

Counterfeit Christianity and False Religions

Coptic Orthodox Church

Zion's Roar Holy Spirit Ministry
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The Coptic Orthodox Church
Ancient Tradition Examined Under Scripture
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Brethren,

There are times when I sit quietly and wonder how easily the human heart can deceive itself. Not because truth is hidden from us, nor because God has failed to provide instruction, but because we become attached to things we want to be true.

The longer I walk this path, the more I have come to realize that some of the greatest deceptions do not enter through ignorance. They enter through affection. They enter through admiration. They enter through familiarity. They enter through relationships and loyalties that slowly persuade people to stop examining the things they once tested carefully.

Over the years I have watched individuals spend years exposing error in one place, only to embrace the same error when it appeared somewhere else under a different name. I have seen people who could immediately recognize contradictions when they appeared in a church they distrusted, yet somehow become unable to recognize those same contradictions once they developed respect for the people presenting them.

This has caused me great concern, not because truth has become difficult to find, but because the human heart has an amazing ability to protect the things it has already decided it wants to believe.

Many people who leave the Roman Catholic Church do so because they become troubled by doctrines and practices they believe cannot be supported by Scripture. They question prayers directed toward Mary. They reject the practice of asking departed saints to intercede on behalf of the living. They become concerned with religious traditions that appear to stand alongside, or even above, the written Word of God. In many cases, these concerns are what first motivate them to begin searching the Scriptures more diligently.

During that season, they often become careful students. They compare teachings with Scripture. They ask difficult questions. They refuse to accept a doctrine merely because it has existed for centuries or because it is defended by respected religious leaders.

Yet something often changes.

In their desire to escape one system, they encounter another that appears more ancient, more authentic, more connected to the early church, or simply more sincere in its presentation. As time passes, the careful scrutiny that once governed every doctrine begins to weaken. Questions that were once considered essential are no longer asked with the same intensity. Practices that once seemed obviously unbiblical are viewed differently because they are now being presented by people who appear trustworthy, knowledgeable, and devoted.

The result is often surprising. A person may spend years rejecting prayers directed toward Mary, only to later defend similar prayers because they are practiced within a different religious tradition. Another may condemn appeals made to departed saints while attending one church, yet later justify those same appeals after becoming convinced that another church possesses a more authentic history. Others reject tradition as an authority when examining one denomination, only to embrace tradition when it supports a church they have come to admire.

What makes this so troubling is that the doctrines themselves have not changed. The Scriptures have not changed. In many cases, the practices have not changed either. What has changed is the way those practices are being evaluated. A different standard has quietly been introduced, and once that happens, doctrines are no longer being measured solely by the Word of God.

There is another example that deserves careful consideration.

Many who leave the Roman Catholic Church eventually become convinced that baptism is an essential part of God's plan of salvation. As they study the Scriptures, they encounter passages that connect baptism with obedience, forgiveness, and entrance into the covenant. They read the preaching of Peter, the conversion accounts recorded in Acts, and the instructions given by the apostles. In doing so, they often conclude that baptism cannot simply be dismissed as an optional act with no spiritual significance.

When they later encounter the Coptic Orthodox Church, they may initially be encouraged by the strong emphasis placed upon baptism. They hear language that sounds much closer to the apostolic teaching than what they previously encountered elsewhere. Because of this, they often view the church as having corrected an error they believe exists within other traditions.

Yet this is precisely where careful examination must continue.

If repentance, faith, confession, and baptism appear together throughout the apostolic record, how should we understand the baptism of an infant? An infant has not yet heard the Gospel, has not exercised personal faith, has not confessed Christ, and has not knowingly turned away from sin. Whatever position one ultimately adopts regarding baptism, these questions deserve honest consideration because they concern the very pattern left for us by the apostles.

What concerns me is that many people stop asking questions once they find a church that teaches something they already agree with. They may recognize that baptism is important, yet fail to examine whether the baptism being practiced follows the pattern established in Scripture. In such cases, one error has not been replaced with truth; it has simply been exchanged for a different tradition.

For this reason, the purpose of this study is not merely to examine the Coptic Orthodox Church. Nor is it written to mock, attack, or belittle those who attend it. Many who belong to that church are sincere in their desire to serve God. The issue before us is not sincerity, but truth.

What this study seeks to examine is whether the same standard is being applied consistently.

If a practice is rejected because it cannot be supported by Scripture, then it should remain rejected regardless of who teaches it. If a doctrine is defended, it should be defended because it is found in the Word of God, not because it comes from an ancient institution, a respected leader, or a tradition that has survived for many centuries.

As we proceed, I ask the reader to set aside loyalty to denominations, attachment to traditions, and admiration for religious institutions. Let us examine each doctrine on its own merits. Let us compare every teaching, every practice, and every claim with the Scriptures. Let us be willing to follow the evidence wherever it leads, even when it challenges beliefs we have long held or systems we have long respected.

For in the end, the question before us is not whether a church is ancient, respected, sincere, or influential. The question is whether its teachings can be supported by the Word of God.

It is my prayer that every reader approaches this study with humility, honesty, and a genuine desire to know the truth, for those who truly love the truth have nothing to fear from examination.

John,
A servant of Christ

THE CENTRAL ISSUE

As this study unfolds, the reader will encounter teachings and practices that differ from those found in Scripture. Some of these differences are obvious. Others are subtle. Some involve prayer. Others involve baptism, priesthood, intercession, tradition, or sacramental theology.

Yet the greatest concern is not any single doctrine.

The greatest concern is the tendency to apply different standards to different churches.

Many who reject the Roman Catholic Church do so because they object to prayers directed toward Mary, appeals to departed saints, priestly mediation, or traditions that cannot be established from Scripture. Yet some of those same individuals later accept similar practices within the Coptic Orthodox Church because they perceive it as more ancient, more authentic, or more faithful to the early church.

Likewise, some leave churches that minimize baptism and are attracted to the Coptic Church because it strongly emphasizes baptism as part of salvation. At first glance, this appears to be a correction. However, closer examination reveals that the same church administers baptism to infants who have neither repented, believed, confessed Christ, nor consciously obeyed the Gospel.

