

Supplementary Church History notes on
“CHRISTIANITY” IN AFRICA¹

Note: These notes are simply a rough draft and still very incomplete at present (Oct, 08) focusing mainly on North Africa and East Africa. I hope to add more information on the areas of West & South Africa as well as North Africa-Mike Edwards

EARLY CENTURIES (A.D. 100-600)

ETHIOPIA (ABYSSINIA) & AKSUM:

“Christianity...obtained a foothold on the African side of the Red Sea, in *Axum* (alternate spelling *Aksum*-per Yamauchi), from which the Christianity of the later **Ethiopia** or (more properly) **Abyssinia** seems to have had its rise. The traditional account tells of a philosopher from Tyre who, taking with him two youths, one of them **Fruementius**, sailed for ‘India.’ On the return voyage they were seized by the inhabitants of one of the ports on the west coast of the Red Sea. All the ship’s company were massacred except Fruementius and his fellow-youth. The two rose to high posts in the service of their captors and Fruementius set himself to the spiritual care of the Christian merchants from the Roman Empire whom he found there and built for them houses of worship. He went to Alexandria, asked the archbishop of that city, *Athanasius*, for a bishop, and Athanasius responded by consecrating him and sending him back to his flock. Whatever may be the truth of this story, it appears to be certain that Athanasius appointed one Fruementius Bishop of Axum. It seems probably that Fruementius won the king of Axum and that in consequence Christianity became the official faith of that state. This was in the first half of the fourth century (A.D. 300-350). Thus was begun a connection between the Christianity of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and that of Egypt which was to persist into the twentieth century.”²

Yamauchi relates a similar account of the **early history of Christianity in Abyssinia**: “If the Ethiopian eunuch—who actually came from Nubia—did not really evangelize the area today called Ethiopia, when did Christianity come there? It arrived in a most unusual way in the fourth century (300’s) during the heyday of the Aksumite kingdom. According to Rufinus, a Syrian named Meropius landed at Adulis. He and his companions were killed by the native people who had been incensed by the violation of a treaty. Two young brothers, **Edesius and Fruementius**, were spared and brought to the court of **Ella Amida** at Aksum. As they grew, the king made Edesius his cupbearer and Fruementius his archivist. They used their political power and influence to further the spread of Christianity in the country. **When Ella Amida died and was succeeded by his son, Ezana**, Edesius and Fruementius were allowed to leave. Fruementius visited Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria to report on the status of Christianity in the Aksumite kingdom and requested him to send a missionary there. Rufinus then reports:

‘Then **Athanasius** (for he had recently assumed the episcopate), having carefully weighed and considered Fruementius’ words and deeds, declared in a council of the priests: “*What other man shall we find in whom the Spirit of God is as in you, who can accomplish these things?*” **And he consecrated him and bade him return in the grace of God whence he had come.**”³

“**Fruementius returned as Abba Salama**, setting the precedent whereby the *abuna* (head) of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church would be consecrated by the Egyptian Coptic Church. **Ezana**, the new king, was at first still loyal to pagan gods such as Mahrem, Astar, Beher, and Meder. We have several important inscriptions of this vigorous king in Ge’ez, Greek, and South Arabian, recording his conquests over the Bega (descendants of the Medjayu, who occupied the Red Sea Hills) and most significantly over Nubia and Meroe. It is probable that the Aksumite incursion brought an end to the kingdom of Meroe around A.D. 360. Fragments of Aksumite inscriptions have been found at Meroe. (and) a Greek text published in 1970 makes Ezana’s Christian faith explicit:

‘In the faith of God, and the power of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, who saved for me the kingdom by the faith of his son Jesus Christ, who helped me and always does help me, I, Azanas, king of the Axomites and Homerites... Son of Elle-Amida, servant of Christ, give thanks to the lord my God.’”⁴

¹ Compiled by Rev. Mike Edwards, Baptist Bible College of the Caribbean, St. Vincent, West Indies -Dec., 2006, revised Oct., 2008.

² “*A History of Christianity Volume 1 – Beginnings to 1500*”, Kenneth Scott LaTourette (Harper Collins Publishers: San Francisco, CA, 1953), p. 104.

