

Religious Continuity and Change in Egypt

Objectives

As a result of this lesson, students will be able to:

- describe the ancient religious beliefs of Egypt
 - compare and contrast ancient Egyptian and Islamic funeral rites
 - recognize that many elements have remained the same, while historic events have produced changes.
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Materials

- Student Handout: **Dynastic Chart of Ancient Egypt**
 - Student Handout: **Creation Myths**
 - Student Handout: **Funeral Rites in Ancient Egypt**
 - Student Handout: **Coptic Christianity in Egypt**
 - Student Handout: **Islamic Funeral Rites**
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Key Questions

- What is the connection between past and present religious ideas? Why have some remained the same, while some have changed?
 - What particular elements of the afterlife of ancient Egypt have been passed on and still practiced in Egypt today?
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Sources

Suggested Readings

- Rosalie David. *Religion and Magic in Ancient Egypt*. Penguin Books, 2002. (ISBN-10: 0140262520)
- Ian Shaw. *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford University Press, 2000. (ISBN-10: 0192804588)
- Jill Kamil. Christianity in the Land of the Pharaohs: The Coptic Orthodox Church. Routledge, 2002. (ISBN:-10: 0415242533)

Websites

- www.carnegiemnh.org/exhibits/egypt/guide.htm
 - www.ancientegypt.co.uk/menu.html (This website is for the British Museum)
 - www.egyptianmuseum.gov.eg (This is the website for the Egyptian National Museum in Cairo)
 - Both of these websites have hundreds of educational links, and should provide everything you need to know about ancient Egypt.
 - www.si.umich.edu/chico/mummy
 - www.coptic.net/EncyclopediaCoptica
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Dynastic Chart of Ancient Egypt

Period	Date	Dynasty
Pre-dynastic	5000-3100 BCE	
Archaic Period	3100-2890 BCE	I
	2890-2685 BCE	II
Old Kingdom	2686 – 2623 BCE	III
	2613 – 2494 BCE	IV
	2494 – 2345 BCE	V
	2345 – 2181 BCE	VI
	First Intermediate	2181 – 2173 BCE
2173 – 2160 BCE		VIII - Memphis
2160 – 2030 BCE		VIX - Heracleopolitan
2130 – 2040 BCE		X - Heracleopolitan
2133 – 1991 BCE		XI - Thebes
Middle Kingdom	1991 – 1786 BCE	XII
Second Intermediate	1786 – 1623 BCE	XIII
	1786 – 1603 BCE	XIV - Xoïs
	1674 – 1567 BCE	XV - Hyksos
	1684 – 1567 BCE	XVI - Hyksos
	1650 – 1567 BCE	XVII - Thebes
New Kingdom	1567 – 1320 BCE	XVIII }
	1320 – 1200 BCE	XIX } – Karnak, Luxor
	1200 – 1085 BCE	XX } – Thebes, Valley of the Kings
Third Intermediate	1085 – 945 BCE	XXI – Tanis
	945 – 730 BCE	XXII – Bubastis
	817 – 730 BCE	XXIII – Leontopolis
	720 – 715 BCE	XXIV – Sais
	715 – 668 BCE	XXV – Ethiopian
Late Period	664 – 525 BCE	XXVI – Sais
	525 – 404 BCE	XXVII – Persian
	404 – 399 BCE	XXVIII – Sais
	399 – 380 BCE	XXIX – Mendes
	380 – 343 BCE	XXX – Sebannytos
	343 – 322 BCE	XXXI – Persian
	Greco-Roman Period	332 BCE
332 – 30 BCE		Ptolemaic Period
30 BCE – Fourth Century CE		Roman Period

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Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths

The principle underlying all of the different creation myths is that of order being established out of chaos.

Memphis

Ptah was the self-engendered creator god who was referred to as the “father of the gods from whom all life emerged.” He brought the universe into being by conceiving all aspects of it in his heart, then speaking his thoughts out loud. First he created the other deities, and then towns, with shrines in which to house them. He provided wood, clay and stone statues to act as bodies for the spirits or divine power (ka) of the deities, and offerings to be made to them forever. All things, including all people and animals, were brought into being by Ptah declaring their names.

Elephantine

The creator god of this cult center was the ram-headed deity of the southern cataract region, Khnum. He created the universe by modeling the other gods, as well as humankind (both Egyptians and all those who spoke other languages), animals, birds, fish, reptiles and plants out of clay on his potter’s wheel. He paid particular attention to the molding of the human body, getting the blood to flow over the bones and stretching the skin carefully over the body. He took special care with the installation of the respiratory and digestive systems, the vertebrae, and the reproductive organs. Afterwards, he ensured the continuation of the human race by watching over conception and labor.