In both situations, the same danger exists.

A person may correctly identify one error while overlooking another, may leave one tradition while embracing a different tradition and may exchange one religious system for another without ever asking whether either system fully agrees with Scripture.

For this reason, the purpose of this study is not to compare Rome against Alexandria, nor one denomination against another. The purpose is to compare every doctrine, every practice, and every claim against the authority of God's Word.

Truth does not become true because it is ancient, nor does it become true because it is sincere. And truth does not become true because it is practiced by millions.

Truth remains truth because God has spoken.

There is also a common thread that will appear repeatedly throughout this study. Each of the doctrines examined ultimately places something between the believer and Christ. Whether it is a saint, a priest, a sacrament, a ritual, or a tradition, the result is the same. The simplicity of direct access to God through Christ becomes replaced by dependence upon religious intermediaries.

As we proceed, the question is not merely whether a doctrine is ancient, respected, or widely accepted. The question is whether Scripture authorizes anything to stand between the believer and the Savior.

ANSWERING THE CLAIMS

Before examining the doctrines and practices of the Coptic Orthodox Church, it is necessary to address several common claims frequently made concerning its history, authority, and relationship to other Christian traditions. These claims are often presented as evidence that the church should be accepted as the authentic continuation of the apostolic faith. Because they form the foundation upon which many later arguments are built, they deserve careful examination.

The first claim is that the Coptic Orthodox Church is the original church built by Peter. While the Coptic Church traces its origins to Mark the Evangelist and the church established in Alexandria, Scripture never records Peter founding a church in Alexandria, nor does it identify Alexandria as the center of apostolic authority. The New Testament records Peter's ministry among the Jews and his work in various regions, but it does not establish the claim that he founded what later became the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Even if Mark preached in Egypt, apostolic preaching does not automatically validate every doctrine later associated with a religious institution. This distinction is often overlooked in discussions of apostolic succession. A church may trace its historical origins to an apostolic figure and still depart from apostolic doctrine. The New Testament repeatedly warns that error can arise from within the very communities established by the apostles themselves. The question is therefore not whether a church can trace a historical line to an apostle, but whether it continues to teach what the apostles taught.

This principle must govern every historical claim made by any church. If apostolic succession alone established truth, then doctrinal examination would become unnecessary. Yet the apostles themselves warned that error would arise from among those who claimed to follow them. The authority of a church is

therefore measured not by who founded it, but by whether it remains faithful to the doctrine that was delivered.

The second claim is that the Roman Catholic Church broke away from the Coptic Church. Historically, this is an oversimplification of events. The division that occurred following the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD involved disputes over Christology, ecclesiastical authority, and church governance among several major centers of Christianity. The Roman Church did not emerge from the Coptic Church, nor was Rome originally subordinate to Alexandria. Both churches developed from different apostolic regions and eventually separated over doctrinal disagreements. The existence of a historical split does not establish which side preserved apostolic truth. Scripture, not historical succession, must remain the final standard of examination.

The third claim is that the Coptic Orthodox Church does not pray to Mary or use the rosary. It is true that the Coptic Church does not use the Roman Catholic rosary in its traditional Western form. However, the absence of the rosary does not eliminate the broader issue of prayer and intercession. Coptic liturgical prayers contain direct appeals to Mary and the saints, asking them to intercede before God on behalf of believers. Whether such prayers are recited through a rosary, a prayer rope, or a liturgical service is secondary. The biblical question remains the same: does Scripture authorize believers to direct prayers toward departed saints and request their intercession?

The final claim is that the Coptic Orthodox Church alone has preserved the original faith. This claim is perhaps the most significant because it serves as the foundation for accepting every other doctrine. Yet the New Testament never instructs believers to determine truth by identifying the oldest institution, the longest lineage, or the most ancient tradition. Instead, believers are repeatedly directed to test all things by the Word of God. Age does not guarantee accuracy. Historical continuity does not

guarantee faithfulness. A doctrine is true because it agrees with Scripture, not because it can trace its existence through many centuries.

For this reason, the purpose of this study is not to determine which church possesses the oldest traditions, but which teachings can be demonstrated from the apostolic record. The authority of a church is not established by its claims concerning itself. It is established by its faithfulness to the doctrine once delivered to the saints. Apostolic succession without apostolic doctrine is succession in name only.

MARY, THE SAINTS, AND INTERCESSION

One of the most significant differences between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the apostolic pattern found in Scripture concerns the role assigned to Mary and the departed saints.

The Coptic Church teaches that believers may ask Mary and the saints to intercede before God on their behalf. Defenders of this practice often argue that they are not worshipping Mary or the saints, but merely requesting their prayers in the same way one believer may ask another believer to pray for him. At first glance, this explanation appears reasonable, and for many people it becomes the justification for accepting practices they once rejected elsewhere.

However, Coptic liturgical prayers contain direct appeals to Mary and the saints, asking them to intercede before God on behalf of believers. While the Church maintains that only God can forgive sins, it nevertheless encourages believers to seek the intercession of Mary and the saints concerning those very matters. Some of their leaders defend this practice by asking, “If you ask Mary to intercede for your sins, would Christ deny His own mother her request?”

The concern is that such reasoning effectively places Mary and the saints in a mediatorial role between believers and Christ, even though Christ Himself is presented in Scripture as the mediator between God and men. The implication is that an appeal made through Mary carries a special influence before Christ, who then presents the request before the Father. In practice, this creates an additional layer of heavenly intercession that believers are encouraged to seek, despite the biblical emphasis on direct access to the Father through Christ alone.

