

2022

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# EMERGING COPTIC THEOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA

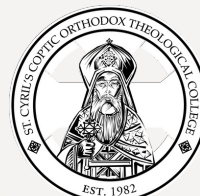
Fri 14 & Sat 15 October 2022

St Athanasius College (SAC) and St Cyril's Coptic Orthodox Theological College (SCC) are delighted to announce their inaugural Research Seminar: *Emerging Coptic Theology in Australia*. By celebrating 40 years of Coptic theological education in Australia, this seminar aims to raise awareness of the theological studies and current research of emerging Coptic scholars in Australia, and foster collaboration between Coptic theological colleges in Australia.



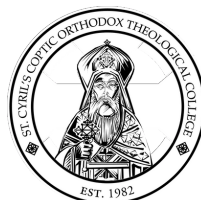
**CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF  
COPTIC THEOLOGICAL  
EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA!**

Thank you for participating in this conference. We look forward to lively and productive conversations! For any tech issues or other questions throughout the conference, contact event coordinators Shadi Nessim ([snessim@sac.edu.au](mailto:snessim@sac.edu.au)) or Samuel Kaldas ([skaldas@stcyrils.edu.au](mailto:skaldas@stcyrils.edu.au)).



# ABOUT

The history of Coptic theological education in Australia began in 1982 when His Holiness Pope Shenouda III of blessed memory delegated a group of clergy and laity to establish the first Coptic theological college outside of Egypt in Sydney. Since that time, Copts in Australia have worked tirelessly to uphold the religious traditions of the Copts and deliver Orthodox teachings to the community through teaching and research. Today, 40 years later, Australia is home to two flourishing Coptic theological colleges who make important contributions in disciplines like Biblical Studies, Liturgy, Patristics, Monasticism, Church History, Philosophy, Ministry and Mission, all with the aim of preserving, enriching and promoting the study of Coptic history and theology. Their research has not only enriched local Coptic communities, but also contributed to academia world wide. This research seminar *Emerging Coptic Theology in Australia* aims to celebrate and encourage the work of Australian-based emerging and established Coptic scholars. Proceedings to be published with SAC Press.



IN COLLABORATION BETWEEN  
St Athanasius College (University of Divinity), Melbourne  
St Cyril's College (Sydney College of Divinity), Sydney

LOCAL ORGANISING COMMITTEE  
Samuel Kaldas, Ph.D (skaldas@stcyrils.edu.au)  
Shadi Nessim, D.Min (candidate) (snessim@sac.edu.au)

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT  
Bassem Morgan, Director of IT (admin@sac.edu.au)

# PROGRAMME

FRIDAY 14TH (6PM - 10PM) OCTOBER 2022

18:00 - 18:05

Welcome and House Keeping

CHAIR

Fr Shenouda Boutros

18:05 - 18:30

**Fr Gregorios Awad, Ph.D**

*The use of the term Transubstantiation in the Coptic Sacramental Tradition.*

18:30 - 19:00

**Fr Shenouda Mansour, Ph.D**

*Perspectives of Coptic identity in Australia. Is it in crisis?*

19:00 - 19:55

VESPERS & DINNER

CHAIR

Samuel Kaldas

20:00 - 20:30

**Fr Shenouda Boutros, D.Min (Cand.)**

*The Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practice Prohibition bill passed by the Victorian State Parliament and an Orthodox Christian response.*

20:30 - 21:00

**Ramsey Andrews, MTS**

*In Pursuit of a Patristic Understanding of Deification within the Contemporary Coptic Orthodox Context: Evaluating the Modern Polemic between Matta Al-Miskin and Pope Shenouda III.*

# PROGRAMME

21:00 - 21:30

**Dr Lisa Agaiby, Ph.D**

*St Shenoute the Archimandrite in Manuscripts of the Red Sea Monasteries*

SATURDAY 15TH (8AM - 4PM) OCTOBER 2022

08:00 - 09:30

DIVINE LITURGY

09:30 - 09:55

BREAKFAST

CHAIR

Fr Jacob Joseph

10:00 - 10:30

**Fr Antonios Kaldas, Ph.D**

*What Might a Modern Orthodox Apologetic Look Like?*

10:30 - 11:00

**Wagdy Samir, Ph.D**

*Divine Participation: The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Fr Matta al-Mīskin's Theology*

