside of the constraints of canon law, dogma, and precedence.

The repercussion of this right, as literally stated by the pope, would be that the patriarch periodically can remove himself from that office to make statements contrary to church doctrine, but only on a personal level. However, in practice, this interpretive right that Pope Shenouda III has taken for himself is much larger, and indeed, has influence on multiple church policies. The current pope’s dedication to the Saint Antonius style of the Sunday School movement certainly instilled a strong sense of the necessity of following one’s spiritual leader within him, which has been infused into the church’s structure during his papacy¹²⁴. Bishop Marqos nicely summed up the true meaning of these “personal” opinions.

Bishop Marqos: ... when a person asks me about anything political as a[n] Egyptian person, not as a bishop, I can represent myself politically. We go to the voting boxes and give our vote, because we are people, Egyptians.

Author: How is that difference of the pope speaking as the Church as compared to the pope speaking as a person made clear to the Egyptian people?

Bishop Marqos: No, because he is always pope when he speaks. He speaks as a pope.

Author: So...

Bishop Marqos: Because he represents all the Christians, Coptic Orthodox believers.

Author: So, how is it made clear to the Coptic Orthodox people or really, any Egyptian person, if he's saying the Church's official view, versus one of his personal, political views?

Bishop Marqos: *We consider that his personal views, always Church view.*

Author: So it's always the Church view...

Bishop Marqos: Yes.

¹²³ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in “A national conference to support the Palestinians in the St. Mark Cathedral: Press review based on Akher Saa, April 10, 2002 (pp.11-14); Al-Akhbar, April 12, 2002 (pp.1&6); Al-Gomhuria, April 12, 2002 (p.5); Al-Wafd, April 12, 2002 (pp.1,4&7); Al-Ahram, April 12&15, 2002 (pp.9&10); Al-Arabi, April 14, 2002 (p.5); Watani, April 14, 2002 (pp.1&16); Al-Ushua, April 15, 2002 (p.19).” Fawzi, Nirmin. Arab West Report, 2002. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=15800&ayear=2002&aweek=15&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>.

¹²⁴ Reiss & Hulsman.

Author: ... when he speaks?

Bishop Marqos: ... *Because we cannot separate His Holiness as a person and as the leader of the Church.* [emphasis mine]¹²⁵

As the bishop shows, Pope Shenouda III has negotiated a nice *Catch-22* clause for personal papal discretion within this framework. The pope is bound to the office of the papacy and its demarcated responsibilities and obligations, unless he chooses to speak as an individual. If he speaks as an individual though, he speaks for the papacy as the two cannot be separated, and therefore must both be obeyed. As such, when Pope Shenouda III condones an action like Palestinian guerilla paramilitary tactics, he is, in essence, allowing the church to condone them as well. This adroit semantic structure has thereby enabled a rapid expansion of the patriarch's informal power. This increase of papal authority can be seen trickling down to the level of ordinary believers across the world within the discussion of the Jerusalem pilgrimage ban. This is demonstrated in the interview conducted with the two French-naturalized Copts previously mentioned.

Marqos: We don't agree with the Pope on the ban for the Jerusalem pilgrimage. It's completely political.

Ibrahim: Completely.

Marqos: And of course we want to go there [Jerusalem]. We don't go because we respect our seniors. If we wanted [to go], it'd be easy to go. I have a French passport. [It would be] very easy [to get] the visa. But we respect the seniors. We respect the pope.

Author: So you don't agree with the pilgrimage ban to Jerusalem, but you don't go because of respect?

Marqos: Not respect exactly. Obedience.

Author: Obedience?

Marqos: Yeah. *We must obey the pope because disobedience is wrong.* Disobedience is a mistake. *We must obey even [if we] don't understand or agree.* [emphasis mine]¹²⁶

It is astounding to see the degree to which the pope has gained lay support over this issue. Marqos' statement that, "We must obey even [if we] don't understand or agree," reveals the extent to which Pope Shenouda III is not only trusted and respected within the community, but also how his "personal opinions" have easily transcended into official church policy that *must* be obeyed. Although Marqos notes that he does not agree with the decision and views it as a political decision, he is still bound to it. The pilgrimage ban is thus a microcosm in which the patriarch's larger project of papal power consolidation is not only visible, but actively being asserted and tested. However, although Pope Shenouda III has been largely successful in garnering more power for his office, the Israeli pilgrimage ban has also provided a forum for subversive discourses that limit his office's authority and bind the pope within normative restrictions and responsibilities. This subversive rhetoric is most visible within debates on the correct punishment(s) for those who flout the ban.

The United States' International Religious Freedom Report of 2007 provides some rough estimates for Coptic Orthodox Christians visiting Israel, as well as an account over the appropriate punishment.

... press reports, citing Israeli Interior Ministry statistics, indicated that an estimated 735 Copts visited Israel in 2004 for pilgrimage. There were no statistics available for subsequent periods. According to *Al-Ahram* on September 4, 2006, Pope Shenouda III forbade Copts to go to Jerusalem and stated that anyone who visits Jerusalem while it is still under the Israeli occupation

¹²⁵ Interview on July 17, 2009.

¹²⁶ Interview of July 15, 2009. Translation mine.

would be subject to "ecclesiastical punishment," including the deprivation of communion.¹²⁷ These "ecclesiastical punishments" have undergone quite a history since the initial ban in 1979, and one which is often difficult to trace. Yousef Sidhom, editor-in-chief of *al-Watani* tactfully offered the following story.

Yousef Sidhom: ... ordinary people would present questions to Pope Shenouda, quizzing, "Your Holiness, what is your comment that there are certain pilgrimages going on, but Your Holiness banned these visits. Pope Shenouda, in spite of the fact that I consider [that] this banning of the pilgrimage was wise, he resolved it, to tackle the visits that were done under the pilgrimage ban in a less wise way, which has been creating some concernment and bad [*inaudible*] because the holy site, that whoever is known to have undergone pilgrimage to has done wrong to the church and he should publish a sorry-note in any newspaper and, funnily enough, in *Watani*, our newspaper, which was, which *is* still a rather hazardous change. So, at the time, we started receiving *many* ads, apologizing to the pope for visiting the Holy Land, and this triggered *negative* reactions and sentiments on part of the public.