The difficulty is that the comparison does not come from Scripture itself. The Bible certainly encourages believers to pray

for one another, but every example involves living members of the body of Christ communicating with one another within the context of earthly life. The apostles repeatedly instructed believers to pray for each other, bear one another's burdens, and encourage one another in faith. What Scripture never records is a believer directing requests toward departed saints or asking those who have died to present petitions before God on his behalf. This silence is especially noteworthy because the apostles had every opportunity to teach such a practice if it had been intended for the church. Peter died. James died. Stephen died. Countless faithful believers died during the apostolic age. Yet nowhere do the apostles encourage believers to begin communicating with them after their deaths. The absence of such instruction becomes powerful evidence against the practice itself.

This distinction becomes important because the prayers contained within Coptic liturgy go far beyond simply remembering faithful servants of God. The service books contain direct appeals to Mary and the apostles. Worshippers ask Mary to intercede before Christ and ask the apostles to pray for the forgiveness of their sins. These are not statements about historical figures, nor are they expressions of gratitude for their faithfulness. They are requests directed toward individuals who have died.

The question that naturally follows is whether such a practice was taught by Christ or His apostles.

When the New Testament discusses prayer, believers are consistently directed toward the Father through the Son. Christ taught His disciples how to pray and never instructed them to address Abraham, Moses, Elijah, John the Baptist, or His own mother. Likewise, after Christ's resurrection and ascension, the apostles never instructed converts to seek the intercession of departed believers. The book of Acts records the growth of the church, the preaching of the Gospel, and the establishment of congregations throughout the Roman world, yet no example exists

of a believer praying to Mary or requesting assistance from a departed saint.

This absence becomes even more significant when considered alongside the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ.” The verse is often quoted, but its importance is sometimes overlooked. Paul was not merely exalting Christ above other mediators. He was explaining the unique role Christ occupies between God and mankind. Through His death, resurrection, and ongoing intercession, Christ accomplished what no priest, prophet, apostle, or saint could accomplish.

Because of this, the New Testament consistently directs believers toward Christ rather than toward additional heavenly intercessors. The believer's confidence rests in the fact that Christ is sufficient. He is not one mediator among many. He is the mediator provided by God.

For this reason, the practice of appealing to Mary or the saints creates a theological problem. It introduces spiritual relationships that are never established in Scripture and encourages believers to seek assistance from individuals whom the apostles never instructed them to approach. While the practice is often defended as honor or respect, the actual prayers reveal something more. They assign an active intercessory role to figures whom Scripture never presents as participants in the believer's access to God.

The concern, therefore, is not whether Mary should be respected. Scripture itself honors her as the mother of Christ. Nor is the concern whether faithful believers should be remembered and appreciated. The concern is whether God has authorized believers to direct prayers toward those who have died. The apostolic record provides no such authorization. Instead, it consistently points believers toward Christ as the one through whom they approach the Father. For this reason, the practice of invoking Mary and the saints cannot be defended from the New Testament pattern. It depends upon later tradition rather than apostolic

instruction, and in doing so it shifts attention away from the sufficiency of Christ's mediation and toward a system of intercession that the Scriptures never establish.

THE ROLE OF PRIESTS - A MAN BETWEEN GOD AND THE PEOPLE

The doctrine of priesthood occupies a central place within the Coptic Orthodox Church. While many Christians use the word "pastor," "elder," or "minister" to describe church leadership, the Coptic system maintains a distinct priesthood that functions as a mediator between the congregation and God. This priesthood is not merely administrative. It is deeply connected to confession, absolution, sacramental ministry, blessings, and the administration of what the church considers channels of divine grace.

This distinction is important because the New Testament presents a very different picture of the relationship between believers and God under the New Covenant. Throughout the Old Testament, priests served as intermediaries because the people could not directly approach God's presence. Sacrifices were offered through the priesthood, and access to the Most Holy Place was restricted. The priest stood between the worshipper and God because the covenant itself required mediation.

The book of Hebrews explains that Christ fulfilled and completed that system. His sacrifice was not one sacrifice among many, nor was it a temporary provision that required continual repetition. By offering Himself, Christ accomplished what the Levitical priesthood could never accomplish. The result was not simply a change in priesthood, but a change in access. Believers were no longer dependent upon an earthly priest to approach God because they now had direct access through Christ.

This is what makes the Coptic understanding of priesthood so significant. The priest is not viewed merely as a teacher or shepherd. He occupies a sacramental role that places him between the believer and the blessings being sought. Confession is made to him. Absolution is pronounced by him. Blessings are received

through him. In practice, he becomes an essential component in the believer's spiritual life.

The use of the title "Abuna," meaning "our father," reflects this structure. Defenders of the title often argue that it is merely a sign of respect. However, titles cannot be separated from the systems in which they function. Within the Coptic Church, the title is connected to a priestly office that possesses spiritual authority over the congregation. It is therefore necessary to consider Christ's warning in Matthew 23:9 within its full context. Christ was confronting religious systems that elevated men into positions of spiritual dependence and authority. His concern was not vocabulary alone, but the tendency of religious institutions to place men in positions that belong ultimately to God.

This same pattern appears in practices commonly observed within the church. Members often kiss the priest's hand because it is believed to have been sanctified through handling the Eucharist. Such actions may be intended as expressions of reverence, yet they reveal an understanding of priesthood that extends beyond simple respect for church leadership. The gesture reflects the belief that the priest occupies a uniquely holy position unavailable to ordinary believers.

Likewise, the practice of blessing individuals while holding a cross between the fingers reinforces the idea that grace is being transmitted through the ministry of the priest. While these rituals are often defended as symbolic, they function within a larger theological framework that places the priest in an intermediary role between God and the worshipper.

The New Testament consistently points believers in a different direction. Church leaders certainly existed, and their role was important. Elders were appointed. Teachers instructed congregations. Evangelists proclaimed the Gospel. Yet none of these offices functioned as mediators of grace. The apostles never taught believers to seek forgiveness through a priest, nor did they

present church leaders as channels through which divine favor flowed.

Instead, the New Testament repeatedly emphasizes that every believer has direct access to God through Christ. This access is not granted through ordination, ritual, or ecclesiastical authority. It is granted through the finished work of Christ Himself.

