

## Editor's Note

The thirteenth Annual Coptic Studies Symposium was scheduled to be held on May 2020 at St George Campus of the University of Toronto, but due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, it was switched to a virtual meeting. Fortunately, all the speakers pursued the task and accepted to present their papers online. The theme chosen for this symposium was the “Coptic Heritage: The Challenges of Negotiating Identities.” Seven papers read in the meeting are published in the present volume. This meeting aimed to explore the question of ‘Coptic Identity’ with different approaches: etymological, ethnographical, historical, and socio-cultural. Points of reference about the ‘Coptic Identity’ can be found in modern times as well as in different moments of ancient history. The time span covered by the speakers is from the Late Antiquity to the Modern era.

The theme of Coptic identity is not a novelty. Questions about Coptic religious and cultural identity have been discussed previously in the academic field of social-history and anthropology, as well as in meetings organized by societies of human rights. The latter’ focus being to expose the frustrating realities and marginalization of Copts in Egypt. The papers published in the present volume which tackle the same theme but from different perspectives, are considered as ground-breaking in that field. The speakers explored questions corresponding to marginalization within the community itself in the diaspora; or how Copts around the world attempt to rewrite the narrative of persecution as a form of solidarity; or even how various generations of Copts in the diaspora struggle to form an identity while living in multicultural societies.

There is a general consensus that the sense of belonging and identity is a human need. It is a construct of psychological needs and cultural options and obligations. Identities vary from culture to culture and from individual to individual. We human beings need to identify ourselves with a tradition, or with a group of people, with a language, with a memory of the past, or even by adopting a new path. The authors participating in the present volume engaged in all these notions.

The first paper presented by Maged Mikhail discusses the linguistic and historical definition of the term “Copt” and “Coptic.” His thorough research demonstrates how language and history can define ethnicity and helps in the construction of a communal identity.

The ethnographic research conducted by Fr Aaron Michka for his Ph.D. thesis brings a particular depth to the theme of identity. With an example extracted from his field-work survey, he analyzes how multi-denominational Christian identities are interacting and co-habituating in the small town of El-Eziya in Upper-Egypt.

Carolyn Ramzy introduces a new perspective of studying Coptic music, outside of the actual Western categorization dealing with Coptic music, and Copts as colonial subjects. To dismiss these Coptic experiences of coloniality, and the excluding of women’s voices in the Coptic music experience, she suggests a path to be reached through contextualizing the Coptic scholarship histories and music culture.

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In his paper Michael Akladios argues that the Coptic identity cannot be confined into a single definition. The claim of homogeneity of the social Coptic fabric in Canada needs to be revisited. Akladios is using that approach as a starting point to reconstruct the Egyptian immigrant experience in Canada. With arguments based on the study of archived documents, he demonstrates the interactions among different groups of various social and religious ranks in the Coptic churches in the Toronto area and Montreal.

Mena Abdelsayed attempts to show how the Coptic Christology constructed by St Cyril of Alexandria in the first half of the fifth century evolved in different directions in the following eight centuries. He argues that the major shift that appears in Al-Makin' writings, a theologian of the fourteenth century, shows a revolving theology that shifted towards Chalcedonianism and in some instances, Nestorianism. That shift paved the road towards ecumenism between the Oriental and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

In his paper Fr Paul Guirguis examines the complex process of identity formation from a Coptic Orthodox cleric's perspective. The Coptic diasporic identity in Canada, influenced by the identity of origin in Egypt, has been interchangeably bouncing between two positions reflecting either victimhood or triumphalism. Fr Guirguis attempts to analyze how this 'false dichotomy' can be replaced by embracing an empowering 'identity of action'.

Martyrdom has always been associated with the Coptic identity. In her paper, Monica Ghebrial investigates how the Coptic narrative about persecution, following the execution of the 21 martyrs in Libya, served to create a form of solidarity on the local level in Egypt, as well as Globally. She demonstrates the social dynamics of that process through the various physical and digital material culture presented in her paper.