Author: You think because so many of them were published? And that it was such an open forum for these, or?

Yousef Sidhom: Well, they were. Because Pope Shenouda said that to have an idea of this, and to publish this apology would be pardoned by the church. [*emphasis in the original*]¹²⁸

Thus the original punishment as conceived by the pope for the ban appears to have become a subversive discourse in and of itself, for by ordering public apologies to be the vehicle for obtaining pardons, the church unwittingly created an easy way for the congregation to not only see the relative ease of being pardoned, but also the sheer amount of people who had already disobeyed. Thus, instead of shaming the few who were disobedient, the initial punishment for the ban served to raise public disapproval for the ban and lower the impetus for being obedient, weakening papal authority. As a result, this punishment was soon altered. This came in the double-threat of forbidding participation in the taking of the Holy Communion and excommunication: a denial of participation in church ritual and communal life. These two punishments are rarely both explicitly named when punishment is discussed; usually one or the other is favored.

Pope Shenouda III of Alexandria reiterated warnings to Copts against visiting Jerusalem as long as it is under Israeli occupation, adding that the Orthodox Church will not accept any apologies from Copts who visited Jerusalem this year.

Pope Shenouda, the patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, elaborated that apologies published in newspapers would not do any longer, as some have deliberately violated the papal decision that is aimed to maintain the nation's interests.

The head of the Egyptian Orthodox Church stressed that he would never retreat on the decision forbidding Copts visits to a Jerusalem under Israeli occupation.

The Coptic Church had threatened to apply penalties of excommunication on Egyptian Christians who visit Jerusalem.¹²⁹

Pope Shenouda III, the Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, reiterated his refusal to permit any Copt to visit Jerusalem under Israeli occupation, threatening the punishment of disallowing participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion *sine die* in response.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

¹²⁸ Interview of July 17, 2009.

¹²⁹ "Pope reiterates warnings to Copts against visiting Jerusalem." *Al-Liwa' al-Islami* (May 11), 2006. 1. Arab West Report, 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12938&ayear=2006&aweek=20&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation al-Misri, °Amr.

¹³⁰ "Pope Shenouda III brandishes church penalties against Copts visiting Jerusalem." Sadiq, Ashraf. *Al-Ahram* (September 4), 2006. 19. Arab West Report, 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.

When exactly the necessary punishment is denial of communion versus excommunication is difficult to ascertain, and the only examples of punishments carried out found during the research for this article comprised of denials of communion. Cornelis Hulsman provides a stark example of this punishment during one of his meetings with the pope in the late 1980s or early 1990s.

I was once in a meeting with His Holiness Pope Shenouda... During the meeting with His Holiness, a priest came in to plead for a member of his parish who was told he could no longer receive the Holy Communion because he had gone to Jerusalem. The priest was, as a good priest, pleading to Pope Shenouda to lift the ban on giving the Holy Communion to this member of the parish, and Pope Shenouda was extremely, extremely firm in his answer of *no*. And then he turned to me and said, "Should not children listen to their father?" And that was it. [*emphasis in the original*]¹³¹

Bishop Marqos offered a less severe portrayal, describing the punishment of a member of his diocese when confronted with the same situation that offered a chance of pardon.

I think an old man, he told me *after* he already went to Jerusalem, "I am old man and I would like to visit to visit the Bethlehem and the other churches, and I think that there is no, any purpose to forbid me of this. To limit me to go to there. And even I know that His Holiness doesn't agree, but I went with my wife," my, his wife only, and I told him, "Also your wife agrees? And knew that His Holiness has this decision?" He told me yes. You can go to the church, but you cannot have the communion. And after one year, you should write a letter to His Holiness and in general he agreed. [*emphasis in original*]¹³²

The bishop added that he did not know whether or not a pardon was eventually granted.

These new measures of punishment not only eliminated the problematic diminishment of papal authority present in the original letter-writing policy, but also seek to once again strengthen it by forcing pardon to come from direct contact with the pope himself as the sole provider of pardon (in comparison to the letters, which granted pardon by the act of publishing them by a tacit approval of the pope, instead of at the patriarch's explicit personal discretion). Despite the new policy's added precautions however, the issue of punishment for the ban is still open to negotiation and re-interpretation as a subversive space to papal authority.

The simplest way in which this new punishment fails to strengthen papal authority is just by not being carried out. A bishop of a rural diocese granted the author permission to contact a member of his diocese that was known to have gone on the pilgrimage¹³³. The following information is taken from the author's interview with Maqar, a man in his mid sixties who went to Jerusalem in 2008.

Maqar traveled to Alexandria where he joined a Catholic pilgrimage group to visit Israel, pretending to be a Catholic. Their trip included Bethlehem, but mainly focused on Jerusalem, where they spent several days. Maqar did not return to Egypt with the Alexandrian Catholics, but instead directly traveled back to his home village from the Sinai border crossing. He stated that his village is aware of and proud of his travel, and that since returning, excluding that pride, his life has not changed from before the

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=13764&ayear=2006&aweek=36&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation al-Misri, cAmr.

¹³¹ Interview on July 17, 2009.

¹³² Interview on July 17, 2009.

¹³³ The name of the informant has been changed to protect his identity, as well as certain geographic identifying information. He requested that the interview not be recorded. He shall henceforth be known as Maqar. The interview occurred during the summer of 2009.

pilgrimage. The author asked to confirm this, and he restated as such. When prompted as to whether he had encountered any difficulty with his church or priest, Maqar stated no. Maqar similarly denied that any attempts had been made to deny him the Holy Communion or threats of excommunication. When asked if he was aware of the formal punishments, Maqar relayed that he was. He added that *his priest did not think his trip was important enough to get the pope involved*.