³ “*Africa and the Bible*”, Edwin M. Yamauchi (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2004), p. 175.

⁴ Yamauchi, p. 176.

Yamauchi points out that “**The conversion of Ezana to Christianity has been compared to the conversion of Constantine, the Roman emperor, about forty years earlier, in 312.** A century later (450’s) nine saints (monks from Syria) arrived, established monasteries, and translated some of the Scriptures into Ge’ez. The Ethiopian Church embraced a very broad canon, listing eighty-one books, including Old Testament apocryphal and pseudepigraphal works. Such important works as Enoch are preserved complete only in an Ethiopic version. **Ethiopian Christianity has retained many Jewish elements, such as circumcision, the Sabbath, purity laws, and fasting.** Their churches are arranged in three areas of holiness, corresponding to the model of the Jewish temple, with the tabot (ark) resting in the innermost sanctuary...

“**Ethiopian Christians believe that in their cathedral at Aksum they have the original Solomonic ark of the covenant, recovered by Menelik, the son of the Queen of Sheba.**”⁵

“**Modern Ethiopia Was Until Recently [named] Abyssinia.** Though some later church fathers may have referred to the kingdom of Aksum as Aithiopia, this area was generally known—the Arabic designation of the country was *al-habasa*—as Abyssinia from the fourth century until after the Second World War. Aksumite coins from the fourth century (300’s) bear the legend ‘King of the Habashat,’ and medieval texts speak of the ‘Queen of the Habasha.’ King Menelik II (d. 1913) laid the groundwork for the modern country of Ethiopia by expanding his control southward and establishing the new capital of Addis Ababa. It was his great nephew **Tafari Makonnen**, the *Ras* or ‘*chief*’ of the province of Harar, who in 1928 assumed the name of **Haile Selassie** (Might of the Trinity) and was crowned Negus (emperor) in 1930, only to see his country invaded by the Italians in 1934 under the order of Mussolini.”⁶

AKSUM:

“In Ethiopia from 700-300 B.C., the kingdom of Daamat flourished on the Tigrean plateau, influenced by elements from South Arabia. **This was succeeded by a new kingdom centered at Aksum** (or Axum), which was situated on the strategic road between the Nile Valley and the port of Adulis on the Red Sea. It grew wealthy as an (entry point) in the trade of exotic objects such as ivory, incense, gold, hides, horn, and slaves from Africa, which were exported to Rome. The first reference to Aksum is found in Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, a late-first-century A.D. sea captain’s guide to ports on the Red Sea.

...Aksum expanded its power on the plateau in the first and second centuries A.D. and by the third century (200’s) extended its influence west toward Meroe and east across the Red Sea to South Arabia. **Mani, founder of the Manichean religion** (third century A.D.-see definition page later in this paper-mwe), reckoned the four great kingdoms of the world in his day as **Rome, Parthia (Persia), China, and Aksum.** Visible monuments of the rulers are immense granite stelae (stone pillars-mwe), which represent the façade of palaces. Excavations by Neville Chittick in 1972-1974 established that these stelae were markers over royal tombs. Unfortunately, none of the stelae bears any names... **The largest stela, almost 100 feet high, has fallen. Its weight is estimated to be about 300 tons.** The Italians, who under Mussolini occupied Ethiopia from 1939-1945, removed a 78 foot stela from Aksum, estimated to weigh 200 tons, and erected it in Rome...”⁷

EGYPT:

“In Egypt the story was somewhat different. Here were ancient churches which had never died out. The largest was **Monophysite** (see definition page later in paper) in faith, and, although the vernacular of its members was Arabic, it continued its services in the **Coptic language** which had been the speech of most of the population before the Moslem-Arab conquest...before the end of the fifth century the faith became rooted among the native

⁵ Yamauchi, pp. 176-78. I [mwe] would consider that claim very dubious. I have heard the Chief Rabbi of Israel, and the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem state on videotape that they believe the ark & other temple furnishings are hidden beneath the Temple Mount in Jerusalem-though they probably are referring to furnishings of Herod’s Temple. However, it should be born in mind that Nebuchadnezzar & his Babylonian army removed the furnishings from Solomon’s temple e.g. The book of Daniel records the well-known story of Belshazzar throwing a party and drinking from the gold and silver vessels that his father had removed from Solomon’s temple, the night God had a hand write Belshazzar’s judgment on a wall in the palace at Babylon. (Dan.5). In addition, the Arch of Titus in Rome was erected to celebrate Titus’ destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple in A.D. 70, and on it is found an engraving of the Romans carrying off some of the Temple furniture as booty.