Hermopolis Magna

This myth begins by concentrating on the elements that were necessary for creation to take place. The fundamental factors were arranged in four male-female pairs: primordial water (Nun and Naunet); air or hidden power (Amun and Amaunet); darkness (Kuk and Kauket); and formlessness of infinity, otherwise interpreted as flood force (Huh and Hauhet). These divine personifications of the basic elements of the cosmos are referred to as the Ogdoad (Greek for “group of eight,” in Egyptian, khmun). The four male gods were all frog-headed, and the four goddesses were snake-headed. At some point, the eight elements interacted to create a burst of energy, allowing creation to take place. There were two versions of the events that followed this creation myth. In one version a primeval mound of earth described as the Isle of Flame rose up out of the primordial water. The god Thoth, in the form of an ibis, placed a cosmic egg on the mound of earth. The egg cracked, hatching the sun, which immediately rose up into the sky. According to an alternative version, a lotus flower (divinely personified as the deity Nefertem) was bobbling on the surface of the primordial waters when the petals opened and the sun rose out of it. On this occasion, the sun was identified as Horus.

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Heliopolis

Before anything existed or creation had taken place, there was darkness and endless, lifeless water, divinely personified as Nun. A mound of fertile silt emerged from this watery chaos. The self-engendered solar creator god Atum (the “All” or the “complete one”) appeared upon the mound. By masturbating (or sneezing, according to other versions), he was able to spit out the deities Shu (the divine personification of air) and Tefnut (moisture). Now that a male-female pair existed, they were able to procreate more conventionally. The results of their sexual union were Geb (the earth) and Nut (the sky). These two were forcefully separated by their father Shu, who lifted Nut up to her place above the earth. The offspring of the union between Geb and Nut were Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Sephtys.

Funeral Rites in Ancient Egypt

Much of our knowledge about ancient Egyptian culture comes from archaeological evidence uncovered in tombs. Objects, inscriptions, and paintings from tombs have led Egyptologists to conclude that what appeared to be a preoccupation with death was in actuality an overwhelming desire to secure and perpetuate in the afterlife the "good life" enjoyed on earth.

Preparing for the Afterlife

Over the more than three thousand years of ancient Egypt's history, traditional beliefs about the transition to eternal life persisted, with new ideas being incorporated from time to time. Most important for full participation in the afterlife was the need for an individual's identity to be preserved. Therefore, the body had to remain intact, and the person had to receive regular offerings of food and drink.

The afterlife was assured by (1) preserving the body through mummification; (2) protecting the body in a tomb and inscribing a person's name on the tomb walls, funerary stela, and burial equipment; and (3) providing food and drink or illustrating food stuffs and writing about food offerings in tombs in case appropriate relatives or priests were not available to make food offerings. These paintings and funerary inscriptions, which provided the owner of the tomb with "a thousand bread, a thousand cattle," were thought capable of sustaining the individual. The Egyptians also provided their tombs with many kinds of equipment, including furniture, utensils, clothing, jewelry, and cosmetics, according to their wealth, to ensure their material comfort in the best possible afterlife.

To ensure divine protection, funerary texts were written at first only on the walls of pharaohs' tombs and later on papyrus left in the tombs of private people. These texts included such writings as adaptations of the myth about the death of Osiris and spells to protect the deceased on his or her dangerous journey to the underworld.

The Egyptians believed that a person's spirit or soul was composed of three distinct parts, the ka (its vital force or "spiritual twin"), the ba (its personality or spirit), and the akh. The ka was created at a person's birth and needed a body to continue to live after an individual's death. It could also live in a statue of the deceased. The ba was a person's spirit, represented most commonly by a human-headed bird, that was released at the time of death. It could leave the tomb during the daylight hours to travel around the earth and was also with the deceased at his or her judgment. The akh was the "immortality" of an individual and resided in the heavens.

The final step in the transition to the afterlife was the judgment by Osiris, god of the underworld, in a ritual known as the Weighing of the Heart. If a person had led a decent life, he or she would be judged worthy of eternal life. Many spells and rituals were designed to ensure a favorable judgment and were written in the papyrus or linen "Book of the Dead."