It is difficult to gauge to what degree a story like Maqar's is either commonplace or exceptional. However, it does present the very real way in which Coptic Orthodox Christians, particularly those outside of the church metropolises of Cairo and Alexandria, can publicly go on the pilgrimage without ill effect¹³⁴. This anecdotal story implies how the centralization of punishment to the papacy can simultaneously weaken the pope's authority. Although cases that the pope does receive can give him symbolic power to decide a person's readmission to the church community, this only holds true for the cases that are actually brought before the patriarch. As shown in Maqar's story, a local priest can view the issue as too insignificant to bring to the pope, which ironically serves to diminish the pope's authority by removing both his judgment from the case as well as any form of punishment for having disobeyed him. This centralization of authority to the papacy can also backfire even when cases do make it to the patriarch's office.

By making the punishment for traveling to Israel among the strictest available in the church (excommunication being the extent to which the church can punish someone), Pope Shenouda III has also allowed room for harsh criticism for failure to properly obey the ecclesiastic parameters of his own office. Unlike the aforementioned case of "personal opinion" actions by the pope, by using the papal office and the vehicles of forbidding the Holy Communion and excommunication, Pope Shenouda III is using mechanisms available to the patriarch, but ones that are very defined, both in the sources of canon law as well as in the popular perception of them. As such, his actions can be taken and criticized as being improper uses of power, or failing to correctly embody the responsibilities of the patriarchy. One advocate for church reformation from Shubra in Cairo, Ra'ed, seized upon this theme when he claimed that the pope said the following during an excommunication trial. He then provided his own interpretation of this statement¹³⁵.

He [Pope Shenouda III] said, "I am a judge and nobody is to comment on my judgment." This is what he said. So where is meekness? Where is being a father? Where it is? Where is tolerance? Where is transparency?¹³⁶

Ra'ed here is using the occasion of an excommunication (where the patriarch has well-defined rolls and responsibilities) to create a normative vision of *the patriarch*, then compares Pope Shenouda III as its embodiment to this ideal in an unfavorable way. Ra'ed continued:

There is something against his rule. I go to him and I ask for forgiveness and he *must* forgive. This is the faith. I go in front of him and say, "Please forgive me and let me join the

¹³⁴ This "public" however is assumed to only be in a localized community setting. Although an example was not found during the course of this research, it seems unlikely that should such a rural account of pilgrimage be reported upon in a national forum that it would continue to avoid criticism.

¹³⁵ Interview on July 17, 2009 .

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

Holy Communion.” If he said no, *he wouldn’t be at all a Christian.*” [emphasis mine]¹³⁷
Ra’ed has used the expectations and regulations of the office of the papacy to effectively offer an incredibly narrow vision of papal authority and autonomy, with any breach of that behavior being construed as a renunciation of Christianity itself. The punishment for the Jerusalem pilgrimage ban thus has opened room for Pope Shenouda III to demonstrate and build his power over the church, but conversely has given reformists clear cases by which to judge the patriarch’s behavior to a firmly established standard of the necessary conduct of the office as set forth by canon law.

Finally, certain believers view punishment for breaking the ban as outside of the scope of papal authority to begin with, making any actual punishments called for by Pope Shenouda III meaningless. These arguments completely remove patriarchal authority from the issue of the pilgrimage ban, essentially arguing that while the ban should be followed as the pope is a spiritual leader, any disobedience is strictly a personal failing. Dr. Bibawi provided a thorough account of this view on punishment.

Dr. Bibawi: In the first place, the pope stressed that there’s a psychological punishment, not from anyone else. What would the punishment be? When you go to Jerusalem, *there isn’t a crime.* No crime. A person wants to go on pilgrimage, you’re growing old, you’re sick. If you yourself inside want to go visit Jerusalem, to visit the Tomb of Christ [Church of the Holy Sepulchre] to visit the Tomb of the Virgin, there’s no punishment for that.

Author: So...

Dr. Bibawi: *It’s permitted by the church. It’s permitted by the church.*

Author: So there’s not an appropriate punishment on earth for this... well, it’s not a crime. This response.

Dr. Bibawi: There’s no crime. If you want to go visit the Tomb of Christ [The Church of the Holy Sepulchre], you go.

Author: So, is it a sin?

Dr. Bibawi: It’s not a sin. What is it? The general feeling, a feeling against what Israel is doing. Simpler than that, going along with the general feeling, and telling Israel, “No. What you’re doing is wrong.” But do it in a peaceful way. Or in a civilized way. But Israel did wrong, and for that, we won’t visit Jerusalem. [We] want to pray, but Israel made a mistake, not right.

Author: So if one visits Jerusalem, the problem is...?

Dr. Bibawi: Personal. And the church says that. When there’s a lot of people who go.

Author: So there’s no power in the hands of the church?

Dr. Bibawi: The church doesn’t know who’s gone. The church doesn’t hold your passport, or when you go, it helps to go via Cyprus... The church doesn’t know who’s gone or hasn’t gone. It’s something inside of you. [emphasis mine]¹³⁸

This argument creates a vision of the church and pope that can merely advise believers how to behave, but has essentially been de-clawed. Unable to administer punishments, it must tacitly permit any violation of its ban, thus making its rules *advice* and its ban a *recommendation*. At best, the pope’s authority is just the guilt experienced by one who disobeys.

In these ways, the Jerusalem travel ban becomes a field for debates and negotiations of papal authority, prerogative, responsibility, and right, whereby Pope Shenouda III has attempted to grant his office greater power through measures like “personal opinions” and inflictions of punishments for pilgrims. However, as has been shown, the punishments that can increase papal power can simultaneously provide others within the church with opportunities to articulate much narrower visions of patriarchal

137

Ibid.

138

Interview on July 14, 2007. Translation mine.

rights and involvement.

Consecration of the Extended Holy Land:

Perhaps the most unexpected dialogue present in the pilgrimage ban discourse is that of the holiness of Egypt. As has been previously discussed, Pope Shenouda III has engaged the question of whether or not the pilgrimage is an obligatory religious act or a voluntary attempt to seek blessings, thus opening the debate on religious merits and obligations. As has been previously established, the patriarch has countered the claim that the pilgrimage is religiously necessary, thus bringing it into a larger discussion on what serves the greater interests of the church body collectively¹³⁹. Another interview with the pope rearticulates this same message, "...pilgrimage to Jerusalem is not at the core of the Christian belief, but is for the purpose of gaining blessings from the sites connected with the life of Jesus Christ"¹⁴⁰. While these messages certainly work to foster a collectivized perspective on religious interests, they also serve another purpose: they diminish the holy primacy of Jerusalem, relativizing its sacred significance in relation to other sites.