For this reason, the concern is not merely the use of titles or ceremonial practices. The concern is the theological structure that stands behind them. Whenever a religious system places a man between the believer and privileges that Scripture attributes directly to Christ, it risks rebuilding barriers that the New Covenant was designed to remove.

The apostles directed believers toward Christ as their advocate, high priest, and mediator. The more a system encourages dependence upon an earthly priesthood, the further it moves away from that apostolic pattern. The question is therefore not whether priests may be respected, but whether Scripture authorizes them to function in the roles assigned to them by the Coptic Orthodox Church.

BAPTISM: A RITUAL WITHOUT REPENTANCE

One of the doctrines that initially attracts many people to the Coptic Orthodox Church is its strong emphasis on baptism. Unlike many modern churches that treat baptism as a symbolic act with little connection to salvation, the Coptic Church teaches that baptism is necessary and that it plays an essential role in the believer's relationship with God. For individuals who have spent years studying passages such as Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, and 1 Peter 3:21, this emphasis can appear refreshing and biblically grounded.

For that reason, many people stop their examination at this point. They hear a church affirm the importance of baptism and assume that they have found a system that faithfully preserves the apostolic teaching. Yet this is precisely where careful examination becomes necessary.

The question is not whether baptism matters.

The New Testament clearly teaches that it does.

The question is whether the baptism being practiced follows the pattern established by Christ and His apostles.

Throughout the book of Acts, baptism consistently follows the preaching of the Gospel. Men and women hear the message, believe it, repent of their sins, confess their faith, and then submit to baptism. This pattern appears repeatedly. Baptism is never presented as an isolated ritual detached from faith and repentance. Rather, it functions as the response of a believer who has come to trust in Christ and desires to obey Him.

The Coptic Orthodox Church departs from this pattern through its practice of infant baptism. Infants are baptized shortly after birth and are taught to have received regeneration through the sacrament itself. According to this understanding, the child becomes part of the covenant community and receives spiritual

benefits long before personal faith, repentance, or conscious obedience are possible.

The difficulty with this teaching is that it reverses the order consistently found in Scripture.

When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, his audience was not composed of infants. They were individuals who had heard the message, were convicted by it, and asked what they should do. Peter responded by calling them to repentance and baptism. The command was directed toward people capable of hearing, understanding, and responding. The command to repent assumes personal accountability. Repentance is not merely a change in circumstance but a conscious turning of the heart toward God. It requires understanding, conviction, and personal responsibility. An infant possesses none of these qualities. Whatever position one adopts concerning children and God's mercy, the command itself demonstrates that Peter was addressing accountable hearers rather than infants incapable of responding.

The same pattern appears throughout Acts. The Ethiopian eunuch heard the Gospel before requesting baptism. The jailer in Philippi heard the Word before believing. Those who received baptism did so as participants in the process, not as passive recipients incapable of understanding what was taking place.

For this reason, appeals to household baptisms fail to establish infant baptism. Scripture records entire households being baptized, but it never states that infants were included. More importantly, the surrounding passages repeatedly mention hearing the Word, believing, rejoicing, and responding in faith. These descriptions fit conscious participants, not infants incapable of understanding the Gospel.

The argument often shifts to Acts 2:39, where Peter declares that the promise is "unto you, and to your children." Yet the context

reveals that Peter is describing the scope of those to whom the promise is available, not eliminating the conditions he had just established. Repentance remains the command. Faith remains necessary. The promise extends broadly, but it is still received through personal response.

The same problem appears when infant baptism is defended through the concept of proxy faith. Because an infant cannot believe for himself, parents, sponsors, or the church are said to believe on the child's behalf until he is old enough to embrace the faith personally. While this explanation may appear compassionate, it finds no support in the apostolic record. Scripture consistently presents faith as personal, individual, and accountable. One person may teach another, encourage another, and pray for another, but no one believes on behalf of another for salvation.

Throughout Scripture, faith is always presented as the response of the individual being saved. The blind believed. The jailer believed. The eunuch believed. The three thousand believed. Never does Scripture present salvation as the result of borrowed faith, inherited faith, or delegated faith. The sinner himself must respond to the Gospel.

This is why the doctrine creates such serious concerns. Baptism in Scripture is connected to repentance, faith, confession, and obedience. The Coptic system preserves the external act while removing the conditions that consistently accompany it in the New Testament.

As a result, many people grow up believing they have experienced the new birth when they have never personally repented, believed, confessed Christ, or consciously obeyed the Gospel. They are taught to trust in a ceremony performed upon them as infants rather than in a response they themselves have made before God.

The concern is not merely that infant baptism differs from the apostolic pattern. The greater concern is that it can provide assurance where no biblical assurance exists. A person may assume he has entered the covenant because a ritual was performed over him, while never experiencing the repentance and faith that the New Testament repeatedly places at the center of conversion.

The apostles never presented baptism as a substitute for faith. Nor did they present faith as something that could be borrowed from parents, sponsors, priests, or the church itself. The Gospel calls each individual to hear, believe, repent, confess, and obey. Baptism occupies an important place within that response, but it does not replace the response itself.

For this reason, the question before us is not whether baptism is necessary. The question is whether a baptism administered to one who has neither believed nor repented can properly be called the baptism taught by the apostles. When measured against the consistent pattern of the New Testament, the answer becomes increasingly difficult to avoid.

PRAYERS TO THE SAINTS AND MARY: THE FALSE SYSTEM OF INTERCESSION

The practice of praying to Mary and the saints is one of the most recognizable features of the Coptic Orthodox Church. While defenders of the practice often insist that they do not worship Mary or the saints, they openly acknowledge asking them to intercede before God on behalf of believers. This distinction is presented as the difference between worship and honor, and for many people it becomes the primary justification for accepting a practice they would otherwise reject.

The question before us, however, is not whether the distinction sounds reasonable. The question is whether the distinction is found in Scripture.

The New Testament certainly teaches believers to pray for one another. Throughout the apostolic writings, Christians are encouraged to bear one another's burdens, pray for one another, and support one another in times of need. These instructions are directed toward living believers who are actively serving together within the body of Christ. What is noticeably absent is any instruction directing believers to seek assistance from departed saints.