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The Burial Rites When a person died, the whole family went into mourning. Women wailed, special clothing was worn, and men stopped shaving and eating. When a pharaoh died, the entire country mourned, and although the ancient Egyptians emphasized cleanliness, all shaving and bathing ceased.

The corpse was taken by boat from the east bank of the Nile, where most people lived, to the west bank. Cemeteries were located in the western low desert because the west was associated with the setting sun and death. First the body was placed in a purification tent where it was cleansed and dressed in clean clothes. Next it was brought to the embalming tent where it was preserved. The embalming priests wore masks representing Anubis, the god of embalming, and recited prayers and spells.

Mummification The process of mummification, the form of embalming practiced by the ancient Egyptians, changed over time from the Old Kingdom (ca. 2750-2250 B.C.), when it was available only to kings, to the New Kingdom (ca. 1539-1070 B.C.), when it was available to everyone. The level of mummification depended on what one could afford. The most fully developed form involved four basic steps:

1. All of the internal organs, except the heart, were removed. Since the organs were the first parts of the body to decompose but were necessary in the afterlife, they were mummified and put in canopic jars that were placed in the tomb at the time of burial. The heart was believed to be the seat of intelligence and emotion and was, therefore, left in the body. The brain, on the other hand, was regarded as having no significant value and, beginning in the New Kingdom, was removed through the nose and discarded.
2. The body was packed and covered with natron, a salty drying agent, and left to dry out for forty to fifty days. By this time all the body's liquid had been absorbed and only the hair, skin, and bones were left.
3. The body cavity was stuffed with resin, sawdust, or linen and shaped to restore the deceased's form and features.
4. The body was then tightly wrapped in many layers of linen with numerous amulets wrapped between the layers. The most important amulet was the scarab beetle, which was placed over the heart. Jewelry was also placed among the bandages. At each stage of wrapping, a priest recited spells and prayers. This whole procedure could take as long as fifteen days. After the wrapping was complete, the body was put into a shroud. The entire mummification process took about seventy days.

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The Funeral Procession

After the embalming was completed, the family was notified that it was time to leave its home on the east bank and travel by boat to the west bank for the funeral. The survivors formed a procession that also included priests and professional mourners to journey to the tomb. Servants carried flowers, offerings, food and drink, sacred ritual oils, and all the objects intended for burial. Some of the most important of these were a large box containing the canopic jars and a chest containing statuettes called shabtis.

A priest performed the Opening of the Mouth ceremony on the mummy at the entrance of the tomb. This ritual gave the deceased the ability to speak, eat, and have full use of his or her body. After the mummy was put in a coffin and then in a sarcophagus, it was placed in the burial chamber. Included in the tomb were all the funerary figurines, headrests, models of daily life, furniture, jars, cosmetics, and games necessary to ensure the deceased's enjoyment of the afterlife.

After the door was sealed, a banquet was held outside of the tomb entrance. When all the mummification equipment was buried near the tomb, the funeral was over.

Tombs

In the Predynastic Period (ca. 4500-3100 B.C.), bodies were buried in the fetal position in shallow, rectangular or oval graves dug directly in the sand away from any arable land. With the founding of the Egyptian state at the beginning of Dynasty I (ca. 3100 B.C.), burial practices changed and tombs began to appear. During the Dynastic Period three basic types of tombs evolved: mastabas, rock-cut tombs, and, for many kings up to the time of the New Kingdom, pyramids. During the first dynasties the Egyptians began to build mastabas of mud brick. These early mastabas consisted of a rectangular-shaped chapel above ground with a burial chamber below ground. Mastaba tombs enjoyed great popularity in the Old and Middle Kingdoms. The later mastabas were often built of stone, with larger chapels and a series of chambers above ground.

The first known pyramid was the Step Pyramid of King Djoser at Saqqara (Dynasty III, ca. 2700 B.C.). Its superstructure was a configuration of six squared-off mastabas of diminishing size set on top of one another, with the burial chamber below ground.

True pyramids had smooth sides. The Dynasty IV pyramids, including Pharaoh Khufu's Great Pyramid at Giza, were probably the largest ever built and consisted of large stone blocks faced with limestone. Later pyramids were smaller and usually had a rubble-filled core. Pyramids did not stand alone but were part of a complex of buildings that included various temples.

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**Tombs
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In areas with steep cliffs, the Egyptians tended to cut tombs deep into the rock. These rock-cut tombs first appeared in the Old Kingdom, and by the New Kingdom royal rock-cut tombs were widespread. These royal tombs were in a remote valley that we call the Valley of the Kings and consisted of a series of rooms cut into the sides of steep cliffs. Nonroyal people also used rock-cut tombs that were often topped with small brick pyramids.