The Coptic Orthodox Church has had a longstanding position on the doctrine of the holy family's visit to Egypt, as discussed earlier in the history of Coptic Orthodox pilgrimage. However, as was also earlier stated, the lack of direct Biblical support for this doctrine has made it difficult to accept for many Christian believers (as shall be seen, including Coptic Orthodox Christians themselves). It is also necessary to emphasize the unique qualities of this claim: although other denominations and regions claim a Christian sacred presence (e.g. Catholicism and the sanctuaries of Lourdes in France or the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City, or Greek Orthodoxy and the Church of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary at Tinos, *et cetera*), these presences were established through saints, apparitions, and miracles, not the claim that Biblical events actually transpired there. This gives the Coptic Orthodox claim of the sacredness of Egypt a different nature: if one believes that the holy family physically visited Egypt, then such places associated with that visit can easily be argued to possess the *same sacred qualities* as sites they visited in Palestine. The ban on pilgrimage to Jerusalem then can also operate within this frame, as it seeks to imbue Egypt with the same holiness that Palestine is thought to have.

Returning to the matter at hand, the papal policy denying the obligatory nature of the Jerusalem pilgrimage sets up two parallel arguments: first, that pilgrimage is an optional and personal decision to gain individual blessings from a site with a sacred connection, and secondly, that such blessings can just as easily be obtained from sites within Egypt connected to the holy family as those in Israel. This discourse thus seeks to establish Egypt as a Holy Land with identical weight and significance to its neighbor to

¹³⁹ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in °Adil, Michael; al-Dab°, Diana.

¹⁴⁰ "Copts buy Jerusalem's soil." Rose al-Yusuf (April 23), 2006. 12. Arab West Report, 2006. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12690&ayear=2006&aweek=17&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Al-Shami, Shayma'.

the north-east. Pope Shenouda III explained this issue in a newspaper interview.

I say to the Copts: why do you go to Jerusalem? Is it to have a blessing because Jesus Christ was born there? [Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, a fact that Pope Shenouda III is well aware. This is almost certainly a misquote of the author of the article. Egyptian journalists often do not record interviews, relying instead on handwritten notes. Such mistakes are therefore unfortunately common.] The blessing is in Egypt because Jesus Christ lived here with the Holy Virgin for three and half years and went to different places. *You can find blessings in every place Jesus Christ visited. [emphasis mine]*¹⁴¹

Here, the pope explicitly states that any location in which Jesus Christ was present during his lifetime carries the *same potential for blessings* as any other place. This statement thus demotes the significance of what event occurred in that place (i.e. the activity that Christ undertook in any given location does not seem to interest this theological assertion: in blunt terms, it values the Crucifixion in Jerusalem as being equally significant in terms of holiness to the miraculously planting of the balsam tree in Matariya¹⁴²), valuing just the historical presence of Christ at a location for its sacred significance. Bishop Marqos similarly spoke of the holy qualities of Egypt, tying this issue intrinsically into the question of the pilgrimage ban.

...not only Jerusalem is the Holy Land. For Jesus Christ and his family, Saint Mary and Joseph visit[ed] Egypt ... we would like to encourage people to live in Egypt and visit [the Arabic words for “visit” and “go on a pilgrimage” are the same. The Bishop appears to be confusing them in English.] the area in Egypt *better than* go there [Jerusalem]. And when the Israeli people see that the Christians will not visit this area [Jerusalem] and this economic situation will of course will check in or decrease, then they can restudy the relationship with [the] Israeli and Palestinian people. [emphasis mine]¹⁴³

In the bishop’s construction, the holiness of Egypt is a natural and undeniable condition of equal value to the Holy Land of Palestine. As such, he finds encouraging Coptic Orthodox believers to seek blessings in Egypt to be logically preferable as a means of exerting economic pressure on the Israeli government to re-evaluate its political position within the Palestinian-Israeli conflict while simultaneously continuing to allow believers to obtain the blessings of Jesus Christ. Thus, by using the pilgrimage ban to re-highlight the church’s pre-existing doctrine of the holy family’s visit, the church not only offers an alternative destination for Coptic Orthodox pilgrims that has the same benefits as the banned destination, but also emphasizes the *rightfully equal* status of Egypt as the Holy Land to that of Palestine. The ability of this ban to pursue that second aim serves a useful function in the church to finally establish this equality as a consequence of the doctrine of the holy family’s visit. Despite the deep doctrinal place of the holy family’s visit to Coptic Orthodoxy, the church has long struggled to convince its followers of the status of Egypt as part of the Holy Land. This fight continues today.

Indeed, the popular perception of Jerusalem still attributes much more religious significance to the city than other possible pilgrimage destinations. Father °Abd al-Qudus from the rural diocese of Biba provided his assessment on the sacred nature of Egypt in

¹⁴¹ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in “The wisdom of the pope.” October (March 31), 2002. 21. Arab West Report, 2002. 3 Aug. 2009. <http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=8972&ayear=2002&aweeek=13&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

¹⁴² Meinardus (1999), 21.

¹⁴³ Interview on July 17, 2009.

comparison the traditional Holy Land.

Author: ... So, are they the same thing, the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and pilgrimage to holy places in Egypt? I mean, do they have the same level of blessings, or...?

Father ^cAbd al-Qudus: No.

Author: No? So, Jerusalem is...

Father ^cAbd al-Qudus: People look to the pilgrimage to Jerusalem...

Author: And the holy places in Egypt are just...?

Father ^cAbd al-Qudus: A little.

Author: A little?

Father ^cAbd al-Qudus: Jerusalem, that's where Christ lived and died. Here, there's a blessing in visiting the holy places, but it's not to the same degree. Jerusalem is one thing.

Author: So it's not the same level?

