

KOINΩNIA

The News of SAC

Issue 9, December 2021



ST ATHANASIUS
COLLEGE



UNIVERSITY
of DIVINITY

2022 MID-YEAR INTENSIVE UNIT ON
ST GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN
BY FR PROF. JOHN BEHR

"The Journey that Led Me to SAC"

SAC Publications in 2021

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

ICONOGRAPHERS'
WORKING GROUP

Congratulations to SAC
Graduates 2021

Fr Dr Jacob Joseph
and Dr Amir Malek
receive their PhDs



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Cover image: Coptic icon of St Mark, by Youstina Nan

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A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRINCIPAL



We give thanks to Almighty God for having delivered us through the past two years. Certainly 2020 and 2021 were challenging years for all of us, particularly for a college such as St Athanasius College. The mission of SAC is to create, develop and maintain a learning community, a community of scholars. The idea of community and communion is central to Orthodox thought. The Church is a community and mission work of the Church is done in community. Indeed, the central act of the gathering of God's people is consummated in the act of sharing Holy Eucharist together. The New Testament terms this as *KOINΩNIA*, a Greek word that means the gathering in fellowship with the fellowship of believers. SAC is then a *koinonia* of learners and scholars in fellowship for the purpose of learning and growing in faith. How we achieve this goal when we are not able to meet together was the challenge put before us during the past two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Academic staff were charged with creating an 'intentional online community' that would allow the mission of SAC to advance. Some of our teaching staff innovated in various ways to create this online *koinonia*. For some it

was regular one-to-one conversations using the available technology, for others it was weekly group discussions facilitated in one way or another, and for others they shared the wonderful work of students to enhance the feeling of community.

In this issue of *Koinonia* you will read reflections by our students from a variety of backgrounds writing about their experience at SAC. A *koinonia* of learning, a community of scholarship, *koinonia* that enables each person to enhance their knowledge, their faith, their belief, and their practice of Christian life, all the while respecting and celebrating their unique cultural and denominational backgrounds.

Our academic staff have excelled this year in terms of their research output. Research is the hidden engine that ensures that quality teaching takes place. When teaching staff engage in research, they not only contribute to the body of knowledge that benefits all humankind, but they grow in themselves as scholars and ensure that their teaching reflects cutting-edge research. Our students are the benefactors of such endeavour. A researcher grapples with the material before them. They try to make sense of the material, putting it in context, comparing with past research and forming hypothesis as to their meaning and testing that hypothesis by comparison to what else is available or known to date. The researcher has their work tested by peer-review. This is the way in which quality of work and the significance of work that enters the literature is ensured. St Athanasius College stands in defence of academic integrity and academic freedom as these form the boundaries of advancement in knowledge. Academic integrity underpinned by academic freedom is vastly different from opinion one hears in the local press; that opinion belongs to the person who utters it and is untested and therefore its reliability is questionable. Opinion that we hear from all sorts of quarters should never be mistaken for academic scholarship. Studying at SAC and being part of the *koinonia* of learning will enhance one's ability to distinguish opinion from sound academic research. I applaud the outstanding research undertaken by our academic staff.

The *koinonia* that we form at SAC is vitally important to us. It is the reason for our existence, and it is our mission. As you read this issue of *Koinonia*, I trust that it would be borne in mind the title of this annual publication in which we showcase the wonderful work of SAC students and staff. The name of our magazine is not just a title, it is in fact our aspiration. I invite you to continue being a valued member of the learning *koinonia* of SAC. There are many who contribute to our College in so many ways, whether they be students, staff, alumni, friends of the college, and those who sustain us with their donations. All are part of our fellowship together, contributing to the Kingdom of God. I trust that this issue of *Koinonia*, will inspire and enhance your experience of learning.

Fr Dr Daniel Ghabrial
Principal



CONGRATULATIONS TO SAC ACADEMIC STAFF ON THEIR DOCTORAL DEGREES

On Saturday 20 November, the University community gathered to celebrate the graduation of six Higher Degree by Research students (from 2020 and 2021). The ceremony took place at St Paschal's Chapel in Box Hill, Melbourne. Honoured to be chosen to carry the University mace was our own Fr Dr Jacob Joseph who was among those receiving his Ph.D. for a thesis titled *The Christ Who Embraces: An Orthodox Theology of Margins in India*. Fr Jacob undertook his doctoral studies at Pilgrim Theological College under the supervision of Rev. Professor John Flett and Rev. Dr Duncan Reid. So exceptional was Fr Jacob's thesis that he was awarded the University medal.

University Medal, 2020 Citation:

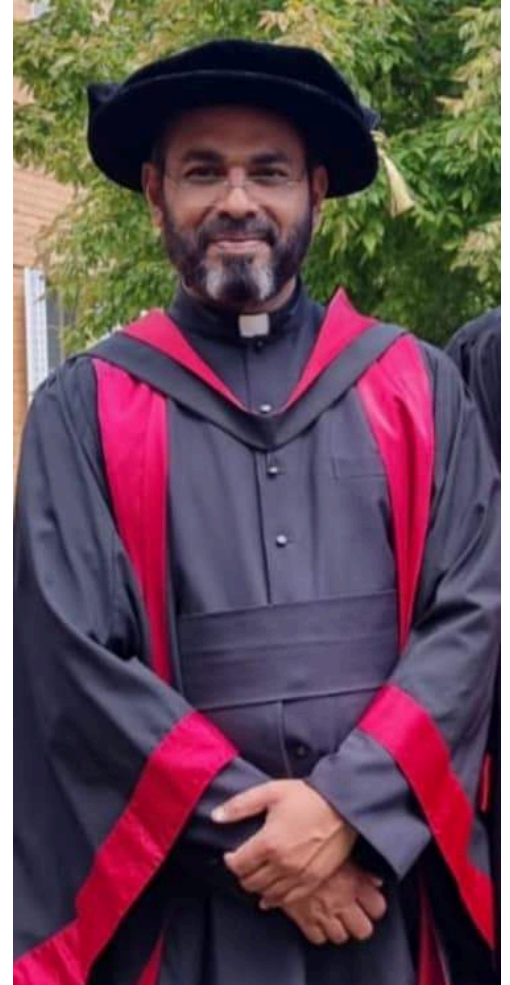
Dr Jacob Joseph has completed a doctoral thesis of exceptional quality which has significance for Indian and global theology into the future. His thesis, "The Christ who Embraces: An Orthodox Theology of Margins in India," engages in both Dalit and Orthodox theology, developing a constructive rereading of accepted concepts and practices. The thesis challenges the existing structures of knowledge, especially regarding a multicultural, yet deeply stratified, Indian society. Dr Joseph's reading is passionate and ingenious, presenting audacious arguments with conceptual clarity and accuracy.

In addition, we delight in our Biblical scholar Dr Amir Malek who was also awarded his Ph.D. during the ceremony and was honoured to give the Scripture Reading during the ceremony from Philippians 4:4-9:

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Dr Malek undertook his doctoral studies at Yarra Theological Union under the supervision of Rev. Associate Professor Mark O'Brien, Dr Callan Ledsham and Dr Lisa Agaiby. His thesis *Marqus Ibn al-Qunbur: Commentary on the Book of Genesis (1-11): An Edition and Translation* contributes significant scholarship by offering a world first edition, apparatus and translation into English of a major work of one of the most prolific Coptic theologians of the Middle Ages: Ibn al-Qunbur's commentary on the Pentateuch (Genesis 1-11).

[View the ceremony here.](#)



From top to bottom: Fr Dr Jacob Joseph receiving his award from the University Chancellor Dr Graeme Blackman; carrying the University mace; with fellow SAC colleagues (from L-R): Fr Dr Gregorios Awad, Dr Amir Malek, Fr Dr Jacob Joseph, Fr Dr Daniel Ghabrial, and Fr Shenouda Boutros. Photos courtesy of Fr Dr Jacob Joseph and James Carrett, Rowdy Partners



From top to bottom: Dr Amir Malek receiving his award from the University Chancellor Dr Graeme Blackman; reading from the Scriptures; with fellow SAC colleagues Dr Lisa Agaiby and Fr Dr Daniel Ghabrial. Photos courtesy of Dr Amir Malek and James Carrett, Rowdy Partners



CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OUR SAC GRADUATES IN 2021

The ceremony of conferring academic awards is a tradition that takes place at academic institutions throughout the world. On Friday 19 March 2021, the University community came together at St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne to celebrate the graduation of a number of students. Due to the continuing coronavirus pandemic and the need to take all possible steps to protect the health and safety of the University's members and the community at large, numbers at the graduation ceremony were forced to be limited. Nevertheless, family and friends not able to attend in person were able to participate online. We likewise celebrated with those graduating online in the Friday 3 December 2021 ceremony.

This year we congratulate the academic achievements of our six graduates from SAC:

Aiman Tawadros	Diploma in Theology
Fr Daniel Tyab	Diploma in Theology
Katherine Mikhail	Graduate Diploma in Theology (<i>awarded the Vice-Chancellor's scholar</i>)
Marco Attia	Graduate Diploma in Theology (December graduation)
Monica Demian	Graduate Certificate in Divinity (December graduation)
Fr Hedra El-Baramousy	Master of Theological Studies (December graduation)

[View the 19 March 2021 Online Graduation Ceremony and Program here.](#)

[View the 3 December 2021 Online Graduation Ceremony and Program here.](#)

AN OVERVIEW OF FR DR JACOB JOSEPH'S THESIS

The Christ Who Embraces: An Orthodox Theology of Margins in India



Fr Jacob's thesis develops a Christological response to the Orthodox Christian Mission in the context of caste dynamics among St. Thomas Syrian Orthodox Christians in India. The world's Orthodox community recognises as axiomatic Ion Bria's description of mission as the 'liturgy after the liturgy.' The liturgy inhabits an all-encompassing space one without any room for exclusion, as is proper for the God of all creation. To justify this argument, Ion Bria develops his theological dictum in terms of the cosmic missional fulfilment of 'the liturgy:' the imperative to witness in the public and political realms, identifying with the struggles of politically marginalised communities in order to embody the Gospel in hostile contexts. This theological perspective is engaged in a contextual debate on the theology of margins in India, namely Dalit Christology, and its importance on meaningful engagement in the formation of Orthodox theology of margins in India.

The research considers the implications of the above claim of the Orthodox mission model in the Indian social context, mainly how emphasising transcendence and liturgy might take the political form to Dalit social and theological concerns. Locating this potential ground within the liturgy itself follows the critical evaluation of Ion Bria's description of the existing Orthodox mission dictum – 'the liturgy after the liturgy.' This reference to the liturgy builds upon a fundamental Christological claim, one which uses *amiaphysite* approach, as developed by the early teachers of the Church and their treatment of transcendental and immanent Christology.

The above analysis aims to initiate practical action within the contextual debate over Dalit theology, which emerged from the life experience of the community of margins in India and its importance for meaningful future engagements. There is a continued practical distance, one that is both visible and invisible in the area of Orthodox and Dalit relations in the Indian context. The reasons for this are complex and involve both social and theological histories, but it is beholding on the Orthodox churches in India to address their history and theology in this regard.

In an attempt to begin this process, this thesis has revisited the Orthodox tradition to show the potential of all-inclusive miaphysite Christological and its appropriation of the liturgical 'kiss of peace' or 'embrace' to commence the act of reconciliation with the people who are socially marginalised.

Further, this study proposes an all-encompassing praxis of the liturgical embrace (the Kiss of peace), a Christological metaphor for the Syrian Orthodox liturgy, extending from the liturgical to the social milieu. This proposal aims to define touch or embrace in the context of 'untouchability,' where people identify as equal, without discrimination, reflecting the inseparable unity or embrace of the transcendental (divine) and immanent (human) nature of Christ. Following these threads, this thesis intends to offer a casteless Orthodox theology of mission that envisions a reconciling mission through a Christological embrace. For Christological inputs, this thesis is heavily indebted to St. Severus of Antioch and his understanding of the 'body of Christ.' To accomplish the goal of finding an all-encompassing interpretation of the Kiss of peace or liturgical embrace, the following pays attention to four early liturgical commentators of the miaphysite tradition: Jacob, Bishop of Edessa (c.633-d.708); George, the Bishop of Arabs (d.725); Moses Bar Kepha (813-903); and Dionysius Bar Salibi (c.1171).

In this line, this thesis highlights the urgency of a theoretical paradigm shift in Orthodox theological and missional engagement in the context of social marginality. This thesis's theoretical model for Orthodox theological endeavour is 'patristic symbiosis.' Patristic symbiosis believes that 'the early teachers (fathers and mothers) are not dead. Contemporary theology requires the voice of the early teachers, but their voice can be heard only when the present voice is humbled to partner with their voice. This process is polyphonic in structure. By following a 'patristic symbiosis' with the patristic teachers, this method aims to partner the prevailing questions with the patristic teachers along with the current teachers. Through this method, Orthodox theology can listen to the voice of patristic teachers again in today's social context. Without limiting the Orthodox renewal within the ritual reformations, it can revitalise theology for the context.

AN OVERVIEW OF DR AMIR MALEK'S THESIS

Marqus Ibn Al-Qunbur: Commentary on the Book of Genesis (1-11): An Edition and Translation



Marqus Ibn al-Qunbur was a twelfth century Coptic monk and priest. A prolific teacher and writer, he was considered a rebel and heretic by his own Church due to the fact that he fought to restore the abandoned tradition of the practice of secret (auricular) confession to a priest. Accordingly, he left the Coptic Church to join the Melkite Church, only later to return to the Coptic Church before dying in 1208 as a member once more of the Melkite Church. Of his surviving works is a significant commentary on the Pentateuch; significant because it has been considered as being the first systematic commentary on a set of Scriptures in Coptic Christianity. Dr Amir's thesis offers a first edition with an apparatus of Ibn Qunbur's commentary on the first eleven chapters of the book of Genesis based on the study of thirteen manuscripts, together with a first English translation and commentary with the aim of contributing new scholarship in Biblical Studies and Arabic literature of early medieval Christian Egypt.

Due to the scarcity of Old Testament Arabic commentaries in the Coptic Church during the medieval period, Ibn al-Qunbur's commentary on the Pentateuch – especially on the book of Genesis – continued to be read by the Copts as well as other Orthodox communities in the region until the end of the nineteenth century. Patriarch Cyril V (1874–1927) championed educational reform in the Coptic Church and accordingly instructed the publication of many books. In 1895 he issued a decree that Ibn al-Qunbur's commentary on the book of Genesis be published and disseminated.

The commentary provides a very allegorical interpretation of the book of Genesis that follows the Alexandrian School. From the point of view of modern Western critical analysis, it may seem that Ibn al-Qunbur takes allegorical interpretation too far by offering a rather subjective and imaginative way of reading Scripture. For example, he claimed to see in Genesis preludes and prophecies of the great Christian doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, Salvation from Sin, and the spiritual life. He also claimed to see in numbers and other elements in the texts of Genesis a kind of prophecy pertaining to the Ecumenical Councils.