⁶ Yamauchi, p. 163. His book includes an interesting footnote on the same page, in reference to this paragraph: “*An influential Caribbean movement known as the Rastafarians regards Selassie as God, much to his displeasure during his lifetime.*” See Spencer, *Dread Jesus.*”

⁷ Yamauchi, op cit., p. 173.

Egyptian stock and in time was the dominant religion of the land. To facilitate the integration of the faith in the lives of the masses the Scriptures were translated, and other Christian literature was prepared in the vernacular and the services of the Church were carried on in that tongue... **this Coptic population followed its leaders in refusing to accept the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon and held to Monophysite views.** Monophysites by no means entirely agreed among themselves, and their dissensions, theological and personal, troubled the Coptic church... At the outset (of Arab/Muslim conquest) the Arab victories brought relief to the Coptic Christians, for the latter were freed from persecution by Byzantine officials... To be sure, Christians were placed under the disabilities which we have noted as general under Moslem Arabs, including a discriminatory tax.

Within a generation of the (Muslim) conquest (ca. 650-700) a large proportion of the Christian population, both Coptic and Melchite, went over to Islam.... As the years passed, Moslem restrictions on Christians were tightened. Early in the eighth century (700's) additional financial burdens were placed on the Christians and in that same century persecutions were instituted which led to the apostasy of many, even of several bishops... By at least the tenth century (900's) Christians were forbidden to attempt to convert Moslems, to marry Moslem women, to speak disparagingly of the Prophet or the Koran, to display crosses, to ring church bells or in other ways to (impose) their faith on Moslems, to erect houses higher than those of Moslems, to ride thoroughbred horses, or to drink wine in public or to allow swine to be seen, since both of these were abhorrent to good Moslems.(!) Now and again Christians won converts from Islam, but such defections from the dominant faith were usually visited with severe penalties. Yet Christianity persisted. **Monasteries, of which Egypt had been the chief early centre, continued and were the main strongholds of the faith.**... (the Coptic churches were) said to have grown in the second half of the nineteenth century, but from an excess of births over deaths and not by conversions. **The chief strength of the Coptic Church was in the cities and Upper Egypt.**... **Protestantism** was represented by several denominations. Among them were the Church Missionary Society which gathered a few converts from the Moslems and the Copts and the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which built up a community of several thousand, almost entirely from the Copts and chiefly in Upper Egypt."⁸

NUBIA (& MEROE)

"Nubia, South of Egypt, has been called a country 200 miles long and 5 yards wide. Lower Nubia is virtually desert, for the Nile cuts deep into soft sandstone and the flood plain is narrow or non-existent... To the South, there is sufficient rainfall for farming. This was the setting for the civilization of Meroe, which flourished from about 300 B.C. to about AD 300. **Christianity came late to Nubia, introduced in the sixth century (500s) by missionaries not, as one might have expected from Egypt, but from Byzantium.**"⁹

Nubia is the general area of modern-day Sudan and is the likely kingdom from which the Ethiopian eunuch came. "Meroe, (was) the capital of a Nubian kingdom that flourished for a millennium from around 650 B.C. to A.D. 350,¹⁰ (and) was situated about 960 miles south of the Mediterranean and 600 miles from Aswan. **It was located on the east bank of the Nile, between the Fifth and Sixth Cataracts, 145 miles north of Khartoum,** the capital of Sudan. Herodotus (2:28-31) was the first classical writer to refer to Meroe. After the Meroitic civilization declined in the fourth century A.D., Herodotus's account of Meroe was dismissed as legendary until **the site was rediscovered by James Bruce in 1772.**... Contacts with Ptolemaic Egypt were frequent in the third century B.C., which has been called the period of the 'early Meroitic miracle.' S.M. Burstein comments: 'Greeks of all sorts—diplomats, intellectuals, artisans, and most important, Ptolemaic elephant hunters—traveled freely throughout Meroitic territory.' Kendall notes: 'One Simonides was said to have lived there five years and to have written a book about his adventures.' **An inscribed drum with the Greek alphabet was found at Meroe. All of these indications freely explain why the Ethiopian eunuch could read the Book of Isaiah in the Septuagint version.** After withdrawing permanently from Egypt about 590 B.C., the Kushites still maintained a remarkable kingdom for about a thousand years until about A.D. 350."¹¹

⁸ LaTourette, op cit., pp. 1206, 319-320, 1206-1207.