11:00 - 11:30

**Fr Michael Salib, D.Min (Cand.)**

*What do emerging adults need from churches as they make sense of their faith?*

11:30 - 12:00

**Samuel Kaldas, Ph.D**

*Love Made Flesh: The Eucharistic Theology of St Bishoy Kamel (1931–1979).*

12:00 - 12:55

LUNCH

# PROGRAMME

SATURDAY 15TH (8AM - 4PM) OCTOBER 2022

CHAIR

Fr Antonios Kaldas

13:00 - 13:30

**Shadi Nessim, D.Min (Cand.)**

*The Eucharistic Word and Pseudo-Sāwīrus's Kitāb al-īḏāḥ (Book of Elucidation).*

13:30 - 14:00

**Mina Samy**

*The Hymn of the Intercessions (Ⲛⲓⲧⲉⲛ) in the Coptic Liturgical Rite: History and Practice*

14:00 - 14:30

**Michael Ibrahim, Ph.D (Cand.)**

*Schrödinger's Cat and Shenouda's Crisis: Dogmatic Polyvalence, Natural Theology and Contemporary Coptic Pedagogy.*

14:30 - 14:55

BREAK

15:00 - 16:00

CONCLUDING PANEL

# ABSTRACTS



## "St Shenoute the Archimandrite in Manuscripts of the Red Sea Monasteries." *Dr Lisa Agaiby, Ph.D*

As spiritual head of a federation of monasteries in the region of Sohag (Upper Egypt) that numbered some 4000 members, St Shenoute the Archimandrite (c. 348–464) authored a vast number of monastic canons and sermons that were copied and re-copied by scribes throughout the ages. By examining the manuscripts of the Red Sea monasteries of St Antony and St Paul, this paper seeks to identify to what extent Shenoute's influence was felt in monastic environments beyond his own in Upper Egypt.

Dr Agaiby received a Ph.D. from Macquarie University, Sydney Australia, and a Ph.D. from the University of Göttingen, Germany. Her areas of interest include Christianity in Late Antiquity, Early Egyptian Monasticism, Coptic Archaeology, and Christian-Arabic Studies. Her latest publications include: Lisa Agaiby and Tim Vivian (2021, Nov.) *Door of the Wilderness: The Greek, Coptic, and Copto-Arabic Sayings of St. Antony of Egypt* (Leiden: Brill); Lisa Agaiby, Mark N. Swanson, and Nelly Van Doorn-Harder eds. (2021). *The Proceedings of St Athanasius College's International Symposium of Coptic Studies: "Copts in Modernity" 13 to 16 July 2018* (Leiden: Brill); and Elizabeth (Lisa) Agaiby (2018) *The Arabic Life of Antony attributed to Serapion of Thmuis. Cultural Memory Reinterpreted* (Leiden: Brill). She is currently leading a project to digitise and catalogue the entire collection of manuscripts at the ancient Coptic Monastery of St Paul the Hermit at the Red Sea, Egypt.



## "The use of the term Transubstantiation in the Coptic Sacramental Tradition." *Fr Gregorios Awad, Ph.D*

No topic was studied from theologians and scholars so much as this topic concerning the truth of transformation of the bread and wine to the body and blood of Christ and how? This theme has become very important in the modern period due to the Protestant arrival in Egypt who actively wrote and evangelised within the Coptic Church, especially attacking the sacrament. Transubstantiation is a Latin term that tries to explain how bread and wine can become the body and blood of Christ. This term was first used in the 11th century and was later incorporated into the documents of the Council of Trent (1545–63) as an authoritative church teaching. In the Roman Catholic church, the term transubstantiation aims to emphasise the literal truth of Christ's presence while highlighting the fact that there is no change in the appearances of the bread and wine, while the change takes place in the substance of the bread and wine without losing their exterior appearance.

This article discusses how the Coptic fathers and theologians, especially from the late modern period to the present day, explained the eucharistic transformation. How did they try to answer the question? Did they use the Latin term "Transubstantiation"? Were they aware with the theological debates of the Middle Ages in Europe?

Fr Gregorios attained a Ph.D from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece in Dogmatic Theology, and a Ph.D. from Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany in Christian Oriental Studies. He lectures in Church History, Dogmatic and Systematic Theology, and Coptic Language. His areas of interest also include Christian-Arabic Studies and Philosophy. Ordained to the priesthood in the Coptic Orthodox Church in 2015, Fr Gregorios also lectures at the Coptic Theological Seminary in Cairo.



# ABSTRACTS



"In Pursuit of a Patristic Understanding of Deification within the Contemporary Coptic Orthodox Context: Evaluating the Modern Polemic between Matta Al-Miskin and Pope Shenouda III."