Prolific in his knowledge of Scripture and Christian Theology, his commentary nonetheless displays that he was an intuitive teacher who used familiar examples from nature and everyday life to illustrate his ideas and provide an interpretation of Scripture to his audiences who were mostly simple, uneducated folk. Although it is a fact that Ibn al-Qunbur wrote the commentary during a time in which he changed allegiance from the Coptic to the Melkite Church, the first eleven chapters of his commentary on Genesis indicates his theology is mostly Jacobite. It refers to heresies familiar in the Coptic Church, such as those of Arius, Nestorius and Macedonius, and other matters about which the Coptic Church has differing views from other Churches, such as the Filioque. In his commentary, Ibn al-Qunbur propagated the importance of repentance and confession as well as the necessity for a believer to have a spiritual guide or director.

The translation of this work into English will allow readers to learn more about this prominent medieval Coptic theologian and his way of interpreting Scripture. This research pays tribute to a learned Coptic priest whose name had been suppressed throughout the ages because of a disagreement he had with the Church in regard to auricular confession. Strangely enough, the objection the Church had to Ibn al-Qunbur's views on confession were adopted by the same Church centuries later and continue to the present day.



BL. Or. 1330, MS. L
Taken from Dr Amir Malek's Ph.D. Thesis, 2021, p. 442.

The Journey that Led Me to SAC

Carol McDonough

Carol McDonough, of Castlemaine Victoria, (Master of Spirituality, Graduate Diploma of Divinity, Graduate Certificate of Divinity UD) studied at SAC from July 2018 to November 2021, both on campus and online during COVID-19. Here she shares her joy in the formation and friendship she has received at the College. Acknowledgment of her professional career as an academic (including at ANU), in the justice fields of Methodist Missions with Aboriginal people (in the Northern Territory caring for part aboriginals removed from their mothers as well as the very poor), a pioneer in inner-city community based programs for mental health as well as rural child protection, youth justice and mental health (Victoria), she was inducted into the State government's Victorian Honour Roll of Women on the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in Victoria in 2008.



The first time I visited SAC I felt I had come home.

My encounter at SAC began when I first made an email enquiry about attending an international Symposium they were organising and I immediately felt overwhelmed by the sense of hospitality, welcome and acknowledgment of my interest. And so on the 15th of July 2018 I travelled from Castlemaine to SAC's city campus at Eporo Tower in Melbourne's CBD and entered (on my disability scooter) this unknown in anticipation, to discover what has become a near four-year formative later-life adventure. Here were gathered Coptic Orthodox clergy from Egypt and around the world, together with international renowned scholars and local scholars from Australia, the UK, Europe, Egypt, Japan, Canada and the United States. The proceedings of this conference (the 5th International Symposium of Coptic Studies, *Copts in Modernity*), was published by Brill and announced at the University of Divinity Research Conference in June 2021.

Learning by prayerful participation enhancing long reading, as we all know, is an entirely other joy. A Protestant cradle-Christian (Methodist become Anglican) never had I imagined I would be able to immerse myself within one of the great ancient continuous Christian Churches that was founded by St Mark the Apostle (68 CE), accessible in my home State Victoria!

I came to realise that SAC is modelled on the *Didascalia*, the Catechetical School of Alexandria in Egypt, where all were welcome. The most ancient school of Christian studies in the world, the Latin Church father St Jerome (c. 345-420) records that the School was founded by St Mark the Apostle. As I shared hospitality, deep conversations with Copts, eastern and western scholars, listened and received through the presentations, I realised that St Athanasius (c. 293-373), a prominent Church Father commemorated in Orthodox and Western Church calendars, is the same one that the Coptic College that is a member of the University of Divinity, is named after and accordingly, St Athanasius College (SAC) is direct inheritor of the *Didascalia* whose intent is welcoming all and forming faithful Christians sent out in loving service to preach in liturgy and by their lives, and to persevere in living the Gospel of love. I learnt how Coptic history, pioneering theology and desert spirituality of the first to fourth Christian centuries, underlies later theologies, histories and Christian practice of prayer and service. An inclusive grounding, for me, transformative.

Long planned, the Symposium was held during a new wave of shocks, of massacres and bombings of Coptic Churches in its birth country Egypt. Alone, silent, teary, I received their story-images, deeply moved that this Church of antiquity perseveres with great dignity and generous hospitality for all. The Copts further our present ecumenical richness and understanding of what it means to live in faithfulness to the Cross of Christ during two thousand years of continuing persecution.

Following the Symposium, by arrangement through the Churches of Christ Stirling Theological College, I was about to commence my first subject with Dr Lisa Agaiby, *The Lives and Times of the Desert Fathers*. With my Stirling Capstone, these would complete my ecumenical University of Divinity Master of Spirituality program, having by then studied in six colleges.

At this point I wish to share with you my first impressions and experience of my first class at SAC that was held in their exquisite Board Room in their city campus.

Entering from busy La Trobe Street into the still quiet of the foyer, I was arrested by the visible four-floor mosaic of the entire story of Christ, from His flight into Egypt as an infant to His holy Resurrection. A formidable artistic gift to Melbourne, it silently sends its message. My Methodist childhood was challenged. All we learnt is that the Holy Family fled, then they returned. Silence. I became curious about those missing years in the Gospels, in the planting of Christianity in Egypt. I asked the beautiful Coptic women with whom I was standing. They explained oral tradition about how Egyptians of the Nile were initially converted from paganism because of the many wonders and miracles performed by the infant Jesus during the Family's flight in Egypt. What?! I was astounded. Then there was the mosaic of St Mark the Apostle who first preached the Gospel of Christ in Alexandria and founded the Church of Alexandria that was to continue and thrive as the Coptic Orthodox Church.



Mosaic of the Holy Family's Flight into Egypt, SAC City campus, Eporo Tower. Iconographer: Ashraf Gerges, photo courtesy of Bassem Morgan

Upstairs to the Board Room, my love of beauty of Christian symbolism leapt to the mosaic Crown of Christ on the wall together with the wood carvings. I was intrigued by the mosaic of the crown and the Copt I was conversing with explained to me that the crown is the symbol of SACs campus in Eporo Tower; "Eporo" in Coptic means "The King", and hence the crown is a symbol of Christ the King. My father, John, a carpenter always said, "There is only one perfect carpenter, Jesus." Here in this Board Room the work of the hands of His faithful loving followers glowed. Around the Board Room table were about sixteen of us students: half were cradle-Copts (priests and laity, men and women, all professionals), and the other half were Western Christians of Catholic, Anglican and Protestant heritages, also clergy and laity. My Anglican priest, Fr Peter Martin also was with us, his first class at SAC. All were brought to this room, hungry and yearning to be enlightened by a return to pure original sources of Christian history. We discovered enlightenment through immersion in rigorous scholarship and the study of primary monastic texts: various *vitae*, *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, *Historia Lausiaca*, *Apophthegmata Patrum*, *Pachomian Koinonia*, John Cassian's *Conferences* and *Institutes*, and numerous canons, sermons and letters – just to name a few!

Having studied in Anglican, Catholic, Protestant and Uniting Church Colleges, here I was being taught in a Coptic College. This tradition was offered to us all, softly, gently, just by "being" herself, by a cradle-Copt, Lisa Agaiby. Lisa is Australian-born of parents from the land of the Nile. That these traditions were revealed to us, Copts and Westerners alike, by an already acclaimed and published international scholar with degrees in Egyptology and Coptic Studies and a double Ph.D. still astounds me. Here? In Melbourne? I don't have to go to Egypt? It's all planted here.

There was and is more which has dawned on me, researching the fascinating Roman aristocratic woman Melania the Elder (c. 350–c. 410), bereaved wife and mother, woman of prayer, of scholarship, and founder of a monastery on the Mount of Olives – a Mountain oft frequented by Jesus – Melania received the incredible privilege of spending six months living and learning at the feet of the desert fathers of Scetis in the Western Egyptian desert. This was unheard of for women at the time! Fast forward almost two millennia, Lisa is the only woman to have been granted the privilege to live and work amongst the desert fathers of the Eastern Egyptian desert to capture the essence of monastic spirituality while helping to preserve heritage by salvaging precious manuscripts long neglected at the ancient Monastery of St Paul the Hermit. Again, for a woman, unheard of privilege. From long immersion, she bears and transmits the eremitic and monastic traditions to us, forming us as Christians closer to the roots.



Icon of St Melania the Elder, written by student iconographer Kerollos Rophael

We Westerners could experience where much of our liturgy, theology and practice originated through the common heritage of the fathers and mothers from around the Mediterranean and in the Egyptian deserts in particular, from the fourth to sixth centuries.

Lisa's care of her students on behalf of SAC, lead to her tracking me home to Castlemaine after each week's class. Scooting in the dark after class to Southern Cross station, I had to text her that I was safely onto the 9.20pm VLine train in the care of the conductor, then she would call me as I was walking through the door around midnight to make sure I was home safely.

Thus, for my lifelong learning and ongoing formation, I was led to continue with SAC, completing a Graduate Diploma of Divinity that focused on Coptic thought and practice through which I experienced excellence of Christian scholarship of our common roots, shedding light on my prior western studies. SAC truly lives its mission, as explained by Fr Dr Daniel Ghabrial, SAC's Principal:

It was first in the sea-side port of Alexandria that Greek philosophy met Christian thought and it can be argued that it was there that theology bore its first fruits. Theological enquiry, the search for God's truth ... are values dear to the heart of the Coptic Orthodox Church. St Athanasius College brings this yearning for the knowledge of God to Melbourne and the world. We are firm in our belief that to know God is to love God and to love God is to serve Him ... We welcome all students from all walks of life to engage with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and therein discover Him.

I smile, reading these words. How was I led to receive these locally offered Coptic gifts of indissoluble vitality? In a presentation by Fr Daniel he said, "we are born in the image of God to grow into the likeness of Christ who yearns that 'They all may be one' (John 17:21)." Born to grow, yes. Embraced by SAC staff and students, I as a cradle-Christian westerner, felt Coptic Studies leading me forward to love and serve God with broadening understanding and spiritual practice.

My journey to the University of Divinity had started with learning of the Christian hermits in Anglican parish life. I had been searching through secondary texts, their history, ways of life, spirituality, and focused retreats. My searches led me to the Melbourne College of Divinity in 2009, which morphed to the University of Divinity in 2011. But it would not be until 2018 that I would immerse myself in the lives and times of the first Christian hermits. My years studying at SAC span from 2018 to November 2021. I would like to share some highlights of my journey with you.

In March 2019 I graduated with a Master of Spirituality through Stirling Theological College. My last two units were the one with Lisa, where my research focused on St Antony the Great, the pilgrim of the *Vita Pauli*, and a Capstone at Stirling, supervised by Rev. Dr Alan Niven, where I explored critical ethnography of emerging neuro-research findings on the use of devices on young children's brains in terms of social and spiritual development. The aim was to understand to what extent these new devices impact Christian engagement and Christian formation. The first fruit of my Masters stunned me. Following a Call for Abstracts for a Rome conference on "Emerging Methodologies in Spirituality Studies and Spiritual Theology," hosted by the International Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality and the Forum of Professors of Spiritual Theology, Italy, my abstract "Cultural Portraits of Prayer: Towards an Interdisciplinary Inquiry about Transmitted Prayer Practices," was accepted.

As I needed library access and further academic formation, I chose SAC as my home college, enrolling in a Graduate Diploma in Divinity. At Stirling, online with Alan Niven, Human Research Methodology provided me with contexted applied social sciences, while at SAC, I studied the unit *Ascetic Theology and the Making of a Monk* that focused on the primary text of St John Climacus's, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* (c. 600 CE). I focused my research on his "Step 28, On holy and blessed prayer, mother of virtues, and on the attitude of mind and body in prayer." I learnt Climacus's belief, learnt from Egypt's desert hermits and Climacus's own solitude, that "prayer upholds the world." This had first unfolded for me (in 2011) as I had sought evidence of the twentieth century western resurgence of the eremitic vocation, reported in an article in *The Way*, the British Jesuit Journal. Does prayer, everywhere, from everyone, uphold our disrupted world? That belief of Climacus, I wanted to test in my question across Christian communions and continents worldwide through research using collegial methods furthered by the *SAGE* Journal, *Qualitative Inquiry*. The results of my research for my paper will be published in the Rome "Emerging Methodologies" conference proceedings, Peeters Publishing, forthcoming in 2022.

At my new home college, SAC, I have learnt and grown into the understanding of ancient Christian roots and their continuous transmission through the centuries around the world to those carrying vocations to prayer as their primary way of serving God and creation.

In 2020, I completed my Graduate Diploma in Divinity with my final unit being *Saints and Sinners: Women in Late Antiquity*. Having been introduced to Melania the Elder in a previous unit, I chose to further explore her life in this unit. I was awed: a bereaved mother with living grandchildren who yearned for God. She inspires my life daily.

In 2021, I audited the unit *Hagiography and the Cult of the Saints*, and within our cohort were old friends with whom I had studied previously: Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Copts as well as new friends joining us from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church. Coming together in weekly zoom discussions from Melbourne, regional Victoria, Sydney, Darwin, and New Zealand, we participated in an atmosphere of fellowship, unity, and mutual respect, remembering the words of Christ, "I pray that they may be one, even as We are one" (John 17:22).

Reflecting with me on the unit and the fellowship shared, Fr Peter Martin, my Anglican priest, described the experience as "tonic for the soul."

THE ICONOGRAPHERS' WORKING GROUP

Shady Nessim



'Work-in-progress' icons by the students of the Iconographers' Working Group

In early January 2021, SAC released a social media advert inviting past iconography students to express their interest in joining a new initiative by SAC: "The Iconographers Working Group" (IWG). The prerequisite for joining was the successful completion of the units *Coptic Art and Iconography* I and II. Eight students were selected who were to be disciples by the internationally renowned Coptic Iconographer, Mr Ashraf Gerges:

Benjamin Ibrahim
Matthew Shehata
Andrew Soliman
Youstina Nan

Kerollos Rophael
Abanoub Soleman
Rama Mansour
Stephanie Habib

The purpose of forming this group was to provide a platform for students to develop their skills of iconography and offer their services for small projects to raise appreciation toward icons in the Coptic tradition. Our first meeting was in March where the IWG developed a program of projects for the year. Each member painted five icons, of which two were part of an overall theme.

The first theme was inspired by personalities studied in SAC's unit *Saints and Sinners: Women in Late Antiquity*, taught by Dr Lisa Agaiby.