Father ^cAbd al-Qudus: I mean, it's like the difference between your boss and someone lower-down in your office. It's not a problem, but his experience, his validity, and his abilities are less.¹⁴⁴

Father ^cAbd al-Qudus does not deny the holiness of the sites of Egypt, but he has also undeniably classified them on a hierarchy, using the analogy of an office boss compared to a lower-level employee in terms of sway. This metaphor provides an apt lens for how Egyptian holy sites are viewed by many within the church: capable of bestowing blessings, but on a more limited scale than the superior Jerusalem.

It is against such a sentiment that the Jerusalem pilgrimage ban offers one of its more interesting functions: by preventing trips to the more effective "boss," the church is trying to force believers to rely upon local sites for the same function. While opinions like Father ^cAbd al-Qudus' have hardly been eradicated by this policy, it clearly has armed the centuries-old conflict within the Coptic Orthodox Church over internal pilgrimage versus pilgrimage to Palestine with a new weapon. If pilgrims are unable to visit Jerusalem for an extended period, it is more than feasible that the doctrinal equality of Egypt will begin to be a lived experience in the lives of ordinary Coptic Orthodox believers. Indeed, such a trend can already be seen.

The later half of the 20th Century witnessed a rather remarkable surge in the presence of the miraculous in the lives of Coptic Orthodox Egyptians¹⁴⁵. "At no other period in the recorded history of the Coptic Church do we see so many reports of unfamiliar and extraordinary events as during the second part of the twentieth century"¹⁴⁶. This surge of miracles has often taken the form of apparitions and visions, particularly those of the Virgin Mary¹⁴⁷. The most famous of these *mariophanies* (apparition of the Virgin Mary) began on April 2, 1968 in the Cairene suburb of Zaytun¹⁴⁸. Following this apparition, the site was linked to the visit of the holy family, thus *imbuing* both to the doctrine as well as Egypt with religious significance using the apparition as evidence.

...Copts have interpreted the visit of the Holy Virgin as God's response to Egyptians' desperate economic and political situation after their disastrous defeat by the Israelis in the 1967 War, and moreover they regarded the apparition as a way of blessing Copts, who were not able to

144 Interview on July 21, 2009. Translation mine.

145 Meinardus (2002), 93.

146 *Ibid.* 93.

147 *Ibid.* 96-97.

148 *Ibid.* 97.

visit the Christian holy places in Nazareth, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem.¹⁴⁹ As Meinardus here notes, not only is the Virgin revisiting sites where she already is doctrinally held to have been, but her visits are actually being interpreted as a re-sanctification of the place. Thus, by no longer easily being able to visit Jerusalem, Coptic Orthodox Christians are being forced to turn back to the sacred traditions of Egypt itself. At the same time, Egypt is undergoing a re-consecration, as visions like those at Zaytun enforce the belief that the holy family did indeed visit Egypt (establishing it as a contiguous part of the Holy Land) by literally having them *revisit* it. The coincidence of these mariophanies with the pilgrimage ban shows how the Jerusalem policy is changing the perception of Egypt's sacredness. Depending on the future of the ban, the Coptic Orthodox Church might finally realize the complete consecration of Egypt as the Holy Land that is implied by the doctrine of the holy family's visit through events like the mariophanies as believers are forced to find new sources of blessings without access to the Jerusalem pilgrimage.

Bearers of the True Faith:

Coptic Orthodox Christianity obviously suffers from the same problem as all Christian denominations: how to claim heir to the position of the *true Church* amid similar claims by other groups. This matter is further complicated by the relative position of Christianity itself to the Judaic tradition, from which it claims descent, but by which it is not accepted. These issues of doctrinal legitimacy are by no means new phenomena within the Coptic Orthodox Church, but they are given a new forum for social discourse within the issue of pilgrimage to Jerusalem. This discourse is primarily articulated by Pope Shenouda III and prominent bishops in newspaper interviews and speeches; the intended audience will be later discussed.

Judaic theology (as well as that of many Protestant churches, to which Pope Shenouda III has referred derogatorily as "Zionist Christianity") supports a millennial and apocalyptic association with the Jewish occupation of the city of Jerusalem, as well as the status of the Jewish community as God's "Chosen People." Such theological arguments are often used as political and ideological justifications for the existence of and support for the Israeli state. Thus, the arguments used by the pope and bishops close to him in response can certainly be seen in a similarly blurred light of religio-political ideology. These claims are neither dogmatic nor sectarian, but somewhere between the two.

Foremost among the Judeo-Christian doctrines denounced by the pope are the various eschatological claims in relation to Jerusalem (e.g. the rebuilding of the Temple of Solomon, the prophecy of Daniel). These denials are categorical and systematic.

[Pope] Shenouda [III] denied any relationship between the in-gathering of the Jews in Palestine and the return of Christ. He rejected the connection, which the Jews draw, between the blowing-up of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the second coming of Christ. He claimed that the issue has no relationship to the building of Solomon's Temple, since the ancient prophecies, which the Jews believe, reveal that Christ will be born in Bethlehem rather than Jerusalem...

He denied any relationship between the prophecy of Daniel, which Christians interpret as a prophecy of the last days and Christ's return, and the restoration of the political state of Israel. He stated "The establishment of a kingdom on the ground is only in the ambitions of the Jews and

has no foundation in any religious meaning.”¹⁵⁰
The refutation of these apocalyptic and millennial interpretations of the existence of the state of Israel thus state the doctrinal opposition of the Coptic Orthodox Church to these “heterodox” dogmas that provide ideological support to Israel. Thus, the patriarch is effectively alleging a *misinterpretation* of these prophecies by other groups in the Judeo-Christian fold, implying the Coptic Orthodox Church’s doctrinal superiority and claim to the true faith, which is further demonstrated by its wise ban on pilgrimage. Such claims can even be explicit; the pope can select certain groups’ beliefs by name and refute them.

The Pope said that the idea that Jews are God’s chosen people is wrong. Jews were the first to believe in God while all the rest of the world was worshipping idols. The idea of God’s chosen people started to disappear when monotheistic religions spread all over the world.