⁹ "A History of Christianity in Africa-From Antiquity to the Present", Elizabeth Isichei (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI, & Africa World Press: Lawrenceville, NJ, 1995), pp. 14-15.

¹⁰ Note: Yamauchi, citing O'Connor, *Ancient Nubia*, gives a starting point 100 years earlier, stating: "The remarkable Aithiopian kingdoms of Napata and Meroe extended about 1,100 years (from 750 B.C. to A.D. 350)."

¹¹ Yamauchi, op cit., pp. 149, 154-55.

“After his decisive victory at **Actium in 31 B.C.** over the naval forces of **Antony and Cleopatra**, **Octavian** pursued the couple to Egypt. When Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide, **Octavian (renamed Augustus in 27 B.C.** [yes, the Caesar Augustus who reigned when Jesus was born—mwe]) made Egypt his personal province and installed as **governor Cornelius Gallus**, a poet who was a friend of Virgil...In 29 B.C. he pushed south past Philae, probably to secure access to the gold mines in the region...**The kingdom of Meroe was declared a Roman protectorate**, under obligation to pay an annual tribute...Upon recalling Cornelius, Augustus replaced him with **Aelius Gallus**. Aelius was sent by the emperor to conquer Meroe, a commission that did not accomplish, despite Augustus’s boast in his *Res Gestae* (26) ...In 25 B.C., taking advantage of the withdrawal of soldiers to provide troops for Aelius Gallus’s campaign in Arabia, **the Meroites**—under the leadership of Queen Amanirenas—launched an attack on Syene (Aswan) and on the islands of Philae and of Elephantine by the First Cataract. **It was no doubt on this occasion that they carried off a magnificent bronze head of Augustus** that the excavators later found buried under the threshold of a temple at Meroe, so that all who entered would tread over the enemy’s head...

In 24 B.C. Augustus’s new commander, C. Petronius, launched a punitive expedition that reached as far south as Napata. He pursued the treacherous Akinidad, who had been appointed by the Romans as tryannus, and the queen...Through diplomacy, peace between the Romans and the Meroites was established. The Meroites obtained very favorable terms in a treaty signed at Samos in 20 B. C. The Romans withdrew from Qasr Ibrim, and the Meroites were no longer required to pay tribute...**This era of peace and prosperity enabled the so-called Ethiopian eunuch to travel to Judea, perhaps on a diplomatic mission.** Shinnie observes: ‘The amount of building shows that the first century A.D. was one of wealth and power in the Meroitic kingdom, but, after the early part of the century, we have very little information other than the names of rulers.’”¹²

“**Meroe’s strategic position commanded trade routes into inner Africa**, which gave access to highly desirable objects such as ivory and ebony. In the excavation at Wad ben Naga by Jean Vercoutter from 1958-1960 **a great store of ivory and ebony was found. The Meroites also had gold, slaves, leopard skins, and incense to offer**...archaeological finds at Meroitic burial sites, even after the inevitable looting by tomb robbers, indicate the presence of fine imported jewelry, vases, and wine from Rhodes, the west coast of Asia Minor, and southern France and olive oil from North Africa. (!) These objects came from diplomatic and trade missions. As F.J. Snowden Jr. observes ‘Ethiopian diplomats were not uncommon, since Ethiopian relations with the Ptolemies and Romans involved diplomatic exchanges. Diodorus (3.11.3) interviewed Ethiopian ambassadors resident in Egypt.’ Many inscriptions of individuals contain Meroitic titles *apote-leb Arome-li-s* (envoys to Rome) or *apote qor-s* (ambassador of the king).