The group painted a series of seven female saints (the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Pelagia, Melania the Elder, Melania the Younger, Macrina the Elder, and Mary of Egypt) on circular icon panels surrounding a larger icon of Christ painted by Ashraf Gerges. Examples of their work follow on the next few pages. The other themed project was of Old Testament prophets who prophesied about the crucifixion of Christ. Each prophet carries a scroll with a prophetic verse that will flank the icon of the crucifix.

To showcase their work, the IWG is organising an exhibition in 2022 themed "Writers of Life". Details will be forthcoming. A booklet of the members' icons and their reflections will be compiled to guide viewers at the exhibition. Over the course of the year COVID lockdowns restricted much of the IWG's work and progress, but with the easing of restrictions, the group have reconvened and meeting together each Thursday evening to work on their icons in time for the 2022 exhibition.

If you would like to join the IWG in 2022 and have successfully completed the units *Coptic Art and Iconography* I and II, please contact Shady Nessim at: snessim@sac.edu.au

STUDENT ICONOGRAPHERS OF IWG AT WORK



Rama Mansour



Abanoub Soleman



Benjamin Ibrahim



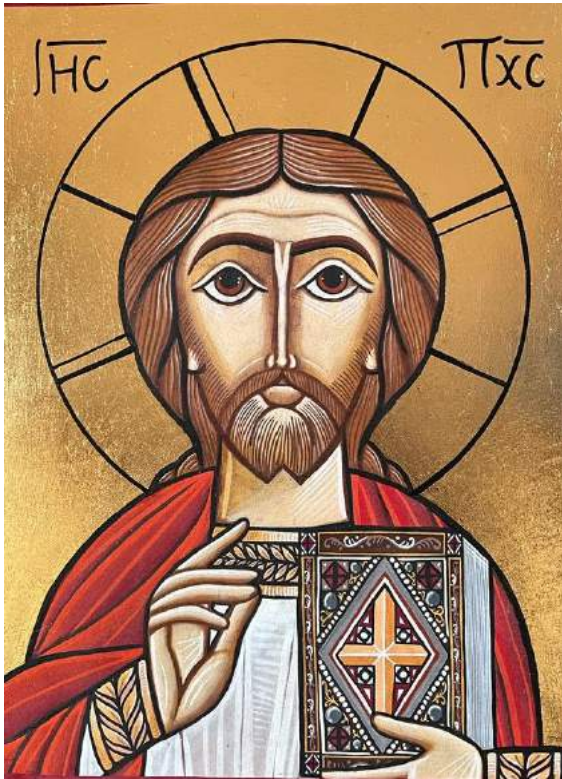
Ashraf Gerges with Rama Mansour & Youstina Nan



Some of the members of the IWG, coming together virtually and in person. Photos by Shady Nessim

SAMPLES OF THE FINAL PRODUCT

Icons written by Youstina Nan



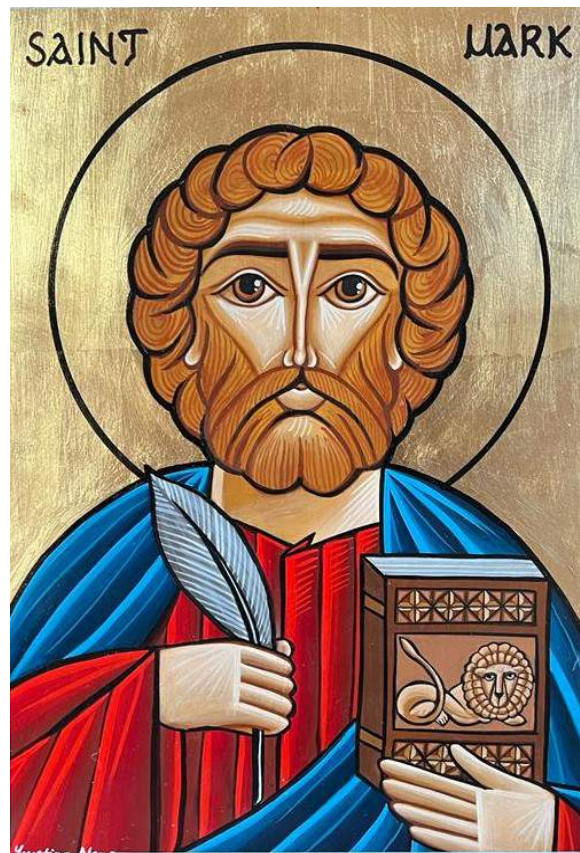
Jesus Christ



Archangel Michael

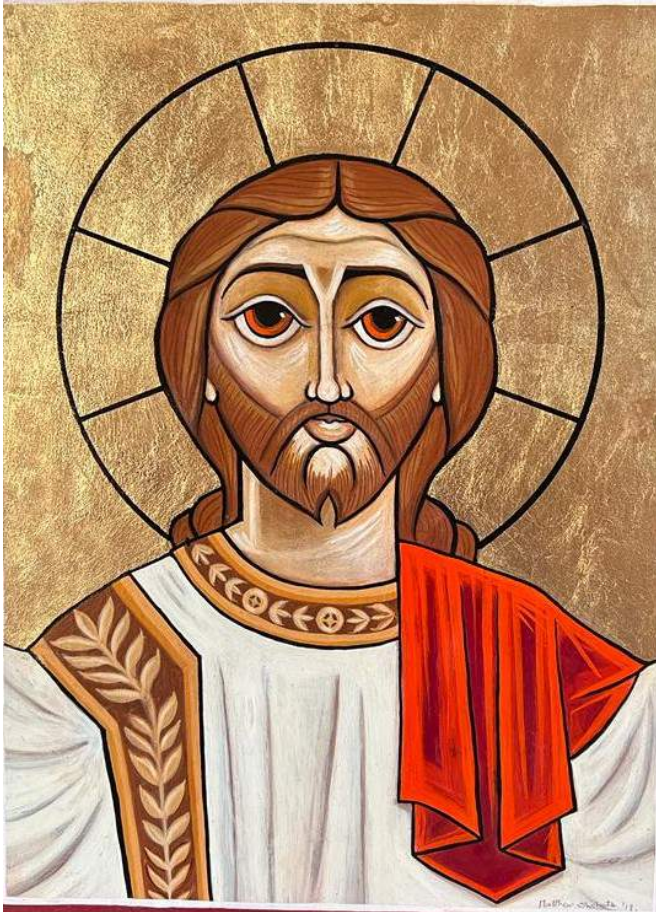


St Mary of Egypt



St Mark the Apostle

Icons written by Matthew Shehata



Christ the Pantocrator



St Macarius the Great



St John the Baptist



St Mary the Theotokos

Icon written by Benjamin Ibrahim



St Mary Magdalene

Icon written by Rama Mansour



St Veronica

Icons written by Shady Nessim



St Mercurios

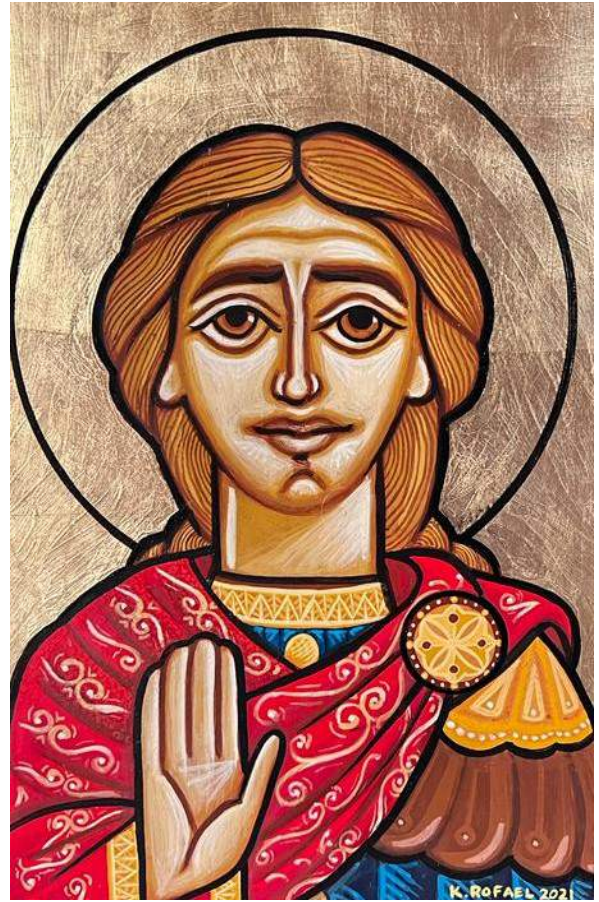


St Macrina the Elder

Icons written by Kerollos Rophael

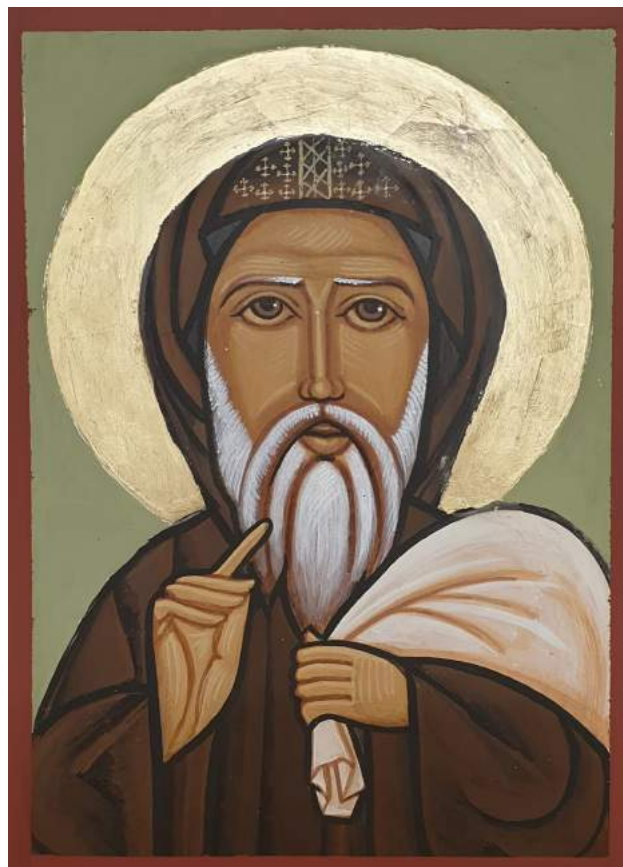


St Aripsima



St Menas

Icon written by Abanoub Soleman



St Moses the Black

**Icons written by
Stephanie Habib**



St Verena and Jesus Christ

**Icons written by
Andrew Soliman**



Archangel Michael and Jesus Christ

STUDENTS' WORK FROM *Coptic Art & Iconography II*



Jesus Christ and St Mary of Egypt

**Icons written by
Cecily Clark**

Icon written by Monica Demian

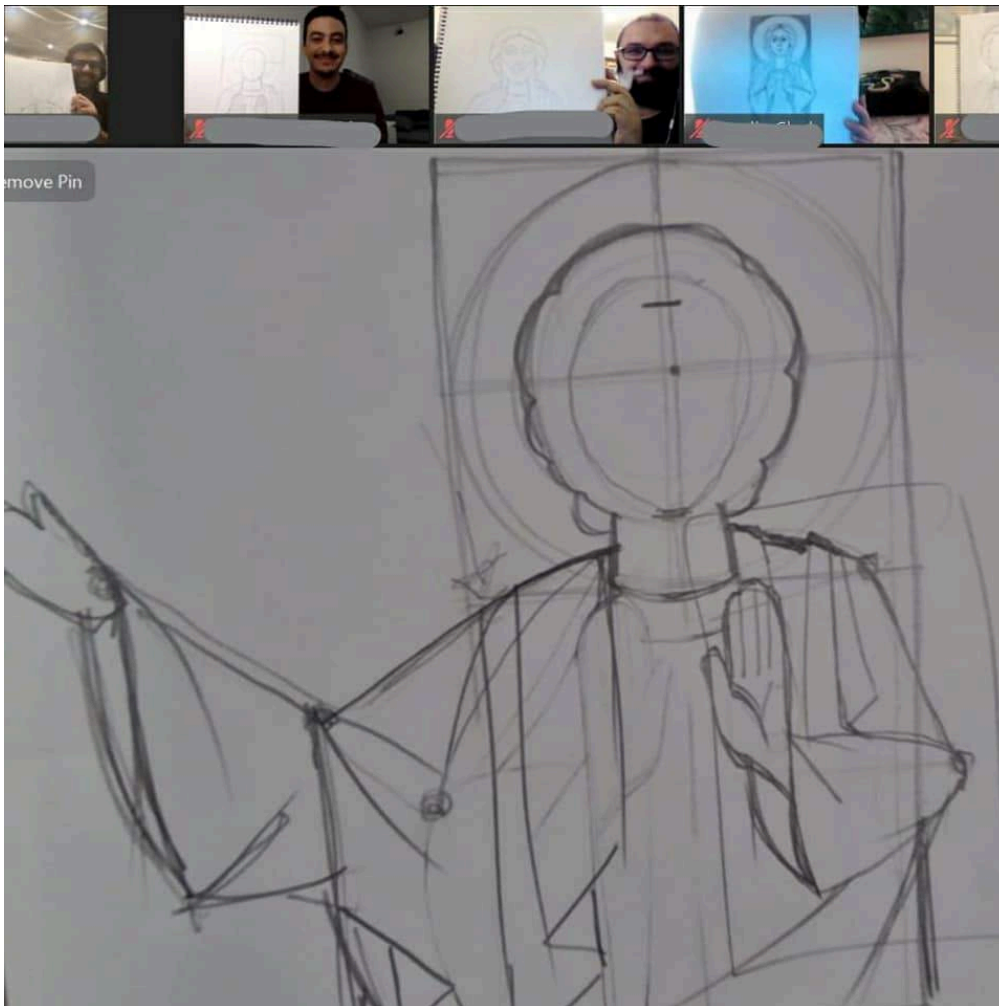


Jesus Christ

Icons written by Joy Adler



Two icons of Jesus Christ



Online instruction by Iconographer Ashraf Gerges via zoom during lockdown.

In Semester 1 and most of Semester 2, "Coptic Art and Iconography I & II" were offered entirely online. With Ashraf Gerges's guidance and the assistance of clever software, students were able to watch in real time our iconographer walk them through the step-by-step process of writing an icon.

FEATURED ARTICLE

Reflections on My Assessment Task for *Coptic Art & Iconography II*: Icon of Saint Antony of Egypt

Cecily Clark



I have welcomed entering the desert metaphorically to find out about Saint Antony of Egypt and the spiritual wisdom he gained from living in the desert. Studying *Coptic Art & Iconography I* and II over 2021 with Mr Ashraf Gerges and Mr Shady Nessim has been faith-transforming. I enjoyed the friendly and sincere company of lecturers and students, and as a Westerner, it has been a privilege and an enlightening, eye-opening experience to participate in the Iconography classes.