The Pope criticized the Vatican for discharging Jews from wronging Jesus Christ and shedding his blood. He said that this was a political decision aimed at gratifying Jews and compensating them for what they had suffered at the hands of the Nazis. “The Jews do not acknowledge the coming of Christ, how come then they were given such compensation?” the Pope added.¹⁵¹

Here, Pope Shenouda III has specifically countered both the Jewish claim to be God’s “Chosen People,” as well as insulted the Catholic Church for its platform of absolving the modern Jewish population of any guilt for the Crucifixion, holding the Jewish people as clearly responsible not only for the act, but for not accepting the true faith. These doctrinal responses attack other religious platforms almost *ad absurdum*; in 2009 in his Christmas address, the patriarch rejected the interpretation that Jesus Christ was Jewish, instead giving him Palestinian origins, on the basis that he “was only Jewish in doctrine”¹⁵². While this particular claim was widely criticized by Coptic Orthodox believers outside of Egypt as ridiculous, it reveals much about the intended audience of statements such as these.

These arguments, by resting upon the issue of Israel and Jerusalem, utilize the mass Egyptian distrust of Israelis and Israel to articulate the theological superiority of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The pope’s anti-Israeli interpretation of all of these issues (be it the lack of eschatological connection with the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem, or simply the consistent degradation of Judaism and Jewish peoples) gives the mass Egyptian audience for which these statements are intended (Muslim and Christian alike) a carefully coded message. His statements confirm most people’s socially learned

¹⁵⁰ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in “Pope Shenouda: I will not enter Jerusalem unless it is with the Sheikh of al-Azhar.” Nasr, Mahmud. October (April 16), 2000. 46-47. Arab West Report, 2000. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=2888&ayear=2000&aweeek=16&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

¹⁵¹ Pope Shenouda III, as quoted in “Egyptians are living in a climate of freedom and democracy under the shade of the leadership of President Mubarak.” Al-Ahram (February 28), 2001. 15. Arab West Report, 2001. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=3696&ayear=2001&aweeek=9&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

¹⁵² “Copts abroad have wronged Pope Shenouda.” Sulayman, Fa’iq Mikha’il. Al-Fajr (January 26), 2009. 23. Arab West Report, 2009. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=21880&ayear=2009&aweeek=4&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Saqqa, Carlos.

suspicion of Israelis and Jewish people in general. However, at the same time, he has attached a denominational affiliation to these ideas: the Coptic Orthodox Church is consistently anti-Israeli, every other Judeo-Christian group ergo being pro-Israeli. As such, the issue of Israel has become a proxy debate to questions of *true Christianity* within Egypt.

This creates a kind of false logic between a person's perception of right and wrong in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (the former right, the later wrong) with the Coptic Orthodox Church versus other Judeo-Christian organizations. By using Jerusalem as a forum for ecumenical debate, the Coptic Orthodox Church has thus found a way to articulate its own doctrinal superiority to the local population of Egypt by associating their pre-existent wariness for Israel – a relatively common opinion across the population at large. These statements are further enforced by the church's ban on pilgrimage (literally proving that they are not just empty talk), and can thereby give Egyptians the impression that the Coptic Orthodox Church is the only "reasonable" organization out of all Judeo-Christian groups. This associated discourse of doctrine and politics thus serves the Coptic Orthodox Church with a radically new format in which to demonstrate its status as the *true Christianity* to its imminent population. Such logic, as demonstrated in the denial of Jesus Christ's Jewish origin, however can backfire internationally, isolating Coptic Orthodox believers outside of Egypt from the church.

Part III: Conclusions

Thirty years after the ban was enacted by Pope Shenouda III, the Coptic Orthodox Church continues to prevent its congregation from visiting Israel. During this time, it has emerged as a microcosmic filter through which debates within the Coptic Orthodox community are discussed, negotiated, and altered.

The legitimacy of the ban is interpreted through (and symbolic of) larger questions on what constitutes the *religious* and the appropriate scope of church interests and involvement. Broad interpreters of the *religious* (which include the ordained clergy) see the ban on pilgrimage to Israel as a cumulative result of numerous church interests and goals, including the ownership of Dayr al-Sultan, peaceful relations between Coptic Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Egypt, the individual blessings obtained by believers in visiting Jerusalem, and greater humanitarian ethics in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. These issues each present a certain benefit and risk to the collective church body, which is assessed, with the end result being the need to ban the pilgrimage for the collective good of the church (at the expense of the soteriological benefit of individual believers in participating in the pilgrimage). In this framework, it is difficult to access what exactly must change for the ban to disappear; the necessary ending conditions are rather seen as a general transformation in the status quo to shift the greater benefit toward a resuming of the pilgrimage, but there is much potential for certain circumstantial visits to Israel anyhow that are seen to be in the greater interest.

In contrast, narrow interpreters (found within the research for this article to exclusively consist of lay members of the church) view the sole appropriate *religious* concern to be the salvation of the church's members. As such, the ban on pilgrimage is conceived of as either inappropriate (a political move by an apolitical institution), or a humanitarian-ethical platform that, while noble, is entirely a personal decision. The scope of the religious is thus fixed into the pursuit of salvation and nothing more.

Not only are the aims of church itself debated in the pilgrimage ban, but also the roles of the authority of that institution: the patriarch. Pope Shenouda III has attempted to free his power from the canon law that delineate the responsibilities and limitations of his office through the exercise of what he deems, "civic opinions." These opinions, as shown by ethnographic interviews, are popular accepted to be synonymous with official church policy, thus giving the patriarch the ability to act outside of the official constraints of his office.

However, patriarchal authority is also questioned, ironically enough, through its punishment. Historically, the public apology created a subversive sentiment against the pope by demonstrating the amount of believers still going on pilgrimage and the ease by which they were exonerated. Today, the need for direct papal forgiveness provides a way for the patriarch to assert his authority. However, these measures also use official ecclesiastical threats of denial of the Holy Communion and excommunication as their basis, which critics can use to reveal their perception that the pope is acting outside of the proscribed, normative functions of his office. In addition, certain factions within the church fail to carry out the official punishment as it is seen as being overly centralized for such "insignificant" infractions, effectively ignoring the patriarch's wishes and preventing any punishment from being delivered. Finally, some limit the church's

official capacity to an advisor, making it unable to punish believers for their disobedience and thus severely limiting the power wielded by the patriarch to the merely symbolic.