“**The Christianization of Nubia.** Though there are some indications of Christianity in tombs of the fifth century (400’s) and reports of monks from Egypt moving into Nubia at this time, the official conversion of the rulers did not occur until the reign of the great Byzantine rulers and **Justinian and Theodora**. Justinian, a vigorous champion of orthodox Christianity, closed the famous pagan temples at Philae. **Justinian favored the Chalcedonian** (church council) **formula**, but **Theodora was sympathetic to the Monophysite cause**, so much so that she hid Monophysite monks in the palace at Constantinople.

“In the Byzantine era (after the fourth century) **three different kingdoms arose in the area of Nubia (1) Nobatia** between the Second and Third Cataracts with **its capital at Faras**, **(2) Makouria** between the Third and Fourth Cataracts with **its capital at Dongola**, and **(3) Alwa** below the Sixth Cataract with **its capital at Soba**. When Theodora learned that her husband was sending Melkite (i.e. Chalcedonian) missionaries to Silko (a Nobadian king), she outwitted him by hastily sending a rival Monophysite mission that arrived first and **in 543 converted the ruler of Nobatia**. Julian, who led this mission, could not stand the heat of the area, and spent seven hours a day nearly naked, soaking in puddles of water in a cave to keep cool! **After the death of Theodora in 547 and the death of Justinian in 565**, another Monophysite missionary named Longinus came to Nobatia in 568 to establish churches and train clergy. Avoiding the hostile middle kingdom of Makouria, Longinus succeeded in converting the ruler of Alwa in 575. Polish excavations at Faras uncovered a cathedral that contained 160 frescoes and 400 wall inscriptions in Greek, Coptic, and Old Nubian, **including lists of bishops from 707-**

¹² Ibid, pp. 158-160.

1169. Archaeological evidence of the conversion of these kingdoms to Christianity is quite dramatic. According to P.L. Shinnie,

‘The missions seem to have been remarkably successful **and within a short period Christianity had become the religion of both rulers and ruled. The evidence is to be seen in the rather sudden change of burial customs** from those of post-Meroitic (X-Group or Ballana) style with their abundance of grave goods, and for the chiefly burials the custom of human and animal sacrifice, **to a strictly Christian one in which, with few exceptions, the body was buried without any accompanying objects.**’

“Adams concurs:

‘Another point of consensus is that the evangelization of the Nobadians proceeded very rapidly and was complete well before the end of the sixth century... There is no transition from pagan to Christian burial. On the contrary **the use of funerary offerings, of contracted burial, and of above-ground tumuli seem to have disappeared as if overnight... The Christian period is symbolized by the longest peace in Nubian history, and by countless representations of a heavenly king, but no single monument nor tomb of any earthly king.**”¹³

“**The (Ethiopian) eunuch** had, no doubt, been in Alexandria, where he would have learned about Judaism from the large Jewish population there. And he may have traveled to Judea to establish economic and diplomatic ties with Herod Agrippa I, the new king of the Jews (A.D. 37-44). Like many other foreign tourists, he would have wanted to see Herod’s magnificently rebuilt temple... The Ethiopian eunuch eventually went home and presumably testified about his newfound faith. **According to Irenaeus’s Against Heresies 3.12.8, written about A.D. 180, the eunuch was ‘sent into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed.**”¹⁴ Yamauchi cites Eusebius’s account from his 4th century church history. The full text reads as follows:

‘For as the annunciation of the Saviour’s gospel was daily advancing, by a certain divine providence, a prince of the queen of the Ethiopians, as it is a custom that still prevails there to be governed by a female, was brought thither, and was the first of the Gentiles that received of the mysteries of the divine word from Philip. The apostle, led by a vision, thus instructed him and he, becoming the first fruits of believers throughout the world, is said to have been the first, on returning to his country, that proclaimed the knowledge of God and the salutary abode of our Saviour among men. So that, in fact, the prophecy obtained its fulfillment through him: *‘Ethiopia stretcheth forth her hands unto God.’*” [Ps. 68:31].”¹⁵

SOME IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL TERMS:

MONOPHYSITISM:

