

Historical Contributions of the Copts

Contributed by Website Admin
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The School of Alexandria

Undoubtedly, the School of Alexandria was the earliest and most important institution of theological learning in Christian antiquity. It grew tremendously in the first four centuries of the world. After the Roman Empire officially accepted Christianity in 313 AD, Alexandria became a renowned center of learning, especially in theology. The School was essential in the education of both recent converts and future patriarchs of Christianity throughout the world. Many of the great deans of the school include St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-254 A.D.), a gifted author, Origen (185 A.D.-264 A.D.) the brilliant scholar; and St. Didymus the Blind, who formed a system of engraved writing for the blind fifteen centuries before Braille.

The Ecumenical Councils

As a result of this great tradition of theology, there arose a number of theologians who were well respected and recognized in the Christian world. Many of these scholars played a critical role in the development of Christian theology in the three recognized Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (325 AD), Constantinople (381 AD), and Ephesus (431 AD).

While still a young deacon at Nicea, St. Athanasius, the 20th Patriarch of Alexandria, defended the Divinity of Christ and was one of the writers of the Christian Creed, which is followed by most Christians today. Another Egyptian sage was St. Cyril of Alexandria, who stressed the unity of the Divinity and Humanity of Christ in the third Council of Ephesus (431 AD). Although the Coptic Church has been unjustly labeled as being 'Monophysite' (believing in only one nature of Christ), St. Cyril explained centuries ago that the Coptic Church believes in "one incarnated nature of God the Word"--that is, one union of two natures--one fully human nature and one fully divine nature.

Monasticism

The Coptic Church is also famous for its asceticism and its monasticism, a long-standing tradition founded by St. Anthony the Great, the "Father of Monasticism" (251-356 AD), St. Pachomius, St. Macarius and St. Shenouda the Archimandrite. This monastic order, based on principles of poverty, obedience and chastity, became the foundation from which many of the western orders are based upon.

Martyrdom

As Christianity grew, the attempts to quash it became fierce. The Coptic Church is recognized as having suffered one of the most violent waves of persecution in Christian history, and thus our Coptic Calendar commences at the beginning of the reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian, at whose hands thousands of Christians died.