The pilgrimage ban also fits into a centuries-old conflict within the Coptic Orthodox Church over the relative positions of Palestine and Egypt as parts of the Holy Land. The former's Biblical support has long made it the sole claimant to the title, despite the Coptic Orthodox Church's official doctrine of the visit of the holy family providing Egypt with a supposedly equal sacred status. Using the ban, the church has been able to restate this position, highlighting the commensurate status of Egypt to Jerusalem for the purpose of gaining blessings. More significantly, by preventing travel to Jerusalem, it has forced many Coptic Orthodox believers to turn toward the holy sites of Egypt for these blessings, resulting in a gradual process of their greater consecration. Although ethnographic interviews show that Egypt has yet to assume a homologous position to Jerusalem for many believers, increasing frequency of events like the mariophanies of 1968 show how Egypt is beginning to relive the holy family's journey, strengthening this position of being part of the Holy Land.

Finally, Pope Shenouda III has adeptly used popular Egyptian views on Israel to tie the Coptic Orthodox Church's doctrines to national sentiments, while other Judeo-Christian groups are linked with the unpopular Israelis. Framing this ecumenical doctrinal debate within this issue has allowed the Coptic Orthodox Church to articulate itself as the true variant of the catholic and apostolic church and rightful heir to the Judeo-Christian tradition within Egypt, which is then demonstrated by the pilgrimage ban. The ban on travel to Jerusalem thus comes to embody the church's doctrinal superiority in Egypt by opposing Israel.

These different discourses and issues show how the Jerusalem pilgrimage ban is used as a dynamic forum within the Coptic Orthodox Church as it enters the 21st Century. Without an obvious ending time in sight, one can assume that this policy will continue to both shape and be shaped by forces within the Coptic Orthodox community, at the same time reflecting and altering the constitution of the church itself. An awareness of its development then becomes a barometer for the state of the church; at a time when the Coptic Orthodox Church is experiencing a new growth and expansion internationally into a universal church, this awareness can provide even more critical insight into the nature and character of this community¹⁵³.

153

Although this paper has addressed many of the functions performed in and through the ban, there are still other topics of vital import to the institution of the Coptic Orthodox Church as well as the Coptic Orthodox community that are being played out within this ban. Foremost among these is the issue of the internationalization and globalization of the church, as it changes from the strictly national church of Egypt to a universal church worldwide, and how these non-Egyptian citizen believers are treated by the church institution. This issue will be addressed in a revision of this article after the author completes the necessary fieldwork outside of Egypt to represent the global Coptic Orthodox community.

Bibliography:

“Copts disobey the pope; make pilgrimage to Jerusalem with Israeli visa.” Abu al-Khayr, Ahmad. Sawt al-Ummah (May 2), 2005. 6. Arab West Report, 2005. 3 Aug. 2009.

http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=6369&year=2005&week=18&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

“Pope Shenouda III: Pilgrimage to Jerusalem is not a religious duty.” Adil, Michael; al-Dab, Diana. Rose al-Yusuf (May 7), 2006. 1. Arab West Report: 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.

http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12850&year=2006&week=19&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Hasan, Dina.

“Pope Shenouda: We reject protection from any foreign country.” Al-Ahali (February 2), 2000. Arab West Report, 2000. 3 Aug. 2009.

http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=2621&year=2000&week=5&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

“Egyptians are living in a climate of freedom and democracy under the shade of the leadership of President Mubarak.” Al-Ahram (February 28), 2001. 15. Arab West Report, 2001. 3 Aug. 2009.

http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=3696&year=2001&week=9&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

“Jamal Asaad is wondering: Are Copts obliged to agree with the political views of the pope?” Asaad Abd al-Malik, Jamal. Sawt al-Ummah (January 24), 2001. 6. Arab West Report, 2001. <

http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=3581&year=2001&week=4&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

The Coptic Encyclopedia. *Dayr al-Sultan*. Archbishop Basilios; Atiya, Aziz S. (ed.). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company (Volume 3), 1991.

“Copts’ patriotism behind stand not to visit Jerusalem.” Aziz, Andarawus. Rose al-Yusuf (January 2), 2006. 7. Arab West Report, 2006.

http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=8318&year=2006&week=1&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation al-Misri, Amr.

Be Thou There: The Holy Family’s Journey in Egypt the Sacred Geography of the Coptic

Church. Bertram, Carel. Al Jadid, 2003. 3 Aug, 2009.
<<http://www.aljadid.com/reviews/Bertram%20-%20The%20Holy%20Familys%20Journey.html>>

Egypt: International Religious Freedom Report 2007, The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 2007. 3 Aug. 2009.
<<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90209.htm>>.

The Early Coptic Papacy: The Egyptian Church and its Leadership in Late Antiquity. Davis, Stephen J. Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2004.

“Christian anger for attacking the Church of the Nativity: Press review based on Al-Ahali, April 3, 2002 (p.1); Al-Gomhuria, April 3,5&8, 2002 (pp.5,4&2); Al-Akhbar, April 3&8, 2002 (pp.10&1); Asharq Al-Awsat, April 4&8, 2002 (p.2&3); Al-Ahram, April 5&8, 2002 (pp.13&1); Watani, April 7, 2002 (p.1); Sawt Al-Umma, April 8, 2002 (p.14); Al-Usbua, April 8, 2002 (p.25).” Fawzi, Nirmin. Arab West Report, 2002. 3 Aug. 2009.
<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=15799&year=2002&aweek=14&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>.

“A national conference to support the Palestinians in the St. Mark Cathedral: Press review based on Akher Saa, April 10, 2002 (pp.11-14); Al-Akhbar, April 12, 2002 (pp.1&6); Al-Gomhuria, April 12, 2002 (p.5); Al-Wafd, April 12, 2002 (pp.1,4&7); Al-Ahram, April 12&15, 2002 (pp.9&10); Al-Arabi, April 14, 2002 (p.5); Watani, April 14, 2002 (pp.1&16); Al-Usbua, April 15, 2002 (p.19).” Fawzi, Nirmin. Arab West Report, 2002. 3 Aug. 2009.
<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=15800&year=2002&aweek=15&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>.