This theological error would spring up in Egypt and Ethiopia in the early centuries, coming to a head at one of the early church councils, the Council of Chalcedon. This error would continue to survive down to the present day in both of those countries in Africa. “Derived from *monos* ‘single’ and *physis* ‘nature,’ monophysitism is the doctrine which holds that the incarnate Christ had only a single, divine nature, clad in human flesh. Since the Council of Chalcedon (451), which confirmed as orthodox the doctrine of two natures (of Christ), divine and human, monophysitism has been considered heretical. Its roots probably go back to Apollinaris (ca. 370) who laid tremendous stress on the fusion of the divine and human. Alexandria (as opposed to Antioch) became the citadel of this doctrine, and Cyril (ca. 430), although deemed orthodox, furnished fuel for the fire kindled by his successor Dioscorus and Eutyches of Constantinople, who denied that Christ’s body was the same in essence as the bodies of men. (!) **Their chief opponent was Leo I of Rome**, whose formulation of the doctrine of two natures in one person triumphed at Chalcedon. Monophysites tended to divide into two main groups: **Julianists**, who held to the immortality and incorruptibility of Christ’s incarnate body, and the more orthodox **Severians**, who rejected the Eutychian view that the human and divine were completely mingled in the Incarnation. **In the remnant of Syrian Jacobites and in the Coptic and Ethiopian churches...it survives to the present day.**”¹⁶

¹³ All four paragraphs from Yamauchi, pp. 180-81.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 165-66, 172-73.

¹⁵ “*The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*”, translated by Isaac Boyle (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1955, 1976), Book II, Chapter I, p. 50.

¹⁶ “*Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*”, Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey Bromiley & Carl Henry, editors (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1960), “*Monophysitism*,” David A. Hubbard, p. 362.

In regard to the above-mentioned Eutyches, the following comment may be helpful: “**Eutychanism**-The heresy of Eutyches (ca. 378-454) concerning the theanthropic person of Christ. Eutyches taught that the two natures of Christ united to form one nature that was a mixture of the divine and the human. Though condemned by the council of Chalcedon in 451, **Eutychanism later emerged as the Monophysitic heresy.**”¹⁷

MANICHEISM:

“An ancient heresy which stemmed largely from the aberrations of **Manes**, who flourished in the middle of the third century (200’s), but about whose early life we have little concrete information. **He assimilated much of the philosophy of Gnosticism and taught a form of heathen dualism, positing two opposing forces, good and evil, in the world. Redemption was the liberation of the good from the dominion of the evil, which in keeping with his Gnosticism was closely associated with matter. Manes viewed Christ in a Gnostic light and denied His resurrection.** He taught that Christ helped in the redeeming work of liberating the good from evil domination, **and that he (Manes) was his successor in that work.** Manicheism had a wide following, absorbing many of the followers of Marcion into its fold.”¹⁸

COPT; COPTIC CHURCH

“**Copt: 1. A member or descendant of the people of pre-Islamic Egypt, 2. A member of the Christian church of Egypt.**”¹⁹

“The word *Coptic* can refer to a people, a language, or a Church. Both ‘Copt’ and ‘Egypt’ come from a Greek word, *Aigyptos*, which, in turn, comes from the ancient Egyptian name for Memphis, ‘the house of Ptah’. The history of ancient Egyptian literacy falls into three phases, each progressively less formal: the hieroglyphs used on inscriptions...One consequence of the Greek presence was that it became increasingly the custom to write the Egyptian language in the Greek alphabet, with seven letters added (Coptic). The earliest surviving exemplar dates from 150 BC. **Coptic was used in writing much Christian literature...**In its turn **Coptic was supplanted by Arabic.** It survived until the thirteenth century (1200’s), but, after that, even Christian Copts spoke Arabic and **Coptic survived only in liturgy**, as Latin did in the Catholic Church until recent times. Coptic Christianity was forged in persecution and its most distinctive expression was in the lives of the (‘**Desert Fathers**’). In Egypt, as in North Africa, a mass turning away from the old religion towards Christianity seems to have begun in the middle of the third century and to have been virtually complete by 400 [due, undoubtedly, in large part to the fact that the emperor first legalized, then mandated Christianity as the only acceptable religion of the Roman empire-mwe]...Persecution became most severe...in the last years of Diocletian and under Maximin in late 311 and early 312. Eusebius describes the atrocious sufferings of the martyrs of the Thebais, in upper Egypt, torn to pieces by sharp shards, or dismembered, or burned alive, executions so numerous that the executioners were exhausted, and the axes worn out...