*Ramsey Andrews, MTS*

Within the Coptic Orthodox Church, there is a current divide regarding the notion of divine participation. This can be observed in a recent and controversial polemic between two highly influential figures: Pope Shenouda III (1923-2012) and Matta Al-Miskin (1919-2006). Whereas Matta Al-Miskin's theology supposedly draws on the Greek Patristic Tradition and subscribes to the notion of deification, the late patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church maintained that no Church Father had ever condoned such a doctrine. The present study critically examines the views of both Matta Al-Miskin and Pope Shenouda III. My research findings indicate that it would be too simplistic to attribute the deification debate to either a personal conflict due to socio-cultural, religious, and political factors or to mere theological differences between the two opposing sides. Therefore, the study suggests the implementation of a *pluri-vocal* orthodox approach that avoids orthodox theological reductionism and aims to seek unity rather than uniformity amongst the two opposing groups.

Ramsey is a psychologist with extensive experience in the provision of various psychological therapies practicing as a registered psychologist for 15 years. Ramsey holds a Master of Theological Studies with a special interest in theology and patristics.



"The Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practice Prohibition bill passed by the Victorian State Parliament and an Orthodox Christian response."

*Fr Shenouda Boutros, D.Min (Cand.)*

On the 4th February 2021, the Change of Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition bill was passed by the Victorian State Parliament of Australia. This paper considers the bill, the secular causes of its introduction, and its consequences for practitioners of Orthodox Christian faith. This paper will discuss the ethics of the bill and the role of the concept of metanoia in an Orthodox Christian response to this bill and the wider societal attitudes to homosexuality.

Fr Shenouda lectures in Christian Ethics in the Orthodox Tradition. He is also SAC's chaplain who provides spiritual and general support to students and staff. The office of the chaplain regularly organises prayers, and retreats for the SAC community, and heads the Student Representative Council. Ordained to the priesthood in 2007, Fr Shenouda serves at the parish of St Bishoy's Coptic Orthodox Church in Bulleen, Melbourne. He is currently a D.Min. candidate at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Pittsburgh Pennsylvania.

# ABSTRACTS



## "Schrödinger's Cat and Shenouda's Crisis: Dogmatic Polyvalence, Natural Theology and Contemporary Coptic Pedagogy."

*Michael Ibrahim, Ph.D (Cand.)*

With the repose of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, an ideological battle (long kept in check) erupted within the Coptic Orthodox Church. Issues such as original sin, deification/penal substitution and the characteristics of Coptic scriptural exegesis have become flash points in an increasingly acrimonious conflict. The polarising nature of the conflict has created serious rifts within our community. The situation has become particularly challenging for theological colleges in the diaspora, which are caught between an established Western critical tradition, a burgeoning Eastern Orthodox scholarship, and the broadly conservative culture of the motherland. This paper will seek to make some preliminary suggestions on the contemporary application of patristic 'natural contemplation' as theological metaphor. The transdisciplinary approach draws on scriptural/patristic metaphor, modern conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), Ps. Dionysian logocentric cosmology and quantum mechanics in order to create a conceptual framework for modern doctrinal pedagogy in Coptic theological college settings.

Michael completed his MA (Theology) at St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological college. He has an interest in Patristics and Theology, particularly as they pertain to inter-Orthodox relations. With his background in science and engineering, he also has a strong interest in the relationship between science and theology. Michael is the Director of Learning & Teaching at St Cyril's, and currently studying towards a PhD at Macquarie University in Patristics (Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Christologies).



## "What Might a Modern Orthodox Apologetic Look Like?"

*Fr Antonios Kaldas, Ph.D*

Christian faith has been assailed by a major campaign from atheists in recent decades. Responding to this challenge in sensible and coherent ways is no longer a luxury for scholars; it is a pastoral necessity for Christian clergy, servants, teachers, and parents. But what might an authentically Orthodox Christian apologetic look like? The majority of apologetic literature (in English, at least) comes from Western Christianity, most often Protestant; while among the Eastern Orthodox, the very project of apologetics is often considered unnecessary at best, gravely mistaken at worst. In this talk I try to sketch out one way to bring together East and West, faith and reason, mystery and knowledge in a distinctively patristic yet recognisably modern way. Responding to atheism is new territory for Orthodox Christians, and we need to be having these kinds of discussions as we develop our own approach.