I come from a Protestant background where saints are ignored, and the monastic religious life is given little recognition. It is unfortunate that many Protestants today have little awareness of the rich Christian heritage prior to the 1500s when the Protestant movement first began. I have now come to appreciate the practice of honouring the saints and this has been enriching, inspiring and has opened up to me a whole new world of Christian traditions and paths to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

One of our assessment tasks in *Coptic Art & Iconography II* was to write a narrative icon. The subject I chose to focus my narrative on was Saint Antony of Egypt (or Saint Antony the Great). The process of icon writing has given me a far deeper understanding of the saint's life and his total dedication to God. Over the many weeks of writing this narrative icon, it became to me a contemplative prayer. I found the spiritual wisdom of Saint Antony was whispering to me through the Holy Spirit as I wrote, drawing me closer, in fact, to God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.



“Blessed Antony, as it is written, became a person taught by God” (*Vita Antonii 66*, hereafter VA).

Saint Antony of Egypt (251-356) journeyed with God over the desert terrain of Egypt. He lived in the inner desert for approximately 43 years but his total time of solitude was about 85 years. What a remarkable saint of God who followed the leading of the Holy Spirit in his life of dedication and surrender to Jesus Christ in the desert!



In the icon I wrote, I chose to place the dove above the saint's head to convey the guidance of the Holy Spirit in and throughout his life. The Holy Spirit led him into the "interior desert" where he would find greater "peace and quiet." Antony travelled with the Saracens for "three days and three nights" until he came to "a very high mountain." And at the base of this mountain "was a spring with very clear water, sweet and very cold". Some distance away from the mountain "was a plain and a few untended date palms" (all quotes from VA 49) and hence, I placed a stream running along the mountain range with one mountain more prominent than the others and the date palms beside a pool, surrounded by the reddish sands of the desert plains. The iron oxide, being red in various tones, symbolises redemption and glory. The higher mountain represents the place where "he sat by himself on the mountain, if ever some question came to him for which he had no answer, it would be revealed to him by Providence as he prayed" (VA 66), thus revealing the richness of his spiritual gift.

Above the gold dome is the night sky with stars, reflecting the heavens and eternity. The crosses are placed on either side of the dove in this night sky alluding to the risen Lord Jesus Christ who is present for Saint Antony and all of us for all eternity. Saint Antony is placed in the dome of gold indicating that he is now in Heaven and as we gaze at him, we too can look forward to this heavenly world for all eternity. The night sky is painted blue, for blue represents the heavens and eternity. The dove is white in colour because it symbolises purity. The repetition of white in Saint Antony's long beard suggests he is overflowing in purity that comes from the Holy Spirit in the form of the dove above him. His long white beard also signifies the saint's spiritual wisdom.



In Saint Athanasius's account of the *Life of Antony (Vita Antonii)*, there are many graphic descriptions of Saint Antony's battles with demons, wild beasts and even apparitions of seductive women. I chose to place instead, a camel alongside Saint Antony in my icon rather than a lion or other wild beast, for unlike the violence or terror associated with wild beasts, a camel brings comfort and aid to desert dwellers. In the *Vita* we read how a camel "carried bread and water for [the brothers and Saint Antony] because that whole desert region is without water and there is no drinkable water at all except on the mountain" (VA 54). Furthermore, it is not uncommon for camels to be depicted accompanying saints in Coptic iconography – perhaps to signify a geographic locale – such as in the icon of Saint Menas of Egypt, or Saint Reweis (Teji).

The crosses placed on either side of the dove and the twelve crosses on the top of Saint Antony's blue mantel show that his life was dedicated to his love for Christ Jesus. In the account attributed to Saint Athanasius, Saint Antony cried out to the demons, "Look, here I am – Antony! I will not run from your blows! Even if you do worse things to me, 'nothing will separate me from the love of Christ!'" (VA 9). The significance of twelve white crosses placed on his cowl represent the twelve disciples and hence symbolises that the wearer is also a disciple of Christ.

While Saint Antony is usually depicted in Coptic iconography wearing a black cowl and garb (black symbolising death to worldly affairs), I chose to enrobe him in blue because of the colour's association with eternity. There are several traditions within the Coptic Church about the history and significance of the monastic cowl, but they stem from the Pachomian tradition of the monk's cowl resembling a baby's bonnet as a reminder to be pure and simple as a child (*Historia Lausiaca* 32.3).

In my icon, Saint Antony holds a scroll with Coptic writing on it because he wrote letters in the Coptic language (as he did not know Greek) on spiritual matters to other monks. He leans on a staff to show his seniority as an elder and father to many monks. His raised right hand is a gesture of blessing.

In both the Eastern and Western Christian traditions, Saint Antony is considered the father of monasticism and is an inspiration to us all. He chose to live an ascetic life of isolation and the rejection of everything the world offers to find the Living God who freely gives living water that never runs dry.

An intriguing aspect of Saint Antony's life is the many years he spent in solitude and silence. The notion of finding God in silence is strange to many in the 21st century who fill their worlds with noises – the shrieking, speaking, shouting chatter of human voices, coffee machines, traffic, vocal media coverage, podcasts, and trivial glossy music. I wonder, do they run away in fear from silence? Some churches in worship make as much sound as possible as if loudness is necessary to get God's attention. Imagine if only they too sat in silence like Saint Antony, they might actually hear Him instead of drowning His still small voice with their cacophony of sounds! We could all learn from the silence and sacred space of the desert in which Saint Antony spent so many years of his life.



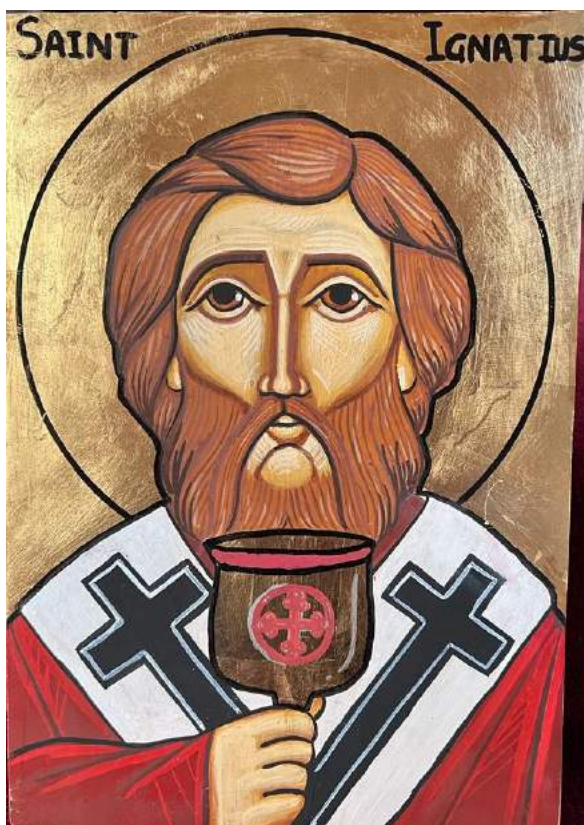


Coptic icon of St Antony the Great, written by Cecily Clark

NEW UNITS OFFERED IN 2021

For the first time, SAC offered 2 new and exciting units in 2021: *Seeking Christ in Scriptures - Scriptures and its Exegesis in the Orthodox Tradition* taught by Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara; and *Hope in Dark Times: The Eschatological and Apocalyptic Imaginations* taught by Prof. John McDowell.

Seeking Christ in Scriptures explores the place of Scriptures in the Orthodox Tradition and given that the Orthodox Tradition is patristic, the unit focuses on the principles of the Patristic hermeneutics to investigate homiletic, ascetic, liturgical, and iconographic exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. The unit enables a critical understanding of the process of canonical formation of the Scriptures and its position in the Orthodox Tradition and the place Scripture has in the spiritual life of a believer.



Coptic icon of St Ignatius of Antioch, written by student iconographer Benjamin Ibrahim

Hope in Dark Times addresses a range of issues relating to hope, hopelessness, and despair, while seeking to understand and critically engage with them through the history of Christian eschatological and apocalyptic thought. Because beliefs and practices are inseparable, the unit considers practices of hope that can be fruitfully examined in conjunction with critical analysis of the beliefs that ground and shape them. The unit explores a range of eschatological perspectives throughout the history of Christian theology and fosters an understanding of the importance of context for the development of diverse eschatological beliefs, all the while appreciating the overlap between philosophical and theological analyses of hope and hopelessness.



OTHER NEWS

The SAC community wish to thank Prof. John McDowell who served our College as Academic Dean from January 2020 to July 2021, prior to taking up the position of Associate Dean at our sister College of the University of Divinity, Yarra Theological Union. In the time that John was with us, he brought considerable experience to SAC as an academic administrator, researcher and lecturer. Dr Lisa Agaiby has replaced John as Academic Dean at SAC.

REFLECTIONS ON THE UNIT *Major Prophets*



13th century wall painting at the Syrian Monastery in Egypt, of the Virgin Mary and Archangel Gabriel (centre) accompanied by four prophets: Moses and Isaiah on the left, Ezekiel and Daniel on the right. Photo by Karel Innemée

Travis Betts

This unit offered at SAC is set between a general introduction to the Old Testament and an in-depth study into any one of the *Major Prophets*. Having completed Old Testament studies previously, this unit helped me to concentrate on a specific moment in Israel's history and more fully grasp the impacts of external cultures, politics and belief systems of Mesopotamia. It was particularly interesting to note the idea that the impact on Jews during the exilic period echoed in both prophetic writings of the time, but also that of the Pentateuch and Kings texts. While the mechanics of Deuteronomistic History are still contested, it was very apparent that the Gospel and New Testament writers employed some of the literary characteristics of the Major Prophets. This has given me a more thorough understanding of the Gospels and New Testament, but also has allowed me to better construct religious education and the occasional sermon that draws equally between the two Testaments of the Scriptures. I am more adaptable in listening to other's interpretations of texts, and better able to argue my perspective using historical and literary contexts. I also have greater dimension in reconciling the particular daily readings in the Liturgy and during Morning and Evening Prayer.

John Wahba

This was my first Biblical unit as I have not yet had the opportunity to take the *Introduction to the Old Testament* unit which would have been a great precursor to this unit. The *Major Prophets* unit introduced the methods of critical review and analysis of ancient texts which allowed me to gain a better understanding of the fundamentals of an exegetical study especially in the context of the Hebrew Bible text. Throughout the semester, the bi-weekly synopsis provided deeper analysis and reflections on the study material. The critical reviews of the synopsis during the zoom tutorial calls enriched the discussions and provided in-depth knowledge and analysis of the prophetic text. This unit helped me gain an appreciation of the major prophets and to broaden my views as a graduate student in this important area of theological studies. Completing the assignments have increased my skills, and my understanding of the text. By taking this class, I have been able to improve my rhetorical knowledge, develop better critical thinking, learn intertextuality, and develop effective strategies for writing essays.

Fr Samuel Zaki

The unit *Major Prophets* provided a comprehensive study of the concept of prophecy in light of the historical contexts, cultural backgrounds, and social settings through examining the writings of the four “major” prophets of the Hebrew Bible – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Throughout the course lectures, reading material, and regular group discussions, one could gain an overview of the nature of the genre of prophetic literature and its place in the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The unit examined the personalities, historical and cultural background, social setting, and theology of the four prophets. Given that I study online from Canada, the regular discussion groups and bi-weekly synopsis of the learning experience provided an ongoing opportunity to connect with fellow students and share our learning experiences. The unit addressed the reception of the prophetic writings in both Christian and Jewish traditions which provided a fresh perspective of the prophetic message as viewed by different traditions. All in all a fantastic learning experience, highly recommended for all students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate.

Biruk Tesfaye

Incorporating history and biblical archaeology, this unit on the *Major Prophets* is not only about God’s message to the Israelites, but carries significant meaning, hope, and relevance even to the present day.

Fr Karas Awad

As an international student studying online from Canada, this is my second unit with Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara, my first unit with him being *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Wishing to further my studies in the Old Testament, this unit provided me with an in-depth analysis of four major prophetic literature, allowing the opportunity for reflection, research, and knowledge expansion. Fr Nebojsa was always readily available and accessible and skillfully guided us through the “open door” tutorial sessions, which I found very insightful. Even online, actively participating in group discussions and reflections was easy and enjoyable and was very enriching in providing foundational understanding of prophetic Scripture. This unit also made me realise the importance of studying the Hebrew language to appreciate exegesis more fully. And therefore I’m excited at the prospect of studying Fr Nebojsa’s unit *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* in semester 1 2022.

REFLECTIONS ON THE UNIT *Orthodox Mission Theology*



Medieval wall painting at the Syrian Monastery in Egypt of St Andrew the Apostle baptising new converts. Photo by Karel Innemée

Abram El-Sabagh

As an Orthodox Christian, mission has always been in the back of my mind. How do I approach others in my communities? At work? At university? At the shops? The truth is, I always thought mission was something other denominations do really well, and the Orthodox Churches were learning how. This unit flipped my understanding upside down. Fr Dr Jacob Joseph showed us the depth and richness of Orthodox mission, how the Orthodox Church approaches mission, and the fruits of this approach. Every lesson was intriguing, I thoroughly enjoyed Fr Jacob’s approach and how he took us through different parts of our Orthodox faith and how they tie into mission. I learnt that mission wasn’t just about preaching; Orthodox faith is all about mission.

REFLECTIONS ON THE UNIT

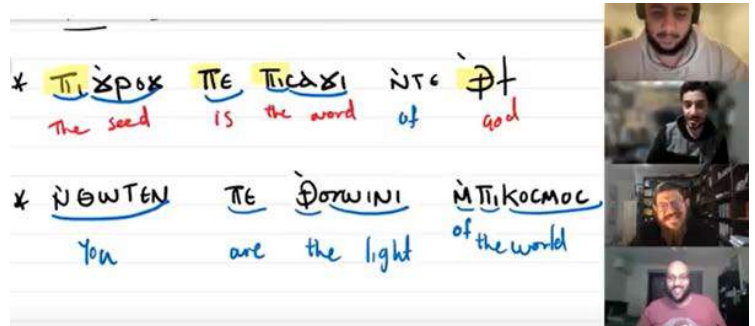
Introduction to Syriac

Katherin Papadopoulou

There are many reasons to learn Syriac. In and of its own, Syriac is a beautiful language with gorgeous scripts, but it is particularly useful for biblical studies, history, and theology. As the great Syriac scholar Sebastian Brock points out, Syriac is also the only cultural-linguistic tradition in which all three Christological positions (Chalcedonian, Oriental Orthodox, and Church of the East) are represented, so it is invaluable for understanding the theological positions of the 'other' (and the polemics to avoid!), which in turn opens the door to studying aspects of conflict and dialogue relevant to today's intra and interfaith relations. And if anyone doubts how Syriac fosters dialogue and diversity, here I was a Greek Orthodox at a Lutheran college learning Syriac at a Coptic Orthodox college from a Serbian Orthodox priest who trained in Syriac at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Armenian seminary of St. Nersess in New York! For me, learning Syriac at St Athanasius College (SAC) was both personally and professionally rewarding. As a dialect of Aramaic, Syriac is very close to the language which Jesus spoke. While we do not have many of Jesus's own words but rather the evangelists' summaries of what He taught, the playfulness and poetics of the Syriac language make the Syriac gospel's renderings of Jesus' teaching particularly memorable. Syriac was also invaluable for my own doctoral research in the social and cultural history of early Christianity. I was able to pick up omissions and nuances that were lost in translations of Syriac texts. Best of all, knowledge of Syriac was instrumental in helping me identify the sources and reconstruct the compositional history of an early Syriac saints' calendar, which was one of my most rewarding discoveries.