“The experience of persecution divided those who suffered from it. The point of division was the policy to be adopted towards backsliders. Were Christians who recanted during persecution to be readmitted after (repentance), or should they be permanently excluded from the Church? Peter, the Patriarch of Alexandria, who himself died a martyr’s death, took the more generous line; Meletius and his followers the harsher one. The Christians in prisons in Alexandria in 304 hung a curtain between the factions, so sharp were their divisions...

“Perhaps the most distinctive contribution of the Coptic Church to world Christianity lay in its virtual invention of both the eremitical and the monastic way...The beginning of western monasticism, as well as of eremiticism, is written in Coptic. **Pachomis** (290-346) was an Egyptian (who)...lived for a time as a solitary, and then established a large monastery in the Thebaid...It was said at a later date, with pardonable exaggeration, that there were more Egyptians in the desert than in the cities...Most, but not all, came from a poor background, which doubtless made the privations of the desert easier to endure...Some tried the life and found that they could not endure it. Jerome spent some time in the Syrian desert, learned Hebrew to rid his imagination of dancing girls and discovered, in the end, that his calling lay elsewhere...**Not everyone admired the (‘Desert Fathers’).**

¹⁷ “*Dictionary of Theological Terms*”, Alan Cairns (Ambassador-Emerald International: Belfast, Northern Ireland, 2002), p. 169.

¹⁸ Cairns, p. 271.

¹⁹ “*The American Heritage Dictionary*” (Dell Publishing: New York, NY, 1994), p. 193.

Rutilius in the early fifth century (400s) wrote of: ‘a credulous exile skulking in the dark, Thinking, poor fool, that heaven feeds on filth, Himself to himself more harsh than the outraged gods.’”²⁰

SYNCRETISM

“From the Greek verb sunkretizein, ‘to combine’; the movement to unite, not merely the churches of Christendom, but all these with all other religions; the movement for a one-world religion.”²¹ “...by the middle of the seventeenth century, when the dogmas of the various branches of Protestantism became settled, it became a term of censure to describe those who would minimize doctrinal standards for the sake of unity...It is a term currently used to describe...attempts to harmonize Christianity with non-Christian thought.”²²

Regarding syncretism, in parts of Africa, as in Europe, North & South America, the Caribbean, etc., professing Christians have sometimes attempted to incorporate and blend in ancient animistic and ancestral religious beliefs and practices with Christianity, creating an unbiblical mixture of truth and error. This must always be guarded against. Paul did not encourage the Ephesians to adapt and incorporate their pagan beliefs and practices into Christianity, but rather to renounce them (e.g. Acts 19; II Cor. 6:14-7:1; etc).

WEST AFRICA:

1400-1800:

ROMAN CATHOLIC ENDEAVORS: [Important Note: The inclusion of the following quotes from LaTourette regarding Roman Catholicism here and on the next page are included because we’re dealing with general church history. They should in *no way* be taken as an acceptance, let alone approval of Roman Catholicism, **which is completely contrary to Scripture in its doctrines and practices.** -mwe].

“The planting of Christianity on the islands which fringe the west and east coasts of Africa and on the shores of Africa itself was mainly by Portuguese and so by Roman Catholics under their auspices...**Prince Henry the Navigator, was...Grand Master of the Order of Christ, a military monastic body which in Portugal succeeded to the property of the Knights Templars.**²³ In his direction of the enterprise he seems to have been moved in part, or at least so a Papal bull declared, by the desire to unite with the Christians of India against the Moslems and pagans of that land and to spread the ‘Christian’ faith...Beginning in the fifteenth century Portuguese colonized the Azores, the Madeiras, and the Cape Verde Islands...At several points on the African coast Christian communities arose...In the area just south of the Congo in what was known as the Kingdom of the Congo a native chief was baptized **near the end of the fifteenth century.** His son who succeeded him seems to have been earnestly Christian and under him a large proportion of his subjects were baptized. A son of this second-generation Christian was consecrated bishop. So far as we know he was the first Negro to be raised to that dignity. Several others were ordained to the priesthood. Schools were begun...**Jesuits** from Portugal were there through much of the sixteenth century and near the end of that century **Franciscans** arrived. There were also **Capuchins and Discalced Carmelites.** Yet in time Christianity died out, leaving only a few relics and possibly some traces in folklore. [We would say that Christianity had never been there, since the Roman Catholic Church’s teaching is unbiblical-mwe]. There were also important missions farther south, in Angola, and on the east coast at Mombasa and Mozambique. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries several efforts were made by Portuguese to propagate Christianity in the island of Madagascar, but without continuing success.”²⁴