Fr Antonios has served as parish priest of Archangel Michael and St. Bishoy Coptic Orthodox Church in Mount Druitt, Sydney, Australia, since 1991. He is an active researcher in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science, lectures in Apologetics and Philosophy at St. Cyril's Coptic Orthodox Theological College in Sydney, and has recently authored *Two Become One: An Orthodox Guide to Engagement and Marriage* (Ancient Faith Publishing, 2017) and *This Great Mystery of Life: An Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church* (St. Shenouda Monastery Press, 2022).



# ABSTRACTS



## "Love Made Flesh: The Eucharistic Theology of St Bishoy Kamel (1931–1979)." *Samuel Kaldas, Ph.D*

Fr Bishoy Kamel (1931–1979) was canonised as a saint of the Coptic Orthodox Church in June 2022, but has long been recognised both within and beyond the Coptic Church as an exemplary pastor and gifted theologian. This paper explores one of the most central and richly developed themes in Kamel's theological writings: the Eucharist. For Kamel, the Eucharist is first and foremost 'love made flesh': the tangible, visible manifestation of Christ's gracious self-emptying and His desire to be made one with the human race. The paper attempts to identify some of Kamel's theological sources, as well as place his eucharistic theology in the context of broader developments in Coptic theology over the course of the twentieth century. Where earlier twentieth-century Coptic reflection on the Eucharist was largely apologetic in nature and narrowly focused on defending the 'real presence' of Christ in the eucharistic elements against Protestant objections, Kamel's theology promotes a more holistic theological vision on which the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is inextricably linked to eucharistic assembly: the faithful are as much the body and blood of Christ as the bread and wine on the altar, and they are called not only to receive the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, but to join themselves to it. In this way, the Eucharist is divine love made flesh, not only in the form of bread and wine, but in the lives and hearts of the communicants.

Samuel is Director of Research & Community Engagement at St Cyril's. He has completed a BA majoring in philosophy and ancient history, with an Honours thesis on the moral psychology of early modern philosopher of religion Ralph Cudworth, who was also the subject of PhD. He is the translator of *Bishop Epiphanius, So Great a Salvation: Biblical Meditations of a Contemporary Desert Father* (Cairo: St Macarius Press, 2019).



## "Perspectives of Coptic identity in Australia. Is it in crisis?" *Fr Shenouda Mansour, Ph.D*

The research conducted at a Coptic school in Australia was an attempt to contribute to the limited study on the Coptic Community in Australia. The study addressed three questions. This paper will only address one question - what are the students' perceptions of their identity? The objective is to look at students' perspectives on Coptic identity. This study offers how identity is constructed from a sociocultural perspective on human development. This paper raises some questions important to communities in the diaspora. What constructs contribute to identity? It takes a village to raise a child. What role does a global village take to crystallise the identity of a Coptic teenager? How important is the engagement in the interaction of family, school, church, and the broader Australian community roles in the construction of Coptic Identity? How do we measure students' perception of identity? We all need to feel that we are part of a community and a sense of belonging – how important is this to the Coptic teenager living in Australia? This paper offers a window into the Coptic identity in Australia. Is it in crisis?

Fr Shenouda is an ordained priest of the Coptic Orthodox Church, serving at the parish of St Antonious & St Paul, Guildford, Sydney, Australia. He completed his PhD in 2018 at Macquarie University. His dissertation investigated attitudes to identity, and cultural language in a Coptic school community. He is the General Secretary of NSW Ecumenical Council. Fr Shenouda is co-editor of a forthcoming book titled "Language and Spirit Exploring Languages, Religions and Spirituality in Australia Today."

# ABSTRACTS



"The Eucharistic Word and Pseudo-Sāwīrus's *kitāb al-īdāḥ* (Book of Elucidation)."

*Shadi Nessim, D.Min (Cand.)*

Beginning in the 10th century, Egypt saw a rising problem in the liturgical life of the Copts, and more precisely in terms of understanding and ritual observation. Canons were written to address this problem and requested that all should attend every part of the liturgy. Of particular emphasis was the faithful's participation in the Sacrament of the Word, known today by the classification 'Liturgy of the Word'. By examining an 11th century work erroneously attributed to Bishop Sāwīrus ibn al-Muqaffa' entitled *Kitāb al-īdāḥ* (Book of Elucidation), this paper aims to harmonise an ancient reading of how scripture played a fundamental purpose in the medieval Coptic liturgy.