REFLECTIONS ON THE UNIT

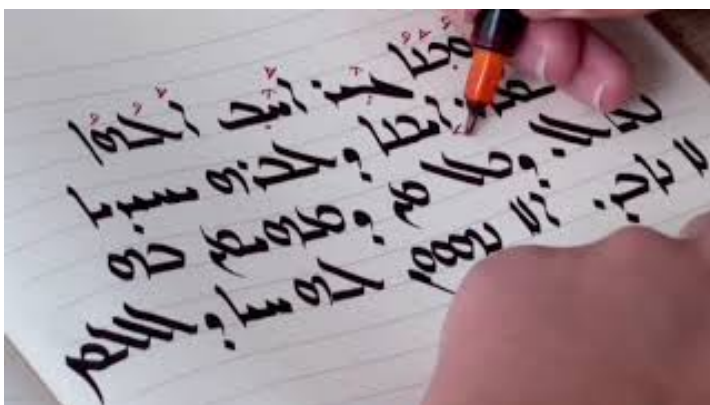
Coptic Bohairic I



Bohairic I zoom class, 2021

Abanoub Hanna

To study any ancient language is a privilege, but as a Copt growing up hearing Coptic chanted in church, studying Coptic I was especially beneficial for me to begin learning the basics of the language, such as the Coptic alphabet, and progress to forming and translating short sentences and feel the improvement week by week in my reading skills. This was particularly helpful given that a number of the texts we read in class are liturgical texts and psalmodies. This unit helped me to understand the words and praises that we pray in our church, something I consider to be the greatest benefit of this unit, for as St Paul says in Corinthians: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15). The challenges posed by the pandemic forcing classes to go online did not affect the learning experience, but in many ways was advantageous as our cohort consisted of students who were local as well as interstate. Our weekly classes took place in real time with the lecturers using Microsoft white boards to replicate the face-to-face teaching experience. The support that was given to each of us from Fr Gregorios and Shady Nessim was incredible. They were always willing to help and go the extra mile to ensure that the students' experience was easy, beneficial and enjoyable. I look forward to continuing my studies in 2022 with *Coptic II* so that I can further develop my skills and understanding of the Coptic language and to one day even contribute to our great heritage by translating some of the Coptic texts contained in ancient manuscripts.



REFLECTIONS ON THE UNIT *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*

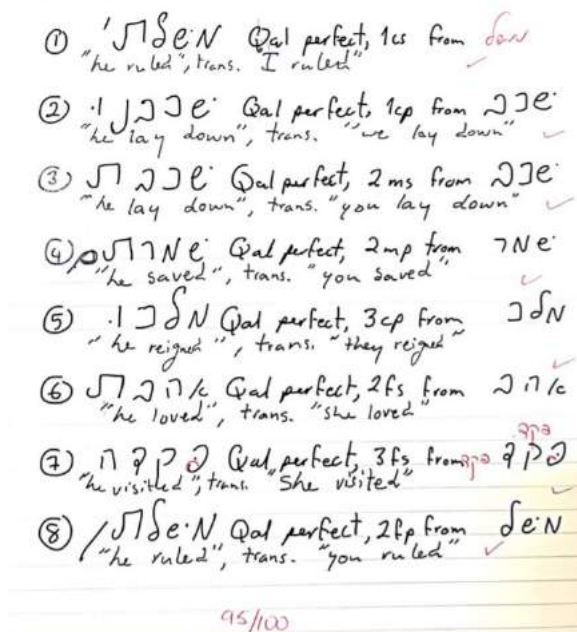
Sami Sawires

Having always studied as an online student from Perth, my journey with SAC has been challenging yet rewarding and enriching. Nearing the end of my Advanced Diploma in Theology and Ministry, I undertook my fifth unit with Fr. Nebojsa, this time studying *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew*. Fr Nebojsa has always been an inspirational instructor and has taught me much from his vast knowledge of Biblical Studies, and now the Hebrew language.

The unit offered foundational elements such as the Hebrew alphabet, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. We also studied word forms in both script and print. Learning material was uploaded weekly and supplemented with real time tutorials that were recorded and became instrumental in teaching us to read and write Hebrew. In the first week, the unit seemed challenging, daunting, and even impossible! But over time and with step-by-step guidance, it became one of the most enjoyable and satisfying experiences to be able to read and write basic biblical texts. In this unit, we were introduced to many Old Testament texts and Psalms, and it was the weekly highlight for our group to read and translate these texts. This unit is a must for all those who wish to deepen their understanding of the Scriptures.

My time at SAC has been very rewarding and the variety of units offered has deepened my understanding of theology, history, and now ancient languages. I have the deepest respect for all the lecturers at SAC who have given me much of their time, knowledge, and encouragement to continue my journey to spiritual enlightenment and personal growth.

Question 2: Locate and translate the following forms



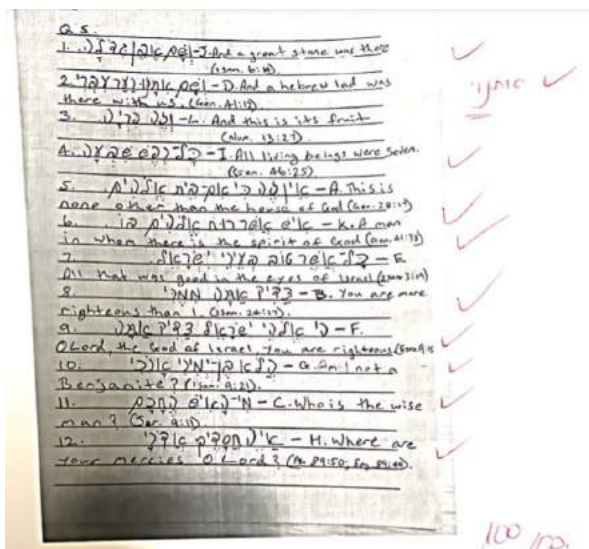
Assessment task

Abram El-Sabagh

For a long time, I've wanted to learn how to read and write Hebrew. For a few reasons, first I believed it would help me interpret biblical Hebrew in the Old Testament. Second, I wanted to be able to visit Jerusalem and the Holy land and try to speak with people. Third, I was keen to add another language that I can read and write. The *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* unit ticked all these boxes. Fr Nebojsa did a great job in taking us, slowly but surely, through biblical Hebrew, explaining the intricacies of the language, the interesting things about it, and helping us learn quickly. At first, I thought this was going to be very complicated, but Fr Nebojsa did an amazing job helping us understand piece by piece, spending time to make sure we understood, and giving us lots of time to practice through the weekly homework. I loved this unit and would highly recommend it to anyone who's interested in learning Hebrew.

Mina Tadros

This unit had a great mix of grammar and foundation level material. The biblical reflections were particularly useful because they gave me an appreciation of how I could apply my learning to better understand Scripture. So my intention is to continue my learning to further my knowledge of the Hebrew language. As a result of this unit, I've gained foundational knowledge of the language and confidence to read and decipher words and simple sentence structures.



Assessment task

REFLECTIONS ON THE UNIT

Coptic Art and Iconography II

Youstina Nan

Coptic Art & Iconography II has been one of my favourite subjects at SAC to date! Building on our foundational skills from *Coptic Art & Iconography I*, we were able to further develop and refine our sketching and painting techniques. This semester, we also learnt not only how to interpret the meaning behind the icons we see, but also how to add meaning to the icons we design and create ourselves.



More importantly, however, this unit deepened our understanding of the theological basis of iconography. As our lecturer Ashraf Gerges emphasised throughout both units, icons are much more than just art. They are, first and foremost, visual theology, teaching the faithful about the mysteries of the Orthodox faith through the medium of art and symbolism. Within the multitude of icons in our churches, we see the faith found in Scripture, Holy Tradition, and the lives of the saints. As such, icons are an integral part of the Orthodox liturgy, serving as a vehicle for our own edification by providing us with ample examples of how to live out our own spiritual lives.



(Top) Youstina Nan; (top right) with iconographer Ashraf Gerges; (bottom right) icon almost complete. Photos by Shady Nessim.

FEATURE ARTICLE

Reflections on My Time Studying at SAC

Pam Daams

Pam Daams studied at SAC (Graduate Certificate of Divinity) both on campus and online from July 2018 to July 2021.



She and her husband have spent many years living in island communities around the Pacific helping Polynesian language groups translate and use the Bible in their own language. One highlight of those years was helping the Kapingamarangi people (Pohnpei, FSM) compile over 300 hymns into their first hymnbook. Pam currently lives in Darwin and hopes to continue her studies at SAC in 2022.

A few years ago on an Open Building Day in Melbourne, my husband and I decided to visit the Donvale campus of SAC. We had never been to a Coptic church, but Coptic history intrigued us, especially the fact that the Copts had one of the earliest Bible translations in Christianity. Since we have worked with small island groups in Bible translation for many years, this translation history added to our interest in the Coptic Church. During that visit to Donvale we met Dr Lisa Agaiby and when I heard that she taught a course on the Desert Fathers, I had to do it!

I enrolled in a Graduate Certificate of Divinity with SAC as my home college. As part of my studies during the unit on the *Lives and Times of the Desert Fathers*, I was able to research a bit more about the early Coptic translation work and it gave me insight on how similar some of the dynamics were to modern translation work. In this unit, people like St Antony, Paul the Hermit, Athanasius, Macarius, Pachomius and Shenoute became for the first time familiar names and offered me a new perspective on the Early Church.

Then when the unit *Saints and Sinners: Women in Late Antiquity* was offered I couldn't resist – especially during a Melbourne lockdown! It was during that semester, when I focused on researching women and singing in Late Antiquity, that I discovered St Ephrem of Syria and his Women's Choirs. I was amazed to discover how he elevated the role and place of women in the fourth century Syrian Church in a most unique way! I was eager to know more about how he expressed his theological understanding in hymns and poetry, and so I chose to do a supervised reading unit that focused on St Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise*. His deep spiritual insights enriched my life and has truly been transforming for me. How I wish that his music had survived the years – or that I was able to read Syriac in order to appreciate the intricacies of his poetry! It is for this very reason that I'm eager to enrol in the unit on *Introduction to Syriac* with Fr Nebojsa Tumara in semester 1 2022.



Coptic icon of St Ephrem the Syrian, written by Kirolos Kilada

There are two things that stand out from my experience studying at SAC. First, is the open exchange of views with people from different faith backgrounds that were in the classes I took. This has deepened my own understanding of God's Church and its rich variety. Secondly, I have learnt that the history of the early Church offers so much that is relevant to our lives today. I've found new understanding of the sacrifices many Christians made in the early centuries and discovered theological discussions that I knew nothing about. I have a new respect for the challenges of the Christian faith as it developed in the Eastern Church and how that has influenced my own Protestant tradition.

PRIESTLY ORDINATION OF REV. FR ANTHONY MIKHAIL

Our sincere congratulations to Rev. Fr Anthony Mikhail (Abanoub Mikhail) on his ordination to the priesthood. Ordained by His Grace Bishop Daniel, the abbot of St Shenouda Monastery in NSW, the ceremony took place on Saturday 27 November 2021 at St George's Coptic Orthodox Church in St Albans Melbourne, where he will be a parish priest.

SAC alumni Fr Anthony received a Graduate Diploma in Theology from the University of Divinity in 2016, and his wife Katherine Mikhail graduated in March 2021 also with a Graduate Diploma in Theology and was awarded the Vice-Chancellor's scholar for academic excellence. During their years of study at SAC, both Fr Anthony and Katherine were ambassadors of the College and actively participated in the organisation of a number of events and symposia. They were also among the pioneering cohort of students who participated in the first field-trip to Egypt in January 2018 to begin the process of documenting the manuscripts at St Paul the Hermit's Monastery at the Red Sea. Fr Anthony has plans to further his studies at SAC in 2022.

"Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the Mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one is found faithful" (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).



Photos by Tony Mikhail

PRIESTLY ORDINATION OF REV. FR ELDHOSE PARUTHIKUNNEL

Our sincere congratulations to SAC student Rev. Fr Eldhose Abraham Paruthikunnel (Elvin Paruthikunnel Abraham) on his ordination to the priesthood. He was ordained as a priest of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church by His Eminence Metropolitan Athanasios Geevargis, the abbot of Mar Ignatius Dayro Manjinnikara, Metropolitan of Simhasana Churches of South Kerala and Patriarchal Vicar of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Churches in New Zealand. The ceremony took place on Thursday 12 August 2021, at St Mary's Jacobite Syrian Church in Nedungapra, Ernakulam District, Kerala State in India.

Fr Eldhose has been focusing his study at SAC in the field of Missiology with Fr Dr Jacob Joseph, and his study will enrich his ministry in the service of the Patriarchal Vicar of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox Churches in New Zealand.

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit"
(John 15:16).



Photos courtesy of Fr Eldhose Paruthikunnel and Koinonia Vision

PRIESTLY ORDINATION OF REV. FR DR ARSENIUS MIKHAIL

Our sincere congratulations to SAC's adjunct lecturer Rev. Fr Dr Arsenius Mikhail (Dr Ramez Mikhail) on his ordination to the priesthood. Ordained by His Eminence Metropolitan Serapion of the Diocese of Los Angeles on Sunday 10 October 2021, Fr Arsenius will serve as chair of Liturgical Studies at St Athanasius and St Cyril Coptic Orthodox Theological School in Los Angeles, alongside his responsibilities as an assistant parish priest in the diocese.

Having received a Ph.D. from the University of Vienna, prior to his ordination he was an Alexander van Humboldt Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Regensburg Chair of Liturgical Studies in Germany. A specialist in the liturgical history of the Coptic tradition, in particular studies relating to the Bohairic liturgy of Northern Egypt, he has published extensively in the field of Coptic Liturgical Studies. SAC has been enriched by having Fr Dr Arsenius Mikhail as a sessional lecturer over the past few years teaching units on *The Liturgies of Egypt* and *Coptic Liturgy*.