This absence is significant because the Coptic liturgy contains direct appeals to Mary and the apostles. Worshipers ask Mary to intercede before Christ and ask the apostles to pray for the forgiveness of their sins. Such prayers are not merely historical acknowledgments or expressions of respect. They are requests directed toward individuals who have died, asking them to intervene on behalf of the living.

The difficulty with this practice is that the apostles never taught it. The book of Acts records the establishment and growth of the church across the Roman world. It records conversions,

persecutions, doctrinal disputes, missionary journeys, and countless examples of prayer. Yet nowhere do we find believers directing prayers toward Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, John the Baptist, Mary, or any other departed servant of God.

This omission becomes even more important when considered alongside the consistent teaching that access to the Father is obtained through Christ. The apostle Paul wrote that there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ. This statement was not written to elevate Christ above a collection of lesser mediators. It was written to establish His unique and exclusive role as mediator between God and mankind.

The New Covenant is built upon the sufficiency of Christ. Through His sacrifice, believers are granted direct access to God. Through His intercession, believers approach the throne of grace with confidence. Through His priesthood, believers receive everything necessary for salvation and reconciliation.

Because of this, the practice of invoking Mary and the saints creates a problem that extends beyond the prayers themselves. It introduces additional intercessors into a relationship that Scripture presents as complete in Christ. The believer is no longer encouraged to approach the Father through Christ alone, but is encouraged to seek the assistance of others who are believed to stand closer to Him.

This raises an unavoidable question. If Christ's mediation is sufficient, why are additional mediators needed? If His intercession is complete, why should believers seek the intercession of others?

The New Testament never presents the believer as lacking access to God. Rather, it repeatedly emphasizes the privilege of approaching Him directly through Christ.

For this reason, the concern is not whether Mary should be respected or whether faithful servants of God should be remembered. Scripture itself honors those who walked faithfully before God. The concern is whether believers are authorized to direct prayers toward those who have died and ask them to obtain forgiveness, mercy, protection, or favor on their behalf.

The apostolic writings provide no such authorization. Instead, they consistently direct believers toward Christ as their advocate, mediator, and high priest. The practice of invoking Mary and the saints therefore rests not upon apostolic instruction, but upon traditions that developed after the apostolic age.

When measured against the New Testament pattern, the system of saintly intercession cannot be reconciled with the simplicity of direct access to God through Christ. What began as honor for departed believers ultimately became a system that encourages dependence upon individuals whom Scripture never instructs believers to approach.

THE ROLE OF PRIESTS: A MAN BETWEEN GOD AND THE PEOPLE

Closely connected to the doctrine of saintly intercession is the doctrine of priestly mediation. While the Coptic Orthodox Church teaches that Mary and the saints intercede in heaven, it also teaches that priests occupy a unique role on earth as spiritual representatives through whom important aspects of the believer's relationship with God are administered.

This priesthood is not merely a matter of church leadership or organization. The priest functions as a central figure within the religious life of the congregation. He hears confessions, pronounces absolution, administers the sacraments, blesses the people, and serves as the primary spiritual authority within the local assembly. Because of this, the doctrine of priesthood deserves careful examination.

The title commonly given to Coptic priests reveals how this office is understood. Priests are addressed as "Abuna," an Arabic word meaning "our father." Defenders of the practice often argue that the title is simply a respectful expression used to honor spiritual leadership. While respect for faithful leaders is certainly biblical, the question is not merely what the word means. The greater question is what role the title represents within the system itself.

Within the Coptic Church, the title is attached to an office that exercises spiritual authority over the lives of believers. The priest does not merely teach Scripture. He serves as the administrator of sacraments, receives confessions, pronounces absolution, and performs functions believed to convey spiritual grace. The title therefore reflects more than affection or respect. It reflects an office that occupies a unique position between the believer and the religious privileges administered by the church.

This concern becomes even more significant when considered in light of Christ's warning in Matthew 23:9: "Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven." The context of Christ's words is often ignored. He was confronting religious leaders who loved titles, positions, and distinctions that elevated them above others. His warning addressed systems that encouraged dependence upon religious authorities rather than dependence upon God.

Some attempt to dismiss this concern by pointing to occasions where fatherly language is used descriptively within Scripture. However, the issue is not the mere existence of the word. The issue is the religious office attached to it. When a title becomes part of a structure that grants spiritual authority, sacramental power, and mediatorial functions to a man, it raises questions that cannot be answered simply by appealing to vocabulary.

The role of the priest becomes even more apparent through the practice of confession. Members are encouraged to confess their sins to a priest and receive guidance, correction, and absolution. This practice is presented as an important aspect of spiritual life and restoration. Yet the New Testament consistently directs believers to Christ as their advocate before the Father. While believers are certainly instructed to confess faults to one another and seek reconciliation where necessary, the apostles never established a priestly office through which forgiveness is administered.

The same pattern appears in other practices commonly observed within the church. Many members kiss the hand of the priest as a sign of reverence because it has handled the Eucharist and performed sacred functions. The priest may bless individuals while holding a cross between his fingers, a practice commonly understood as conveying spiritual blessing through the priestly office. These actions may appear harmless when viewed

individually, yet together they reveal a theological system in which spiritual benefits are closely connected to a religious office. The New Testament presents a different picture of life under the New Covenant. Church leaders certainly existed, and their responsibilities were significant. Elders shepherded congregations. Teachers instructed believers. Evangelists proclaimed the Gospel. Yet none of these offices functioned as mediators between God and His people. The book of Hebrews repeatedly emphasizes that believers now possess direct access to God through Christ. Because Christ serves as the eternal High Priest, believers are invited to "come boldly unto the throne of grace" to obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. The invitation is significant because it directs believers to a High Priest in heaven rather than to a priest on earth. The more complete Christ's priesthood becomes, the less necessary any earthly priesthood appears.