The Treaty of Peace between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the State of Israel, 26 March 1979. The Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Government of the State of Israel. 1979. 3 Aug. 2009.
<http://www.mfa.gov.eg/MFA_Portal/en-GB/Foreign_Policy/Treaties/Treaty+of+Peace+between+the+Arab+Republic+of+Egypt+and+the+State+of+Israel+26+March+1979.htm>

Christianity in Late Antiquity. Harvey, Susan Ashbrook. Providence, RI: Lectures at Brown University. Spring 2007.

Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt: The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality. Hassan, S.S. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

“Reviving an Ancient Faith; two strong-willed reformers bring Coptic Orthodoxy back to life.” Hulsman, Cornelis. *Christianity Today* (December 3), 2001. 16 Aug. 2009.

< <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/december3/2.38.html> >

“Marriage, politics, and Jerusalem.” Jindi, Husni; Shukr Allah, Hani; Tadrus, Mirz. Al-Ahram Weekly (April 1-7), 1999. Arab West Report, 1999. 3 Aug. 2009.
<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=1038&ayear=1999&aweek=14&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

“Pope reiterates warnings to Copts against visiting Jerusalem.” Al-Liwa’ al-Islami (May 11), 2006. 1. Arab West Report, 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.
<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12938&ayear=2006&aweek=20&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation al-Misri, ^cAmr.

“Sheik of Azhar withdraws his call to visit al-Aqsa amid strong reactions: Press Reviews based on al-Arabi, January 21, 2001 (p. 6); Al Sharq-Al Awsat, 17&21, 2001 (P.2&2).” Lufti, Jihan. Arab West Report, 2001. 3 Aug. 2009.
<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=14828&ayear=2001&aweek=3&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Lufti, Jihan.

“Pope Shenouda refuses an Israeli proposal to return al-Sultan Monastery to the Egyptian Church.” Al-Maydan (January 10), 2007. Arab West Report, 2007. 3 Aug. 2009.
<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=15349&ayear=2007&t=s&char=0>. Translation al-^cAwadi, Nirmin.

Desert Root and Global Branches, McCallum, Fiona. *Bulletin of the Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies* 7 (2), Fall/Winter 2005, 69-97.

The Political Role of the Patriarch in the Contemporary Middle East, McCallum, Fiona. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 6, November 2007, 923-940.

“Egypt’s Copts in Crisis.” Medina, Sara; Wurmstedt, Robert C.; Harrison, Nathaniel. *Time* (September 28), 1981. 3 Aug. 2009.
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,953135,00.html>>.

Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages. Meinardus, Otto F.A. Cairo, New York: The American University of Cairo Press, 2002.

Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity. Meinardus, Otto F.A. Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1999.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III. “Biography.” Father Mikhail E. Mikhail. CopticChurch.net, 1998-2005. 3 Aug. 2009.
<<http://www.copticchurch.net/topics/pope/#Biography>>

“Pope Shenouda: I will not enter Jerusalem unless it is with the Sheikh of al-Azhar.”

Nasr, Mahmud. October (April 16), 2000. 46-47. Arab West Report, 2000. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=2888&ayear=2000&aweek=16&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

“The wisdom of the pope.” October (March 31), 2002.

21. Arab West Report, 2002. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=8972&ayear=2002&aweek=13&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

Jerusalem – Map of the Holy Sepulchre. PlanetWare Inc., 1995-2009. 3 Aug. 2009.

<<http://www.planetware.com/map/jerusalem-church-of-the-holy-sepulchre-map-isr-holysep.htm>>

Renewal in the Coptic Orthodox Church: notes of the Ph.D. thesis of Revd. Dr. Wolfram Reiss. Summarized translation of History of the Coptic Orthodox Sunday School movement and the acceptance of their reforms in the renewal movements of the present day Coptic Orthodox Church. Reiss, Wolfram; Hulsman, Cornelis (trans. & ed.). Arab West Report: 2002. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=9412&ayear=2002&aweek=46&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>.

“Copts buy Jerusalem’s soil.” Rose al-Yusuf (April 23), 2006. 12. Arab West Report, 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12690&ayear=2006&aweek=17&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Al-Shami, Shayma’.

“Love your pope.” Sa^cd, ^cAdil Girgis. Rose al-Yusuf (March 28), 2007. 6. Arab West Report, 2007. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=16408&ayear=2007&aweek=13&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation ^cIsmat, Nuhayr.

“Why Pope Shenouda allowed only businessmen to visit Jerusalem?” Sa^cd, ^cAdil Girgis. Rose al-Yusuf (May 19), 2006. 84. Arab West Report, 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12947&ayear=2006&aweek=20&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Salah, Shadi.

“Pope Shenouda III brandishes church penalties against Copts visiting Jerusalem.”

Sadiq, Ashraf. Al-Ahram (September 4), 2006. 19. Arab West Report, 2006. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=13764&year=2006&aweek=36&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation al-Misri, ^cAmr.

“Shenouda: Palestinian resistance is not terrorism.” Al-Sa^cid, Sana’. Al-Musawwar (October 12), 2001. 44. Arab West Report, 2001. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=12324&year=2001&aweek=40&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

“Pope Shenouda: 31 Years on the Papal Chair.” Salamah, Usamah; ^cAtif Hilmi. Rose al-Yusuf, editions of 2-8 Nov. 2002, 50-53. Arab West Report, 2002. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=9376&year=2002&aweek=44&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Arab West Report.

Vita of Saint Mary of Egypt. Sophronios of Jerusalem. 3 Aug. 2009.

<<http://www.monachos.net/content/patristics/patristictexts/182-life-of-mary>>

“Copts abroad have wronged Pope Shenouda.” Sulayman, Fa’iq Mikha’il. Al-Fajr (January 26), 2009. 23. Arab West Report, 2009. 3 Aug. 2009.

<http://www.arabwestreport.info/AWR/article_details.php?article_id=21880&year=2009&aweek=4&article_title=&article_t_date=&article_p_date=&article_p_week=&t=f&char=0>. Translation Saqqa, Carlos.

The author would also like to specifically thank Efthymia Georgiou, without whom such a thorough compilation of articles, both in scope and depth, simply would not have been possible.