"But you will be called the priests of the Lord; you will be spoken of as ministers of our God"
(Isaiah 61:6).



Photos courtesy of
Fr Dr Arsenius Mikhail

SUBDIACONATE ORDINATION OF ANANIAS ANANIEVSKI

And finally, our sincere congratulations to Ananias Ananievski who was ordained to the Holy Order of the subdiaconate on Saturday 24 September 2021, by His Beatitude the Most Blessed Tikhon, Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada and Primate of the Orthodox Church in America. The ceremony took place at the Dormition of the Mother of God Orthodox Church in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Subdeacon Ananias commenced his theological studies at SAC before travelling to the US to undertake a Master of Divinity degree at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. Currently he is serving as President of the Orthodox Inter-Seminary Movement (OISM) which is a pan-Orthodox fellowship among students enrolled in Orthodox Theological schools of all jurisdictions in North America. OISM seeks to promote understanding and unity among all Orthodox Christians, in building a network for future clerical and lay cooperation in serving the Universal and Apostolic Church. Nearing the completion of his Masters degree, Ananias has plans on returning to SAC in 2022 to focus on studying units in the fields of Pastoral Ministry and Missiology.

"But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless... For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 3:10-13).



Photos courtesy of Ananias Ananievski

RESEARCH GRANT FOR ST PAUL'S MONASTERY MANUSCRIPT PROJECT *Watermarks: The Key to Dating and Validating Manuscript Production*



Sample of watermarks (European and Egyptian paper) from the collection

While manuscripts frequently contain colophons (scribal signatures mentioning the year the manuscript text was written), it is not uncommon for scribes to provide no date. So how does one date an undated manuscript?

In June 2021, Dr Lisa Agaiby on behalf of SAC was awarded an “Extraordinary Large Grant” of \$141,408 to carry out research on a component of the larger St Paul the Hermit’s Monastery Manuscript Project. The grant awarded is to document the watermarks contained in the manuscript collection as a means to dating and validating manuscript production. A fantastic team, consisting mostly of early career academics and Masters students have been working diligently since June to collect data according to specific data-set for approx. 500 manuscripts. A summary of the research follows.

Manuscripts contained in monastic libraries are one of our most important witnesses to cultural heritage. They fascinate both scholars and the general public largely because of their antiquity.

One of the most crucial factors used in weighing the importance of a Christian manuscript is its date.

A fundamental aspect of producing a codicological manuscript catalogue that incorporates trends on the development of scribal conventions and book production pertains to dating, and when manuscripts are not dated, watermarks can prove an invaluable means of ascertaining dates more accurately than the imprecise science of palaeography that produces only ranges of possible dates, or radiocarbon dating that is a destructive process and only yields dates within a probable range of one to two centuries and is unsustainable in terms of artifact preservation.

Watermarks are key to retracing the origins of paper manuscripts, and so the value of the project lies in the fact that it will offer a window into the history of human networks and trade practices in the medieval and early modern Mediterranean world, and for the first time offer scholars and the wider community a valuable dating reference of watermarks contained in manuscripts that originate from a purely Christian-Egyptian setting.

THE LARGER ST PAUL'S MONASTERY MANUSCRIPT PROJECT UPDATE

In parallel to the “Watermarks” project, the larger Manuscript Project is ongoing. Due to the ongoing pandemic and subsequent travel restrictions, the January 2021 and September 2021 field-trips to Egypt have been postponed but a dedicated team have been focusing their attention on documentation of codicological detail from the digitised manuscripts and data entry. To date, just under half the collection (approx. 500) has been digitised by the team. The Manuscript Project is receiving exposure and interest from a number of institutions both nationally and around the world. In February, the Lead Investigator (Lisa Agaiby) was awarded a summer fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks (a Harvard University research institute) to focus on an aspect of her larger manuscript project. The result has been the formation of an international collaboration of seven scholars, with Lisa as the lead, who are working on a first edition and translation of the *Life of Paul the Hermit* extant in nine ancient languages (Latin, Greek, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Old Church Slavonic, Georgian, Arabic and Ge’ez). In addition, in April 2021, Lisa was invited to be a ‘Visiting Scholar’ at Cambridge University to work on research pertaining to the Manuscript Project; namely the codicological documentation of a portion of the library’s collection. Due to the pandemic, travel has been postponed.

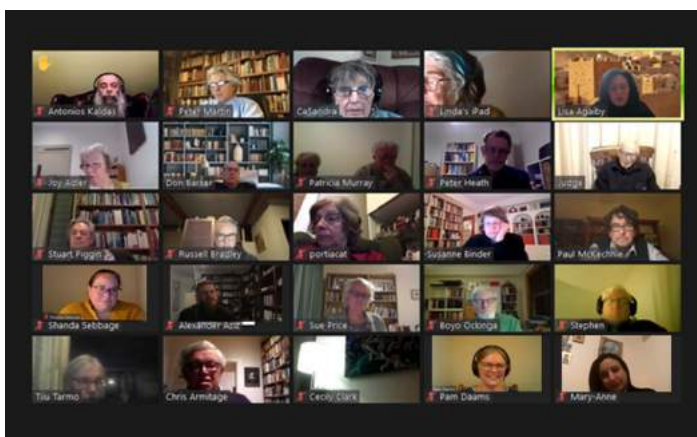
CONFERENCES, SEMINARS & PUBLIC LECTURES

Due to the ongoing pandemic and travel restrictions, many academic conferences were also cancelled in 2021, but those that did proceed went online. This year SAC continued to promote the College and University of Divinity by showcasing recent scholarship at a number of international conferences as well as participate in local seminars and public lectures.

June 19: SAC hosted a virtual public lecture given by Dr Amir Malek where he presented on "Genesis Exegesis in Medieval Egypt: The Case of Marqus Ibn al-Qunbur." Dr Malek's presentation showcased highlights from his doctoral dissertation on the same topic.

July 16 – 17: Dr Lisa Agaiby, senior lecturer in Coptic Studies, presented a paper at the 22nd St Shenouda/ UCLA Conference of Coptic Studies, hosted by the UCLA and St Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, Los Angeles, on "Copto-Arabic Sayings Attributed to St. Antony the Great" as a prelude to the launch of *Door of the Wilderness: The Greek, Coptic, and Copto-Arabic Sayings of St. Antony of Egypt* (Brill, Nov. 2021). The large majority presented from North America, however, scholars from Europe, Egypt, the UK, Japan, and Australia also contributed to this virtual conference. The proceedings will appear in *Coptica*, which is an international peer-reviewed journal published by the St Shenouda the Archimandrite Coptic Society, Los Angeles.

September 1: Dr Lisa Agaiby gave an overview presentation on the "St Paul's Monastery Manuscript Project" that is part funded by the University of Divinity, to Macquarie University's Society for the Study of Early Christianity.



September 6-7: Our Librarian Deborah Decru attended the 49th General Assembly of BETH (European Theological Libraries), an online conference titled "Information Literacy in Theological Libraries." Presentations by librarians from Ukraine, Belgium, Italy, Germany, Croatia, Canada, and England enlightened participants on the best ways to impart information literacy to both staff and students, and the desirable outcomes for those learners. A couple of key themes of the presentations were: the importance of delivering information literacy as a learning process, rather than a teaching process, so it becomes student focused; and the recognition that information literacy is not something that can be learnt in one session but is an iterative process, gained and improved through multiple "exposures" over time.

September 8: Fr Nebojsa Tumara, senior lecturer of Biblical Languages, Religious Studies and Old Testament, was a guest lecturer at Whitley College for the unit on Creation. His presentation was titled: "Orthodox Doctrine of Creation, Jacob of Serugh, Hexameron."

September 17 – 18: Mr Shady Nessim, associate lecturer in Ancient Languages and Liturgy, participated in the "Amassing Perspectives: Recent Trends in Syriac Iconography" virtual seminar that was hosted by Princeton University, where he was a respondent for a roundtable session on "Medieval Church Wall Paintings" with presentations by Prof. Mat Immerzeel (Leiden University) on "Syriac Art & Identity: The Decoration of Medieval Churches in Lebanon and Syria," and Prof. Karel Innemée (University of Amsterdam and UD Honorary Associate) on "The newly discovered paintings in the dome over the sanctuary in Deir al-Surian Conservation Project."

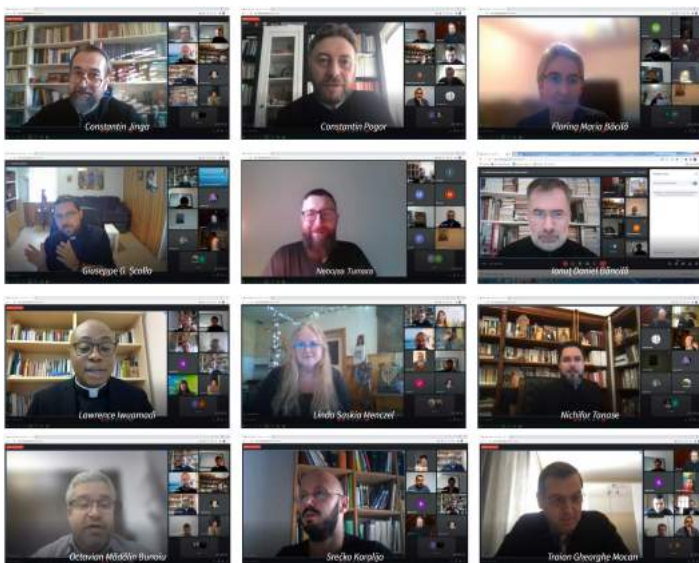


(Left) Zoom presentation, "St Paul's Monastery Manuscript Project to Macquarie University's Society for the Study of Early Christianity. (Top) Zoom presentation, "Amassing Perspectives" hosted by Princeton University.

October 2: SAC hosted a virtual public lecture by Mr Abraam Mikhail on “Greek Patristic and Coptic Liturgical Exegesis of the Creation of Humankind” as a preface to the new unit he will offer in 2022 titled *Pillars of Orthodoxy*.

October 30: Fr Nebojsa Tumara presented a paper at the 14th Annual Coptic Studies Symposium, hosted by the Ontario Historical Society titled “Iconography and Hagiography: Picturing Holiness in Coptic Christianity.” His paper was titled “St Paul of Thebes among the Serbs - Hierotopy and the Translation of the Holy Land of Egypt into the Visual Culture of the Medieval Balkans.” Scholars from Australia, Canada, the US, Egypt, France, Sweden, and the UK attended this virtual Symposium, and the proceedings will be published in the international peer-reviewed *Journal of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies* published by Lockwood Press.

November 11 – 13: Fr Nebojsa Tumara presented a paper at the 2nd International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis, hosted by the Faculty of Theology at the West University of Timișoara in Romania titled “Holy Scripture in Church and History.” The symposium was attended by scholars from Europe, North America, and Australia. The theme provided an opportunity for interdisciplinary theological, philological, historical, artistic approaches. Fr Nebojsa’s paper on “He Lowered Himself from the Heights of Creation”- Jacob of Serugh on the Kenosis of God” will be published in a peer-reviewed thematic volume by The West University of Timișoara Press.



Zoom presentation, "2nd International Symposium on Biblical Exegesis" hosted by the West University of Timișoara

November 17: Fr Shenouda Boutros, SAC Chaplain and lecturer of Systematic Theology presented at a University of Divinity seminar that was led by the Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Sherlock on “Academic Freedom, Religious Freedom and the University of Divinity.” Given our University’s collegiate structure, this seminar acknowledged there are a range of theological and doctrinal perspectives represented and thus focused discussions on what it means to uphold both religious and academic freedoms in an institution that contains a wide variety of positions on matters of public importance. The aim of the seminar was to consider how the University can model creative, respectful and constructive disagreement to the wider community. Ensuing seminars will follow in 2022.



Eastern Suburbs Research Seminar

In 2021 we continued with the Eastern Suburbs Research Seminar series, which is a research collaboration between Stirling Theological College, Eva Burrows College, St Athanasius College, and Yarra Theological Union. The goal of the seminar is to showcase current research and enhance research collaboration, quality, and output among these four colleges. Presenting from SAC in 2021 were:

- Prof. John McDowell (24 March) on “The Idea of the University and the Last Academic”
- Dr Fr Jacob Joseph (12 May) on “Patristic Symbiosis: Reading Early Teachers in the Contemporary Context”
- Dr Lisa Agaiby (28 July) on “The Arabic Apophthegmata Patrum”
- Fr Nebojsa Tumara (15 September) on “Hierotopy gone wrong – Iconographical interpretations of The Myth of Heavenly Serbia”

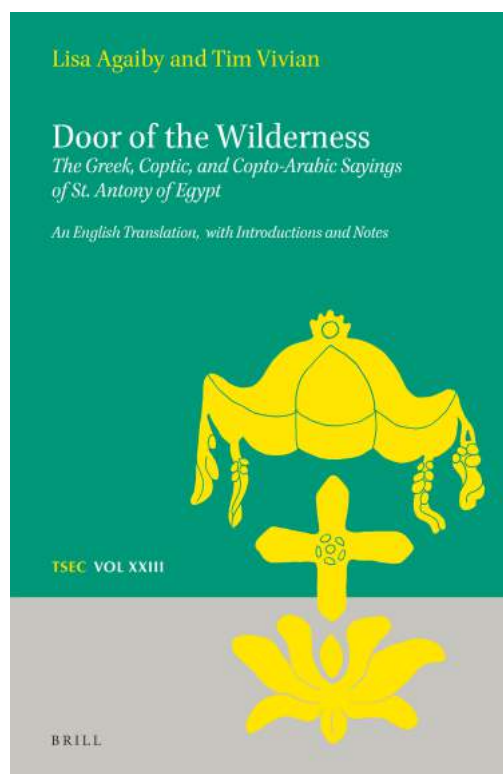
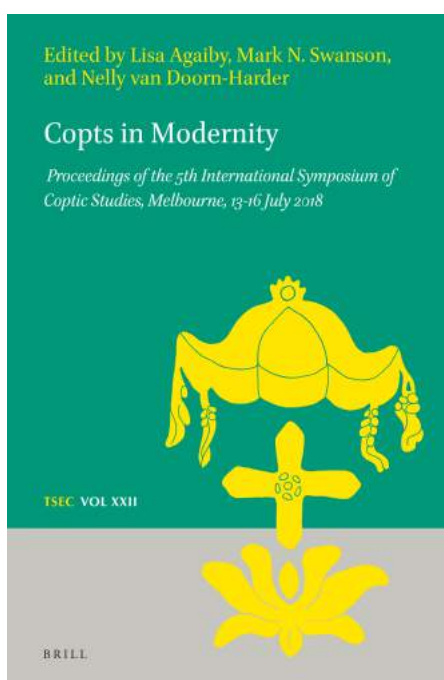
PUBLICATIONS BY SAC IN 2021

NEW BOOKS

Lisa Agaiby, Mark N. Swanson and Nelly van Doorn-Harder, eds.