Defenders of priestly absolution often appeal to Christ's words in John 20:23: "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." At first glance, this passage appears to grant the apostles authority to forgive sins. A closer examination, however, reveals that Christ was not establishing a permanent priestly office through which forgiveness would be dispensed.

Throughout the book of Acts, the apostles never functioned as personal dispensers of forgiveness. Instead, they proclaimed the conditions under which God forgives. When Peter preached on Pentecost, he did not invite the crowd to seek absolution from him. He instructed them to repent and be baptized. When Simon the sorcerer sinned, Peter did not pronounce absolution over him. He instructed him to repent and pray to God for forgiveness. The apostles announced God's terms of forgiveness, but they never placed themselves between God and the sinner.

None possessed authority to grant forgiveness. None stood as channels through which divine grace flowed. None occupied a

position that diminished the believer's direct access to God through Christ.

The distinction is important. Church leaders may teach, counsel, rebuke, encourage, and restore. They may declare what Scripture says concerning repentance and forgiveness. What they cannot do is become the source of forgiveness itself. The apostles announced God's terms of forgiveness, but they never presented themselves as the ones dispensing it. Forgiveness flowed from God through Christ, not from clergy through sacramental authority.

When Simon the sorcerer sought forgiveness, Peter did not instruct him to seek priestly absolution. He instructed him to repent and pray to God. When believers sinned, the apostles consistently directed them toward repentance, confession, and reliance upon Christ's advocacy. The pattern remains remarkably consistent. Forgiveness comes from God. Christ intercedes. The believer responds in faith and repentance.

The concern, therefore, is not whether church leadership is necessary. Scripture clearly teaches that it is. The concern is whether the functions assigned to the priesthood are functions that God reserved for Christ alone.

Under the New Covenant, believers possess direct access to the Father through Christ. They do not approach God through an earthly priesthood. They do not require a human mediator to obtain forgiveness. They do not depend upon a religious office to secure access to divine grace. The priesthood of Christ is complete, sufficient, and eternal.

For this reason, any system that places a man between the believer and privileges that Scripture attributes directly to Christ departs from the apostolic pattern. The more authority and mediation are assigned to the priesthood, the further the system moves from the simplicity of the Gospel and the direct relationship with God made possible through Christ.

THE EUCHARIST AND THE FINALITY OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

The doctrine of the Eucharist cannot be separated from the doctrine of priesthood because the authority of the priest within the Coptic Orthodox Church is largely tied to his role in administering what the church believes to be the true body and blood of Christ. According to Coptic teaching, the Eucharist is not merely a memorial of Christ's sacrifice. It is understood as a true participation in His body and blood and is presented as an ongoing sacramental reality within the life of the church.

Because of this, the doctrine stands at the center of the Coptic Orthodox system. The priest does not merely teach, shepherd, or lead worship. He administers what the church believes to be a primary means through which sacramental grace is received. Consequently, the doctrine deserves careful examination.

The first question that must be asked is not whether believers should remember the death of Christ. Scripture clearly commands believers to remember His sacrifice and proclaim His death until He comes. The question is whether the Lord's Supper was established as a memorial of a completed sacrifice or as a continuing sacramental participation administered through a priesthood.

The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes the finality of Christ's work upon the cross. The book of Hebrews spends considerable time contrasting the repeated sacrifices of the Old Covenant with the perfect sacrifice offered by Christ. Under the Levitical system, sacrifices were offered continually because they could never completely remove sin. Their repetition testified to their insufficiency. If those sacrifices had truly perfected the worshippers, there would have been no need for them to continue.

Christ's sacrifice is presented in direct contrast to that system. Scripture declares that He entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption. He was offered once to bear the sins of many. By one offering He perfected forever those who are sanctified. The repeated emphasis throughout Hebrews is not accidental. The writer's purpose is to demonstrate that Christ accomplished what the old sacrificial system never could. His work was not temporary, partial, or incomplete. It was finished.

For this reason, any doctrine that introduces an ongoing sacramental framework must be examined carefully. While the Coptic Orthodox Church does not teach that Christ dies repeatedly, it nevertheless presents the Eucharist as a continuing participation in His sacrifice through the ministry of the priesthood. Defenders of the system often respond that Christ is not being sacrificed again but that believers participate in His one eternal sacrifice through the Eucharist. This explanation seeks to preserve the finality of the cross while maintaining the sacramental system.

Yet the central question remains unchanged. Does Scripture present the Lord's Supper as a means through which Christ's sacrifice is continually administered to believers, or does it present the meal as a remembrance of a sacrifice that has already secured redemption completely?

When Paul instructed the church at Corinth, he described the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of Christ's death and a proclamation of that death until His return. The language is significant. A memorial points backward to a completed event. It does not continue the event itself. Believers proclaim what Christ accomplished. They do not complete, extend, or perpetuate what remains unfinished. The meal points to a sacrifice that has already been offered and accepted.

Some point to Paul's warning that those who eat and drink unworthily become guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord and conclude that the elements themselves must be transformed into Christ's literal body and blood. Yet Paul's warning demonstrates the sacredness of the ordinance, not necessarily the transformation of its elements. The Corinthians were treating the Lord's Supper with irreverence, selfishness, and division. The seriousness of the warning reveals the seriousness of what the meal represents. It does not alter the fact that Paul repeatedly refers to the element as bread and presents the meal as a proclamation and remembrance of Christ's sacrifice.

This distinction becomes even more important when examining the practical role assigned to the Eucharist. If participation in the Eucharist is necessary to receive ongoing sacramental grace, then believers inevitably become dependent upon the priesthood that administers it. The focus gradually shifts from confidence in a completed work to confidence in continued participation within a religious system. The question is no longer simply what Christ accomplished, but what the church continues to dispense.

The issue is not whether believers should gather together, worship, pray, remember the cross, or partake of the Lord's Supper. Scripture clearly commands such things. The issue is whether these practices communicate spiritual blessings that are otherwise unavailable apart from participation in a sacramental system administered by priests.