SOUTH AFRICA:

1600-1800:

PROTESTANT EFFORTS: “**Protestant Christianity came late to Africa.** Its chief centre was on the southern tip of the continent. Here, in **1652**, the Dutch began a continuing settlement as a way station to their trading posts in India, Ceylon, Malacca, and the East Indies, and a community arose made up of the Dutch and their

²⁰ Isichei, op cit., pp. 26-29.

²¹ Cairns, op cit., p. 443.

²² Harrison et al., op cit., p. 510.

²³ Such Roman Catholic “*military monastic societies*” probably go a long way towards explaining how early Roman Catholic explorers felt justified in taking lands and forcing people to become “Christians” at the threat or reality of death. It should be kept in mind that the famous Jesuit philosophy is, “*The End Justify the Means.*” Of course such a philosophy is completely unbiblical (cf. Rom. 3:8)-mwe

²⁴ “*A History of Christianity Volume II – Reformation to the Present*”, Kenneth Scott LaTourette (Harper & Row Publishers: New York, NY, 1953, 1975), pp. 926-927.

descendants, (as well as) of Huguenot refugees, of Malays (Malaysians) and others brought from the East, and of local Hottentots (Africans). Within a few years a resident clergyman arrived, and services and religious instruction were carried on according to the faith of the Reformed Church. **In 1737 a Moravian missionary came** who for six years laboured among the Hottentots. The Dutch ministers also baptized some of the non-Christians (?) and a church was built in Capetown for the converts.”²⁵

NORTH AFRICA:

1800-1914:

ROMAN CATHOLICISM: “On the north shore of Africa west of Egypt the Christian churches which had flourished in the early centuries had gradually disappeared under Moslem rule. At the dawn of the nineteenth century Christianity was represented only by Spanish footholds in **Morocco**, European merchants, and the captives of the corsairs. Between 1815 and 1914 most of the north shore west of Egypt was occupied by Western European powers and this led to a striking increase in the numbers of ‘*Christians.*’ **Almost all the growth was by immigration from north of the Mediterranean.** There were also missions, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, among the Moslems and Jews, although with very few converts. Most of the Christians were in Algeria, conquered by the French in the 1830’s and 1840’s, and in Tunisia, occupied by France in 1881. **By the end of the century Algeria contained about half a million who were registered as Roman Catholics.** The majority were French but there were substantial numbers of Italians, Spaniards, and Maltese. There were also several thousand in Tunisia. A Roman Catholic hierarchy was developed and in 1884 the Archbishopric of Carthage, made famous in the early centuries by a distinguished succession of prelates, chief among them Cyprian, was revived...Libya, occupied by Italy in 1911, contained a few thousand Roman Catholic immigrants of the nineteenth century.”²⁶

PROTESTANTISM: “(In Egypt) Protestantism was represented by several denominations. Among them were the Church Missionary Society which gathered a few converts from the Moslems and the Copts and the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which built up a community of several thousand, almost entirely from the Copts and chiefly in Upper Egypt. Christianity reentered the Sudan, in the upper part of the Nile Valley, south of Egypt. **There, it will be recalled, it had been introduced in the sixth century and had been strong for many years, only to succumb to slow extinction by Islam.**...in the second half of the century the British and Foreign Bible Society, the Church Missionary Society, and the United Presbyterians made their way into the region.”²⁷

²⁵ Ibid, pp. 927-928.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 1205-1206.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 1206-1207