Copts in Modernity: Proceedings of the 5th International Symposium of Coptic Studies, Melbourne, 13–16 July 2018. Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity (22) Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2021.

This book presents a collection of essays, many of which contain unpublished archival material, showcasing historical and contemporary aspects pertaining to the Coptic Orthodox Church. The volume covers three main themes: The first theme, History, gathers studies that look back to the 19th and late 18th centuries to understand the realities of the 20th and 21st; the second theme, Education, Leadership and Service, explores the role of religious education in the revival of the Church and how Coptic religious principles influenced the ideas of leadership and service that resulted in the Church's spiritual revival; and the third theme, Identity and Material Culture, draws upon a broad range of material and visual culture to exemplify the role they play in creating and recreating identities. This volume brings together the work of senior and early career scholars from Australia, Europe, Egypt, Japan and North America.



Lisa Agaiby and Tim Vivian

Door of the Wilderness: The Greek, Coptic, and Copto-Arabic Sayings of St. Antony of Egypt. An English Translation, with Introductions and Notes. Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity (23). Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2021.

Saint Antony of Egypt (c. 251–356), often called “the father of monasticism,” has numerous representations: the Antony of the Life of Antony and the Letters, but also the Antony of around 120 sayings or apophthegmata. This volume presents fresh English translations of the Greek and Coptic sayings, as well as the first English translation of the Copto-Arabic sayings that are based on unpublished manuscripts. The volume thus opens the door to a richer image of Saint Antony's many identities across various languages and traditions.

PUBLICATIONS BY SAC IN 2021

SAC's academic staff have had yet another very productive year on the research front, producing a total output of 2 books, 5 book chapters, 1 encyclopedia entry, and 5 peer-reviewed journal articles. Several publications are the result of approved conference papers and proceedings, the most significant being the contribution of 5 chapters to the *Copts in Modernity* volume which is the proceedings of the 5th International Symposium of Coptic Studies that SAC organised and hosted in Melbourne, from 13–16 July 2018.

BOOK CHAPTERS

- Agaiby, Lisa with Shady Nessim. "The Cenotaph in the Cave Church of St. Paul the Hermit." In: *Copts in Modernity*. Texts and Studies in Eastern Christianity (22), eds. Lisa Agaiby, Mark N. Swanson, Nelly van Doorn Harder (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2021), 321-356.
- Awad, Magdi (Gregorios). "A Correspondence between Rome and Alexandria in the Middle Ages: An Example from the Eighteenth Century." In: *Copts in Modernity*, 39-55.
- Salib, Michael. "A Multidimensional Understanding of Sunday School in the Coptic Orthodox Tradition." In: *Copts in Modernity*, 257-269.
- Tumara, Nebojsa. "Sign of Martyrdom, Heresy and Pride": The Christian Coptic Tattoo and the Construction of Coptic Identity." In: *Copts in Modernity*, 295-320.
- Youssef, Youhanna. "Pope Mark VIII (1796-1809) the Author of Psalis for St Mark." In: *Copts in Modernity*, 81-105.

ENCYCLOPAEDIA ENTRIES/PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

- Agaiby, Lisa. "Antony of Egypt, Saint: Arabic life by Serapion of Thmuis." *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*, eds. Gawdat Gabra and Karen Torjesen (Los Angeles: Claremont Graduate University, 2021), <https://ccd.claremont.edu/digital/collection/cce/id/2173/>
- Agaiby, Lisa. "Shenoute the Archimandrite in Manuscripts at the Red Sea Monasteries." *Coptica* (Los Angeles: St Shenouda Society for Coptic Studies, 2021), 1-16.
- Nessim, Shady. "In Likeness and Commemoration: Pseudo-Sāwīres Ibn al-Muqaffa' on Sacred Images." *Phronema* 36.2 (Sydney: St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College, 2021), 55-81.
- Tumara, Nebojsa. "21 Martyrs of Libya" – Presenting Holiness in the Contemporary Coptic Church." *IKON – Journal of Iconographic Studies* 14 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2021), 347-356.
- Youssef, Youhanna. "Coptic Liturgical Texts Relating to Agathon the Stylite." *Cuestiones Teológicas* 48.109 (Colombia: Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana, 2021), 147-163.
- Youssef, Youhanna. "Coptic Liturgical Texts Relating to Saint John of Heraclia." *Coptica Alexandrina* 1 (Alexandria, Egypt: Bibliotheca Alexandrina, 2021), 53-70.

LIBRARY MATTERS by Deborah Decru

What a challenging year we have all experienced! As the SAC Librarian, I have been working from home for most of 2021 due to work restrictions and a reduced demand for print books and journals. St Athanasius College is not new to online study, so lecturers were well prepared to meet students' needs for resources, minimising the demand for hard-copy library materials. The print collection was moved to a new library management system – OCLC's WorldShare Management Service (WMS) – early in 2021, resulting in the SAC collection being searchable through the Library Hub, although eBooks and other online resources were the preferred options this year for obvious reasons. The move to OCLC has made the SAC collection more visible to members of the University, facilitating inter-library loans, and the wider community through Trove and WorldCat. It has also provided further opportunities for professional development and collegial engagement with other librarians of the University, which I have particularly appreciated. The books at the Eporo campus are gradually being relocated to our Donvale library. The Not for Loan, Arabic language, and Journal titles were moved into the old bookstore room at Donvale – which is now a beautiful reading room for staff and HDR students – to make space for the books from Eporo in the Library.

BOOK REVIEW

Deborah Decru

Copts in Modernity: Proceedings of the 5th International Symposium of Coptic Studies, Melbourne, 13-16 July 2018. Lisa Agaiby, Mark N. Swanson, and Nelly van Doorn-Harder, eds. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

This excellent edited volume is divided into three parts, with contributions on History; Education, Leadership, and Service; and Identity and Material Culture. Within these categories sits a most interesting range of articles looking at various liturgical and epistolary manuscripts, significant leaders – both lay and clerical – in the modern history of the Coptic Church, the publishing of medieval Christian-Arabic texts by Copts, papal selection, the Sunday School movement, Coptic religious material heritage, and Coptic music theory.

Contributors range from eminent Coptologists to emerging scholars and include six academic staff members from St Athanasius College. The work of a strong editorial team is evident throughout the volume. A comprehensive introduction provides context for the articles that follow, and the text is interspersed with photographs and illustrations, graphs, tables, and a map. This is an excellent volume for anyone interested in learning about the Coptic Orthodox Church and her people, and the deep religiosity that permeates the Coptic culture. It should certainly spark interest in further reading. A sequel to the volume, focusing on how the diasporic setting has impacted the Church, would certainly complement this work.



Visit of King Fuad to the Hanging Church in Old Cairo, accompanied by the Coptic patriarch Pope John XIX, 1920

SEVEN NEW UNITS ON OFFER IN 2022

Semester 1

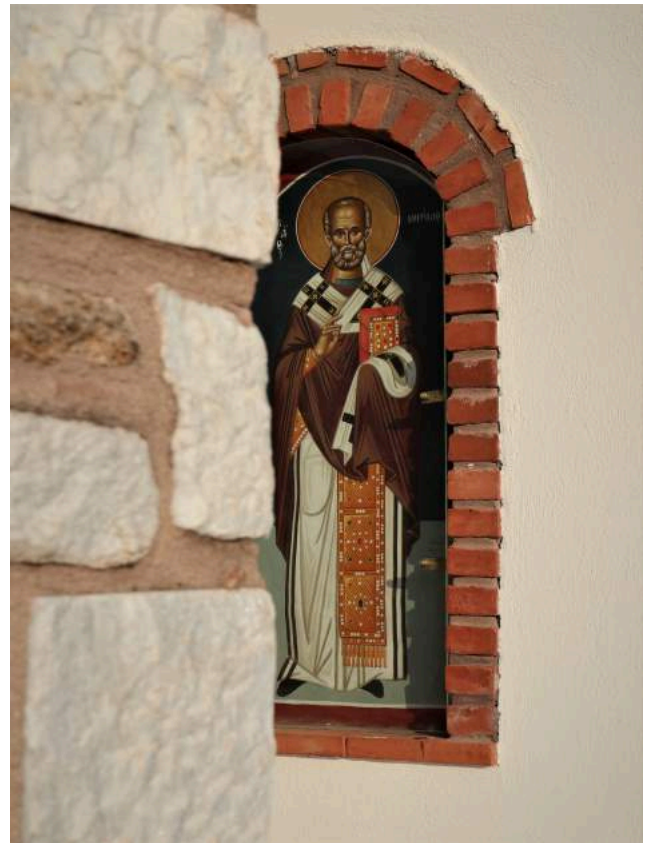
Holy Images, Holy Relics and Sacred Space in the Orthodox Tradition

Lecturers: Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara & Mr Shady Nessim

The Orthodox Tradition testifies that the holy relics of saints and their iconographical representations play one of the most essential elements of the liturgical life of the Church. At the same time, relics and icons have their place in the personal devotional life of believers. The faithful believe that some icons as well as saints' relics serve as a channel of divine grace and can perform miracles. Accordingly, the faithful kiss and touch holy images and relics and thereby participate in a unique visual and sensory experience of faith.

At the same time, as scholars we are challenged to critically evaluate the cult related to icons and relics and observe how it developed and was challenged throughout history. To understand this, the unit will use the concept of *hierotopy* to ask the question how holy icons and relics articulate holiness, both in the past as well as the present and how they participate in the creation of holy space in both Oriental and Byzantine Orthodox traditions.

A unique aspect of this unit will include field-trips to both Byzantine and Oriental Orthodox Churches in Melbourne where students will experience sacred space and rituals, as well as meet and converse with iconographers in both Russian and Coptic Church traditions.



Pillars of Orthodoxy: The Alexandrian Fathers

Lecturer: Mr Abraam Mikhail

The Early Church Fathers were powerful and influential theologians and their writings determined the intellectual and doctrinal foundations of Christianity. Their writings have established the framework for Christian tradition, way of life, and provided a door to a deeper understanding of faith. A number of these Fathers lived and wrote and flourished during the fourth century; one of the most dynamic eras in history when Christianity was establishing itself as the recognised religion of the Roman Empire.

In this unit, we will be introduced to the literary works of some of the most prominent early Alexandrian Fathers; namely, Didymus the Blind, Clement, Origen, Cyril, and Athanasius. By reading primary texts, we will understand the social, cultural, theological, and political contexts in which the Fathers were engaged, in order to appreciate how Alexandrian theology developed against the backdrop of controversies at the time.

Semester 1

Jesus Christ at the Margins

Lecturer: Fr Dr Jacob Joseph

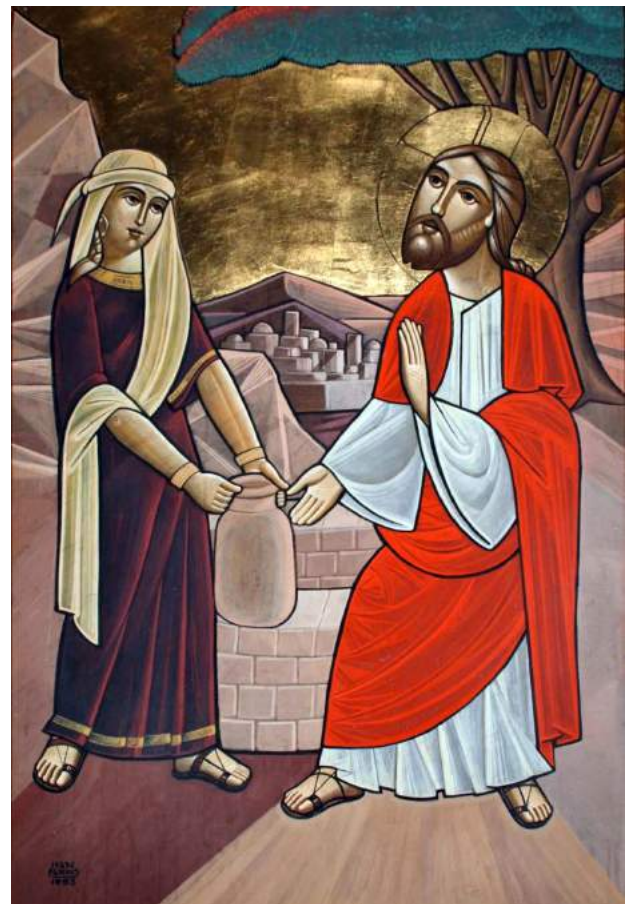
This compelling new unit on Christology and contemporary mission will address the question “How do we understand Christology today?” After reviewing the various Christological interpretations in history, one receives in-depth knowledge about the divine (transcendent) nature of our Lord. Here, many often remain within the knowledge of the incarnated God alone, ignoring the significance of the human (immanent) nature of Christ. Indeed, in Christian history, the immanent nature of Christ has not gained as much as the transcendent one has. As the miaphysite Christology envisions, one cannot separate Christ's divine and human nature into two.

Upon the above fundamental principle of Christology, this study explores the meanings of the transcendent and immanent nature of Christ within our ecclesiastical and social context. In this unit, an attempt is made to understand the immanent nature of our Lord and its corresponding purpose without separating the transcendent nature. This unit, therefore, seeks to critically examine Christ's engagement with people, especially those who are categorised as social margins.

Through a biblical and patristic survey, the unit determines how contemporary theologians have appropriated to articulate a contextual Christology. By tracing this perspective from the Gospels, ante-Nicaean and post-Nicaean teachers, and modern theologians, this unit seeks to estimate the missional significance of conceiving Christology through the life of vulnerable communities.



13th century wall painting of Jesus Christ, St Paul's Monastery in Egypt. Photo by Shady Nessim



Coptic icon of Christ and the Samaritan woman, written by Isaac Fanous

Semester 2

Pastoral Ministry and Priesthood

Lecturer: Fr Dr Daniel Ghabrial

In Orthodox Churches priesthood is a holy sacrament and is performed by the laying on of hands by the bishop on the elected candidate, and by the invocation of the Holy Spirit. Following ordination, the priest becomes a minister of the mysteries of God and has the authority to officiate all the Church Sacraments, with the exception of ordination, which is the role of the bishop. But not only is the priest an officiator of Church Sacraments, he is also an administer, teacher, and father.

In this unit we will explore the pastoral role of the priest within a parish, and in the process investigate the life of a parish with respect to its growth, development, administration, community participation and philanthropy. Important for discussion will be a theoretical analysis of priesthood, ministry and pastoral care in the Orthodox tradition and contemporary life generally.