Throughout history, religious systems have often struggled with the simplicity of the Gospel. Human nature is drawn toward visible ceremonies, sacred rituals, religious institutions, and tangible acts that can be seen and experienced. A visible priest, a visible altar, and a visible sacrament can feel more certain than faith in an unseen Savior. Yet Scripture repeatedly calls believers to walk by faith and not by sight. The danger is not the existence

of ceremony itself. The danger is allowing ceremony to become the object of confidence.

Over time, a believer may begin placing trust in participation rather than faith, in ritual rather than obedience, and in ceremony rather than the finished work of Christ. What begins as remembrance can gradually become dependence upon a system that claims to distribute the benefits of the cross.

The New Testament presents a different foundation. Forgiveness rests upon the blood of Christ. Reconciliation rests upon the sacrifice of Christ. Access to God rests upon the mediation of Christ. None of these blessings depend upon an ongoing sacramental ministry performed by earthly priests. The apostles consistently directed believers to place their confidence in Christ Himself rather than in ceremonies administered through religious authority.

For this reason, the doctrine of the Eucharist as a continuing sacramental offering stands in tension with the repeated testimony of Hebrews concerning the finality and sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. The apostles directed believers to trust in a work that had already been completed. They did not direct them toward a continuing sacramental system through which that work must continually be administered.

The central question is therefore not whether the Eucharist is important. The question is whether Scripture presents it as the remembrance and proclamation of a completed sacrifice, or as an ongoing sacramental act through which the benefits of that sacrifice must continually be dispensed. If Christ's offering truly secured redemption once and for all, then the Lord's Supper functions as a memorial of a finished work rather than participation in a continuing sacrificial system.

THE CROSS AND RITUAL BLESSINGS: SUBSTITUTING SYMBOL FOR FAITH

Closely connected to the doctrines already examined is the Coptic Orthodox understanding of blessings, sacred objects, and ritual acts. While individual practices may appear harmless when viewed in isolation, they form part of a larger theological system that places significant emphasis upon visible symbols and ceremonial actions as vehicles through which spiritual benefits are conveyed.

One example is the use of the cross by the priest when blessing the congregation. The priest often holds a cross while making the sign of blessing over the people, and many believers receive this blessing with the understanding that grace, protection, or spiritual benefit is being imparted through the act. Similar significance is attached to various sacred objects, liturgical actions, and ceremonial practices throughout the life of the church.

The question is not whether symbols can have value. Scripture itself contains many symbols. The Passover lamb pointed toward redemption. Circumcision pointed toward covenant membership. The sacrifices pointed toward atonement. Even baptism and the Lord's Supper function as visible expressions of spiritual realities.

The issue arises when symbols begin to occupy a place that belongs to faith itself.

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly warned His people about the danger of confusing a symbol with the reality it was intended to represent. A symbol may point toward truth, but it cannot replace truth. A ceremony may illustrate faith, but it cannot substitute for faith. When people begin to trust in the symbol itself, the symbol becomes an obstacle rather than a guide.

A clear example appears in the history of Israel. During the wilderness journey, God instructed Moses to raise a bronze

serpent so that those who looked upon it in faith might live. The bronze serpent served a specific purpose at a specific moment in history. Yet centuries later, the people of Israel transformed that symbol into an object of reverence. What had once been a sign of God's provision became an instrument of idolatry. King Hezekiah ultimately destroyed it because the people had begun attributing significance to the object itself rather than to God.

The same danger exists whenever religious systems encourage believers to associate spiritual power with objects, rituals, or ceremonial actions. Over time, trust can subtly shift away from God and toward the visible things connected with religion. The object remains visible. The ritual remains tangible. The ceremony remains familiar. Faith, however, is increasingly directed toward the system rather than toward the One the system claims to represent.

The New Testament consistently directs believers in the opposite direction. The apostles emphasized faith in Christ, obedience to His Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer. Spiritual growth was not presented as the result of contact with sacred objects or participation in ritual actions. It was presented as the result of a living relationship with God grounded in truth, faith, repentance, and obedience.

This distinction is important because external religion can easily create the appearance of spiritual life without producing genuine transformation. A person may receive countless blessings, participate in numerous ceremonies, and surround himself with religious symbols while remaining unchanged in heart. Scripture repeatedly warns against this danger. God has never been impressed by outward religious activity divorced from inward obedience.

The concern, therefore, is not whether a cross may remind believers of Christ. The concern is whether believers are being

taught to associate spiritual power with the object itself or with the ritual surrounding it. The concern is not whether ceremonies exist. The concern is whether those ceremonies are gradually replacing the simplicity of faith in Christ.

The Gospel directs attention away from objects and toward the Savior. It directs attention away from ritual and toward repentance. It directs attention away from ceremonial systems and toward obedience flowing from faith. Whenever religious symbols become channels through which people believe grace is transmitted, the focus begins to shift from Christ Himself to the mechanisms of religion.

For this reason, the practices surrounding ritual blessings, sacred objects, and ceremonial acts must be evaluated with great care. The New Testament never teaches believers to seek grace through objects, nor does it present symbols as instruments through which forgiveness, sanctification, or divine favor are conveyed. Those blessings come from God through Christ and are received through faith, not through ritual.

The danger of every sacramental system is that it slowly persuades people to trust in visible things. The Gospel calls believers to trust in the invisible God, whose promises are received through faith and whose work is manifested through obedience. The more confidence is placed in ceremonies, objects, and ritual acts, the further one moves from the simplicity of the apostolic faith.

THE FOUNDATION EXPOSED

After examining the doctrines and practices of the Coptic Orthodox Church, a clear pattern begins to emerge. The concerns raised throughout this study are not isolated issues that exist independently of one another. Rather, they are connected branches growing from the same root.

At first glance, the doctrines may appear unrelated. Yet each doctrine ultimately points in the same direction. Saints are approached for intercession. Priests are approached for absolution. Sacraments are approached for grace. Rituals are approached for blessing. In each case, confidence is gradually redirected away from the believer's direct relationship with God and toward intermediaries, institutions, and ceremonies. One section addresses prayers directed toward Mary and the saints. Another addresses infant baptism. Another examines the role of priests, sacramental confession, the Eucharist, or ritual blessings. Yet beneath these practices lies a common principle that explains why they continue to exist together.