Shadi is a D.Min. candidate at the Catholic University of America. He received a Master in Theological Studies from the University of Divinity, where his thesis focused on the Coptic Theotokia and its patristic influences. He has served as a member of the University of Divinity Academic Board, and at SAC is an associate lecturer and of Coptic (Bohairic) language and Liturgy. He has recently authored two books: *The Life of Sts Maximus and Dometius: Monastery, Hymnography, and Iconography* (St Shenouda Press, 2022) & *Bulus al-Bushi: Commentary on the Apocalypse* (St Macarius Press, forthcoming). Shadi is currently involved in a project to digitise and catalogue manuscripts at the Monastery of St. Paul the Hermit at the Red Sea, Egypt.



"What do emerging adults need from churches as they make sense of their faith?"

*Fr Michael Salib, D.Min (Cand.)*

More than two decades ago, a new area of research appeared focusing on emerging adulthood- the life stage between adolescence and adulthood beginning at 18 with a less defined endpoint at about 30. Defining emerging adulthood as its own life stage allows for a more critical examination and discussion of the key features of these transitional years between adolescence and adulthood and can help form a clearer picture of the faith journey. This third decade of life characterised by exploration, instability, transition and the optimism of possibility, brings about both challenges and opportunities for a stable consequential faith to be formed amongst emerging adults. This paper will explore the key features of emerging adulthood in conversation with the stages of faith development to highlight what emerging adults need from churches as they make sense of their faith.

Fr Michael was a former High School teacher who taught Physics and Mathematics. He has also worked in Teaching and Learning Leadership in the government school sector. He is currently a D.Min. candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary where his research explores the relationship between ministry, formation, education and the Eucharistic Table in the Coptic Orthodox tradition. Fr Michael was ordained to the priesthood in 2015 and serves at the parish of St Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in Kensington, Melbourne.

# ABSTRACTS



## "Divine Participation: The Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Fr Matta al-Miskin's Theology"

*Wagdy Samir, Ph.D*

Matta al-Miskin (1919-2006), a Coptic Orthodox desert father, championed the reappropriation of the patristic doctrine of deification, emphasising humankind's union with God. The vast majority of his writings are available only in Arabic, remaining inaccessible to foreign readers. Nevertheless, he left a considerable mark on his church and on those who knew of him around the world. He has been credited with the theological revival in Coptic Egypt and is probably one of the Middle East's most outstanding Coptic Orthodox spiritual leaders in modern times. The current paper examines his views on divine participation within the context of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in humankind. Throughout, this paper emphasises the interconnectedness of his soteriology, pneumatology, trinitarian theology, and sacramental theology, with Christology as the central locus of humankind's union with the divine.

Wagdy attained his PhD in Theology from The Sydney College of Divinity (June 2022). His dissertation title is "Divine Participation in St Cyril of Alexandria's and Fr Matta Al-Miskin's Commentaries on The Gospel of St John." Wagdy has been an eager reader of Fr Matta's work and the early Church Fathers. He is interested in Patristics and Theology, focusing on humankind's participation in the divine life.



## "The Hymn of the Intercessions (ΣΥΤΗΝ) in the Coptic Liturgical Rite: History and Practice"

*Mina H. Samy, MTS*

In the last 100 years, the "Hymn of the Intercessions" which is currently chanted at the beginning of the Liturgy of the Word in the Coptic rite, gained an almost unprecedented popularity. Originally a short hymn asking for the intercessions of the Virgin Mary, which was almost unknown outside of certain locales, it has developed into a much longer hymn encompassing multiple saints and martyrs and has become an over-emphasised part of the Coptic Divine Liturgy. It will be argued that this development detracts from the original purpose of this hymn and from the purpose of the Divine Liturgy as a whole.

While recent studies have shown the differences between the old and new practices, the reasons behind the recent developments are still not well understood. Drawing on medieval sources and recent, valuable work done by researchers in Egypt, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the hymn's development and its place in the Coptic liturgy.

Mina is a student at St Cyril's Coptic Orthodox Theological College and St Andrew's Greek Orthodox Theological College. He holds a degree in Engineering and a Master of Theological Studies with a special interest in Coptic liturgical studies. Mina is also an ordained Reader in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Thank you for participating in this conference. We look forward to lively and productive conversations! For any tech issues or other questions throughout the conference, contact event coordinators Shadi Nessim ([snessim@sac.edu.au](mailto:snessim@sac.edu.au)) or Samuel Kaldas ([skaldas@stcyrils.edu.au](mailto:skaldas@stcyrils.edu.au)).