RAMEZ BOUTROS  
Editor in General of JCSCS



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# TRIBUTE TO A VISIONARY

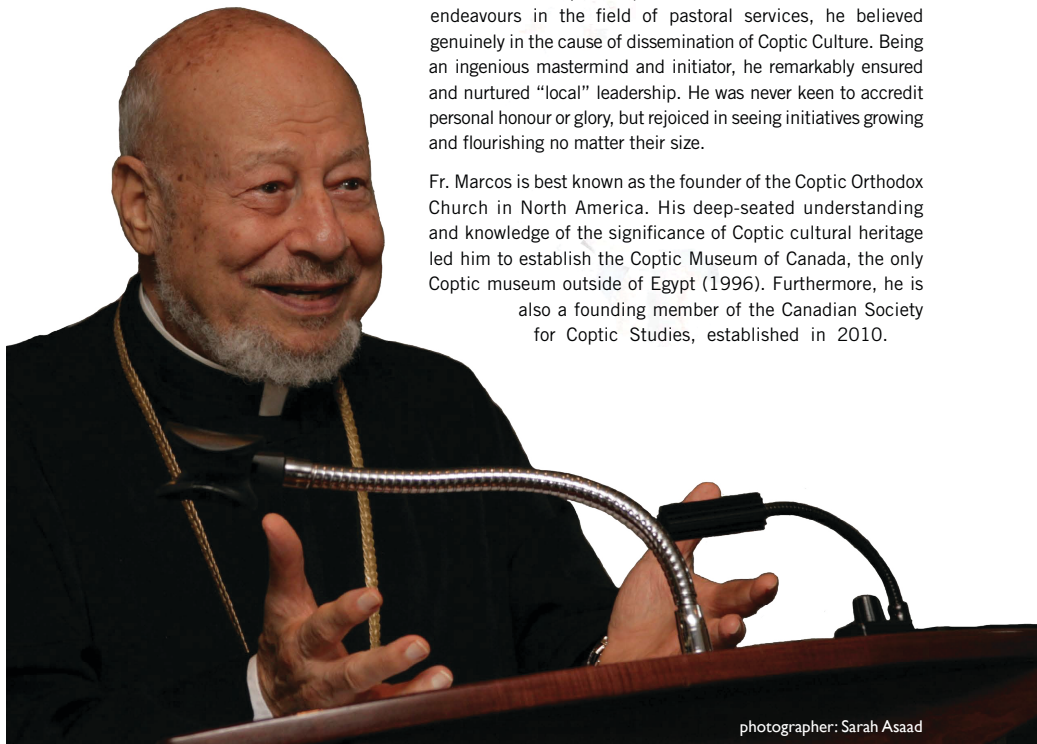
*“It takes a noble man to plant a seed for a tree that will  
some day give shade to people he may never meet.”*

David E. Trueblood, Theologian & Writer

The Board of Directors and Members of The Canadian Society for Coptic Studies (CSCS) join hundreds of people around the world to mourn with grief and sadness the loss of a man with a great vision. Father Marcos A. Marcos departed from our world on December 9, 2020 after a long tireless life of service. This note is not enough to serve his memory rightly, nevertheless we wish hereby to pay tribute to the breadth and scope of his vision and accomplishments in the field of Coptic Heritage.

Fr. Marcos was a pioneer *par excellence*. Beside his fastidious endeavours in the field of pastoral services, he believed genuinely in the cause of dissemination of Coptic Culture. Being an ingenious mastermind and initiator, he remarkably ensured and nurtured “local” leadership. He was never keen to accredit personal honour or glory, but rejoiced in seeing initiatives growing and flourishing no matter their size.

Fr. Marcos is best known as the founder of the Coptic Orthodox Church in North America. His deep-seated understanding and knowledge of the significance of Coptic cultural heritage led him to establish the Coptic Museum of Canada, the only Coptic museum outside of Egypt (1996). Furthermore, he is also a founding member of the Canadian Society for Coptic Studies, established in 2010.



photographer: Sarah Asaad