The central problem is not merely the presence of tradition. Every Christian inherits traditions of some kind. The deeper issue is the authority granted to tradition when it cannot be supported by Scripture.

Throughout the study, a recurring pattern has appeared. When a doctrine cannot be established from the apostolic writings, appeal is made to church fathers, councils, historical continuity, ecclesiastical authority, or ancient custom. The authority of Scripture gradually becomes joined with the authority of tradition until the two are treated as equal witnesses.

Once that occurs, doctrines can survive even when they cannot be demonstrated from the Word of God.

This explains why prayers may be directed toward departed saints despite the absence of apostolic instruction. It explains why infants may be baptized despite the consistent biblical pattern of faith preceding baptism. It explains why priests occupy mediatorial functions despite Scripture presenting Christ as the believer's mediator. It explains why sacramental systems continue despite the repeated emphasis upon the sufficiency of Christ's completed work.

The issue is therefore much larger than any single doctrine.

The issue is authority.

Every church, denomination, and religious institution must eventually answer a simple question: What happens when tradition and Scripture stand in conflict?

The apostles answered that question repeatedly by appealing to the Word of God. Christ answered it when He rebuked religious leaders for making the commandments of God of none effect through their traditions. The Bereans answered it by examining the Scriptures daily to determine whether the things they were being taught were true.

The same question remains before every believer today.

If a doctrine cannot be established from Scripture, by what authority should it be believed?

If a practice cannot be found within the apostolic pattern, by what authority should it be continued?

Ancient origins cannot answer that question.

Sincerity cannot answer that question.

Religious beauty cannot answer that question.
Only Scripture can answer that question.

For this reason, the ultimate concern is not that the Coptic Orthodox Church possesses traditions. The concern is that those traditions have gradually become part of a system that asks believers to trust in things that extend beyond the apostolic record.

The result is a religion filled with ceremony, structure, and historical continuity, yet increasingly distant from the simplicity of the Gospel proclaimed by Christ and His apostles.

The New Testament consistently directs believers toward repentance, faith, obedience, baptism upon belief, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and direct access to God through Christ. The further a system moves away from these foundations, the further it moves from the apostolic faith itself.

For this reason, the doctrines examined throughout this study should not be viewed as isolated concerns. They are evidence of a larger problem. They reveal a system that has gradually replaced the sufficiency of Christ with a network of traditions, mediators, rituals, and ceremonies that the apostles never established.

FINAL ANALYSIS AND DOCTRINAL VERDICT

The purpose of this study has not been to attack individuals, question personal sincerity, or deny the historical significance of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Many who belong to this tradition are sincere people who desire to serve God and honor Christ. Sincerity, however, has never been the standard by which doctrine is measured.

The question placed before this study has been whether the teachings and practices of the Coptic Orthodox Church can be supported by the apostolic record preserved in Scripture.

After examining its doctrines concerning Mary, the saints, priesthood, baptism, confession, the Eucharist, ritual blessings, and ecclesiastical authority, a consistent pattern emerges. Again and again, doctrines are defended through appeals to tradition, church history, councils, and post-apostolic writings rather than through clear apostolic instruction.

The significance of this pattern should not be underestimated. Individual errors are serious, but they are often symptoms of a larger problem. When a church grants authority to traditions that cannot be established from Scripture, it creates a foundation upon which additional doctrines may be built regardless of whether the apostles taught them.

This explains why believers are encouraged to seek the intercession of departed saints despite the New Testament consistently directing them to Christ. It explains why priests occupy mediatorial roles despite Scripture presenting Christ as the believer's advocate and high priest. It explains why baptism is administered to infants despite the apostolic pattern of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. It explains why sacramental systems continue despite the repeated teaching that Christ's sacrifice was offered once for all.

Taken individually, each doctrine raises serious concerns. Taken together, they reveal a religious system that has gradually moved beyond the boundaries established by the apostolic faith.

The New Testament presents salvation as a response to the Gospel. Men and women hear the Word, believe, repent, confess Christ, are baptized for the remission of sins, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Their confidence rests not in religious institutions, ceremonies, saints, or priests, but in Christ alone.

The system examined throughout this study directs believers toward a different source of confidence. Spiritual assurance becomes attached to sacraments. Access to God becomes associated with priestly functions. Intercession is sought through departed saints. Religious tradition becomes an authority alongside Scripture. The result is a system in which the simplicity of the Gospel is gradually overshadowed by layers of ritual and mediation.

This is why the issue before us is not merely one denomination among many. The issue is whether believers will place their trust in the apostolic Gospel or in traditions that developed after the apostolic age.

The apostles consistently warned that departures from the faith would arise from within the religious community itself. They warned of men who would speak perverse things, draw disciples after themselves, and introduce teachings not received from God. Their solution was never a return to tradition. Their solution was always a return to the truth that had already been revealed.

For that reason, the final question is not whether the Coptic Orthodox Church is ancient, respected, or historically significant. The final question is whether its doctrines can withstand examination under the authority of Scripture.

The evidence presented throughout this study leads to a sobering conclusion. The Coptic Orthodox Church preserves many traditions that cannot be established from the apostolic writings and promotes doctrines that stand in conflict with the pattern revealed in the New Testament. In doing so, it encourages dependence upon religious structures and practices that the apostles neither taught nor required.

The apostolic faith remains remarkably simple. Repent toward God. Believe in Christ. Confess Him before men. Be baptized for the remission of sins. Walk in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit. Persevere faithfully until the end.

No saint can replace this.

No priest can perform this on another's behalf.

No ritual can substitute for it.

No tradition can improve upon it.

The believer's hope rests entirely in Christ, His sacrifice, His mediation, His promises, and His Gospel. Anything that draws confidence away from those foundations, regardless of how ancient or respected it may be, must be rejected in favor of the truth revealed by God.

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