We will also study practical applications of the Church's vision and experience to issues of priestly and pastoral life and service in the Church today. We will examine questions such as: How does the unique priesthood of Christ relate to the priesthood of all Church members and to the specific priesthood of the presbyter/bishop? How do we understand the Church to be both hierarchical and conciliar? And how are we to understand the role of women in the Orthodox Church?



Photo courtesy of Fr Alexander Aziz



Jesus Christ in the Asian Context

Lecturer: Fr Dr Jacob Joseph

Asia received Christ in the first century itself – even before much of the Western world welcomed Him. We see the earliest Orthodox traits of Christology in the Asian context. Sadly, the later over-emphasis of the stereotyped depiction of Christ repressed Asian Christ for centuries. However, it has come under renewed scrutiny by Asian people who initiated to interpret Jesus Christ from their day-to-day life experience.

Based on the above context, this unit seeks to critically examine the Christological developments in the Asian context. Primarily, it aims to demonstrate 'who is Jesus Christ' to the people of the multi-faceted milieu of Asia. The stimulant of Asian Christology, namely religious, ethnic, cultural, gender, and economic phenomena, is considered an important area of discussion in this unit. The deliberations in this unit include a methodological reading of 'theology from below' and 'theology from above.' All the above discussions will have a flavour of Christian mission in the Asian context.

This theological approach does not intend to invalidate the foundation of the Christian doctrines, but rather to critically consider the impact of the faith in Jesus Christ among the people who endure various challenges and embrace the meaning of Jesus Christ as equally God and human. This unit will challenge the participants to broaden their passion for the true Gospel and mission by exploring the face of Christ in multi-religious and cultural contexts.

Semester 2

Mary in the Coptic Tradition

Lecturer: Fr Dr Gregorios Awad

The Virgin Mary is the most celebrated woman not only in Christianity but in the world and in the Coptic Orthodox Church – as in all Orthodox Churches – she is the most important and most revered of all saints and is therefore given the highest honour liturgically. Thus, the Virgin Mary is always mentioned first, followed by the heavenly dominions, the apostles, the martyrs, and then the monastic fathers. Furthermore, her elevated position is clear when we consider that in the Coptic Church she is commemorated seven times in the yearly liturgical calendar.

In this fascinating unit we will explore the understanding of the Virgin Mary in ecclesiology, Christology, iconography, and liturgy within the Coptic tradition. We will engage critically with Scripture through a patristic lens in order to understand and appreciate the Virgin Mary's position in the Christian tradition throughout the centuries.

We will also examine Marian doctrines as observed and expressed in Copto-Arabic literature as well as consider the liturgical tradition and practice surrounding Mary in the ancient, medieval, and modern Coptic tradition.



Coptic icons of the Virgin Mary, written by Kirolos Kilada



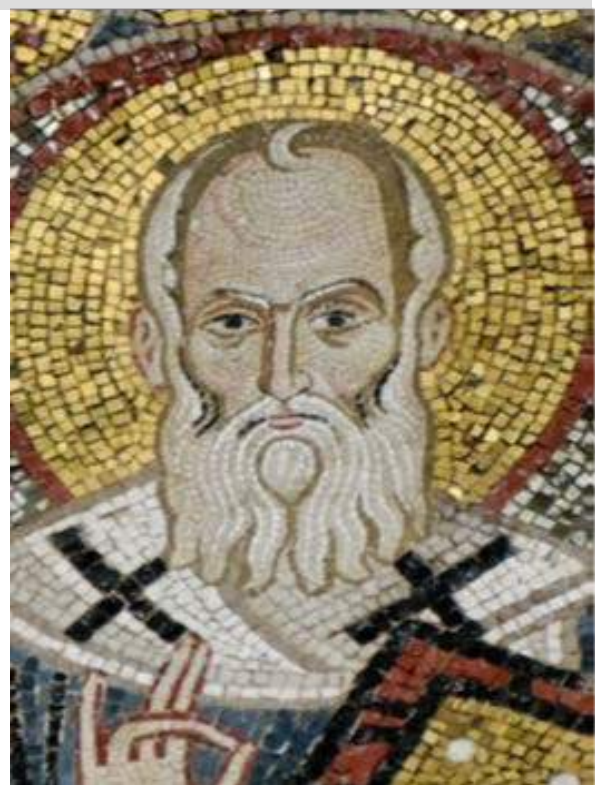
NEW INTENSIVE UNIT IN SEMESTER 2

St Gregory the Theologian

Special guest lecturer: Fr Prof. John Behr

This illustrious fourth century Church Father (329–391) was one of the most prolific theologians in the history of Christianity. A bishop, theologian and poet, his theology of the Trinity and the Incarnation in particular, shaped Christian spirituality, and the depth and beauty of his writings offer practical wisdom even to the present day. Through his unique poetical autobiography and eloquent confessional works, his vivid and utterly human personality is revealed.

It takes no one less than the distinguished patristic scholar Professor John Behr, to introduce us to St Gregory and to take us on a journey to the very heart of the fourth century; one of the most dynamic and fascinating of ancient centuries and in some ways most relevant to our own.



Fr Prof. John Behr

Teaching this unit at SAC for the first time, Fr John Behr is one of the foremost authorities on Patristics. An Eastern Orthodox priest, he holds the position of Regius Chair in Humanities at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, and prior to that was Dean at St Vladimir's Seminary in New York. A prolific writer, he has authored a number of books on theology and patristics; his latest publications include a new critical edition and translation of Origen's *On First Principles* (OUP, 2017), and *John the Theologian and His Paschal Gospel: A Prologue to Theology* (OUP 2019). Fr John is a sessional lecturer in Patristics at SAC and has offered units on *The School of Alexandria* and *Sacred Texts from the Second Century*.

* This unit will be offered online and will consist of an intensive component. Please refer to the timetable at sac.edu.au/timetable/ for more information.

Introducing

ΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ

STUDENT JOURNAL OF

ST ATHANASIUS COLLEGE

Vol 1. 2022

An exciting new initiative coming soon is the St Athanasius College's Student Journal ΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ (meaning disciple in Coptic) which will be dedicated to recognising and celebrating exceptional essays written by students of SAC. This concept was inspired by our principal Fr Dr Daniel Ghabrial as a means to both celebrate and showcase the exceptional work and dedication of our students with the wider community. Produced annually, commencing in February 2022, each Journal volume will consist of an essay from the various disciplines taught at SAC, selected by the College's editorial board.

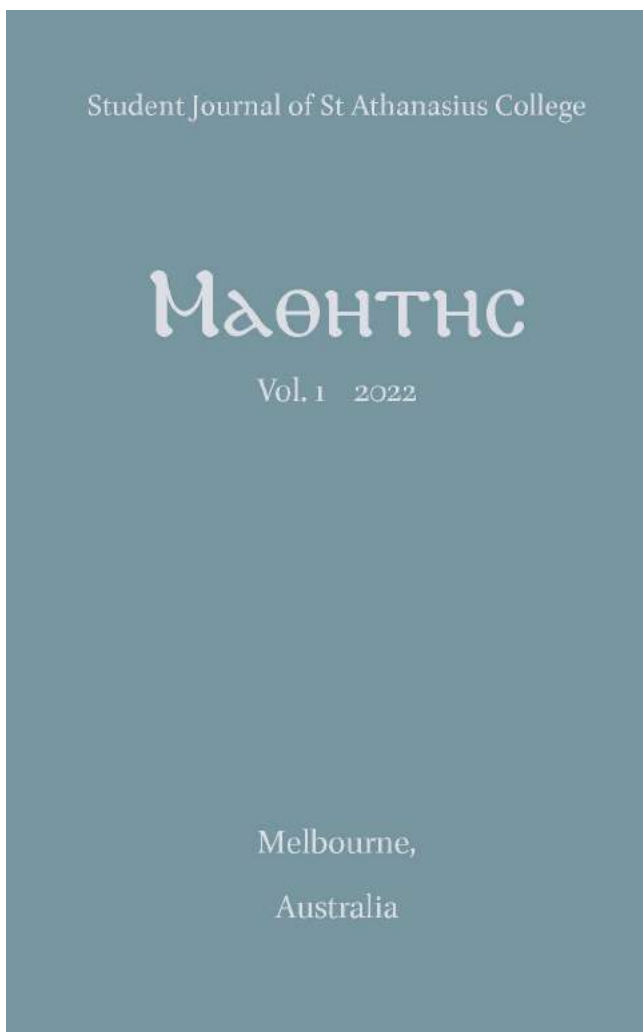


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SEMESTER 1

Monday M	Tuesday T	Wednesday W	Thursday T	Friday F	Saturday S
<p>HOLY IMAGES, HOLY RELICS & SACRED SPACE IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION</p> <p>DL3460A DL9460A</p> <p>Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT</p> <p>BA1100A BA8100A</p> <p>Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>JESUS CHRIST AT THE MARGINS</p> <p>DM3720A/9720A CT3720A/9720A</p> <p>Fr Dr Jacob Joseph</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>PILLARS OF ORTHODOXY: THE ALEXANDRIAN FATHERS</p> <p>CH2530A/8530A CT2530A/8530A</p> <p>Mr Abraam Mikhail</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>COPTIC ART & ICONOGRAPHY I</p> <p>*Face-to-face component at Donvale campus</p> <p>DL1410A DL8410A</p> <p>Mr Ashraf Gerges</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>MINISTRY TO TEENS & YOUTH</p> <p>*Face-to-face component at City campus</p> <p>DA1110A DA8110A</p> <p>Fr Michael Salib</p> <p>9:00am - 3:00pm</p>
			<p>COPTIC LANGUAGE: BOHAIRIC II</p> <p>AL2200A AL9200A</p> <p>Fr Dr Gregorios Awad</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>		
<p>HISTORY OF ORTHODOX MISSIOLOGY</p> <p>CH1800A/8800A DM1800A/8800A</p> <p>Fr Dr Jacob Joseph</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>UNDERSTANDING THE FAMILY: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE</p> <p>DP2610A DP8610A</p> <p>Dr Samir Ibrahim/ Fr Abanoub Attalla</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>ADVANCED BIBLICAL HEBREW</p> <p>AL2600A AL9600A</p> <p>Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>INTRODUCTION TO BIBLICAL HEBREW</p> <p>AL1600A AL8600A</p> <p>Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	<p>LIVES AND TIMES OF THE DESERT FATHERS</p> <p>CH3500A CH9500A</p> <p>Dr Lisa Agaiby</p> <p>6:30pm - 9:30pm</p>	

SEMESTER 2

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Friday & Saturday
M	T	W	T	F	F&S
PASTORAL MINISTRY & PRIESTHOOD	ORTHODOX MISSION THEOLOGY	WISDOM LITERATURE	MARY IN THE COPTIC TRADITION	COPTIC ART & ICONOGRAPHY II *Face-to-face component at Donvale campus	ST GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN
DP2500A DP8500A	CT1810A/8810A DM1810A/8810A	BA3510A BA9510A	DL3330A DL9330A	DL2410A DL9410A	CT2520A CT9520A
Fr Dr Daniel Ghabrial	Fr Dr Jacob Joseph	Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara	Fr Dr Gregorios Awad	Mr Ashraf Gerges	Fr. Prof. John Behr
6:30pm - 9:30pm	6:30pm - 9:30pm	6:30pm - 9:30pm	6:30pm - 9:30pm	6.30pm - 9.30pm	7.00pm - 9.30pm
	SEEKING CHRIST IN SCRIPTURES: SCRIPTURE & ITS EXEGESIS IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION	JESUS CHRIST IN THE ASIAN CONTEXT	INTRODUCTION TO SYRIAC	SAINTS & SINNERS: WOMEN IN LATE ANTIQUITY	
	BS3000A BS9000A	CT3710A/9710 A DM3710A/9710 A	AL1700A AL8700A	AH3150A AH9150A	
	Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara	Fr Dr Jacob Joseph	Fr Dr Nebojsa Tumara	Dr Lisa Agaiby	
	6:30pm - 9:30pm	6:30pm - 9:30pm	6:30pm - 9:30pm	6:30pm - 9:30pm	

HOW TO APPLY TO STUDY AT SAC



1. DECIDE ON WHAT INTERESTS YOU

What are your areas of interest? Are you aiming to complete a particular academic qualification? Would you like to study full-time, part-time, face-to-face, or online? Check out our timetable and unit descriptions, as well as the awards we offer to decide a possible starting point for your studies.

2. TALK TO US

We would love to meet you in person and discuss options for your study, or alternatively to have a conversation with you over the phone. To organise a time, contact Rev. Dr Peter Dobson for undergraduate study options, or Dr Lisa Agaiby for postgraduate and HDR options. Together we can look at study options you may be interested in and decide on a suitable starting point and pathway to your circumstances and interests.

3. SUBMIT AN APPLICATION FORM

- Complete an Application for Admission form
- Complete an application form for FEE-HELP or authorise payment of fees. Provide the following necessary supporting documents:
 - Proof of citizenship in your current name (e.g. birth certificate, Passport)
 - Academic transcripts (Year 12 transcript if applying for the Dip.Theol.)
 - IELTS results if you are an overseas student

4. YOU'RE READY TO GO!

- Application for Admission approved by SAC's Academic Dean and processed by the Registrar
- Receive enrolment confirmation and welcome emails
- Receive access to the online Learning Management System (ARK)
- Receive an admission letter from the University of Divinity
- Enjoy the journey of learning!

2022 KEY DATES

Key Event / Activity

Semester 1 Classes

College Opens
Final Date for New Admissions
Final Date for Re-enrolment
Census Date
University of Divinity Graduation
Non-teaching Period (Easter)
Final Date: New Admissions for Semester 2, 2022 International/
Domestic HDR students
Study Week
Examination Week
Results Published

Semester 2 Classes

Final Date for New Admissions
Final Date for Re-enrolment
Census Date
Non-teaching period
Study Week
Examination Week
Final Date: New Admissions for Semester 2, 2023 International/
Domestic HDR students
Results published

University Holidays 2022

New Year 2022
Australia Day
Good Friday and Easter
ANZAC Day
Queen's Birthday
Christmas

Calendar Date

February 21 - May 27

January 4
February 11
February 11
March 15
March 25
April 11 - April 22

April 15
May 30 - June 3
June 6 - 10
July 8

July 25 - October 28

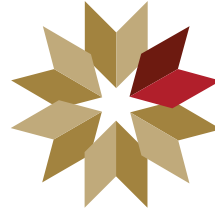
July 15
July 25
August 16
September 19 - 30
October 31 - November 4
November 7 - 11

November 15
December 9

January 3
January 26
April 15 - 19
April 25
June 13
December 26



ST ATHANASIUS
COLLEGE



UNIVERSITY
OF DIVINITY

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