All ancient Egyptians believed in the afterlife and spent their lives preparing for it. Pharaohs built the finest tombs, collected the most elaborate funerary equipment, and were mummified in the most expensive way. Others were able to provide for their afterlives according to their earthly means. Regardless of their wealth, however, they all expected the afterlife to be an idealized version of their earthly existence. n all the mummification equipment was buried near the tomb, the funeral was over.

Islamic Funeral Rites

Death is a very painful and emotional time, yet one that may be filled with hope and mercy. Muslims believe that death is a departure from the life of this world, but not the end of a person's existence. Rather, eternal life is to come, and we pray for God's mercy to be with the departed, in hopes that they may find peace and happiness in the life to come.

Care for the Dying

When a Muslim is near death, those around him or her are called upon to give comfort, and reminders of God's mercy and forgiveness. They may recite verses from the Qur'an, give physical comfort, and encourage the dying one to recite words of remembrance and prayer. It is recommended, if at all possible, for a Muslim's last words to be the declaration of faith: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah."

Upon death, those with the deceased are encouraged to remain calm, pray for the departed, and begin preparations for burial. The eyes of the deceased should be closed, and the body covered temporarily with a clean sheet. It is forbidden for those in mourning to excessively wail, scream, or thrash about. Grief is normal when one has lost a loved one, and it is natural and permitted to cry. When the Prophet Muhammad's own son died, he said: *"The eyes shed tears and the heart is grieved, but we will not say anything except which pleases our Lord."* One should strive to be patient, and remember that Allah is the One who gives life and takes it away, at a time appointed by Him. It is not for us to question His wisdom.

Muslims strive to bury the deceased as soon as possible after death, avoiding the need for embalming or otherwise disturbing the body of the deceased. An autopsy may be performed, if necessary, but should be done with the utmost respect for the dead.

Washing and Shrouding

In preparation for burial, the family or other members of the community will wash and shroud the body. (If the deceased was killed as a martyr, this step is not performed; martyrs are buried in the clothes they died in.) The deceased will be washed respectfully, with clean and scented water, in a manner similar to how Muslims make ablutions for prayer. The body will then be wrapped in sheets of clean, white cloth (called the *kafan*).

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Funeral Prayers

The deceased is then transported to the site of the funeral prayers (*salat-l-janazah*). These prayers are commonly held outdoors, in a courtyard or public square, not inside the mosque. The community gathers, and the *imam* (prayer leader) stands in front of the deceased, facing away from the worshippers. The funeral prayer is similar in structure to the five daily prayers, with a few variations. (For example, there is no bowing or prostration, and the entire prayer is said silently but for a few words.)

Burial

The deceased is then taken to the cemetery for burial (*al-dafin*). While all members of the community attend the funeral prayers, only the men of the community accompany the body to the gravesite. It is preferred for a Muslim to be buried where he or she died, and not be transported to another location or country (which may cause delays or require embalming the body). If available, a cemetery (or section of one) set aside for Muslims is preferred. The deceased is laid in the grave (without a coffin if permitted by local law) on his or her right side, facing Mecca. At the gravesite, it is discouraged for people to erect tombstones, elaborate markers, or put flowers or other mementos. Rather, one should humbly remember Allah and His mercy, and pray for the deceased.

Mourning

Loved ones and relatives are to observe a 3-day mourning period. Mourning is observed in Islam by increased devotion, receiving visitors and condolences, and avoiding decorative clothing and jewelry. Widows observe an extended mourning period (*iddah*), 4 months and 10 days long, in accordance with the Qur'an 2:234. During this time, she is not to remarry, move from her home, or wear decorative clothing or jewelry.

When one dies, everything in this earthly life is left behind, and there are no more opportunities to perform acts of righteousness and faith. The Prophet Muhammad once said that there are three things, however, which may continue to benefit a person after death: charity given during life which continues to help others, knowledge from which people continue to benefit, and a righteous child who prays for him or her.

Coptic Christianity in Egypt

Christianity in Egypt

The word “copt” derives from the Greek word, “Aegyptos,” derived from Hikaptah, one of the names for ancient Memphis, the first capital of Ancient Egypt. The modern use of the term "Coptic" describes Egyptian Christians, as well as the last stage of the ancient Egyptian language script. Also, it describes the distinctive art and architecture that developed as an early expression of the new faith.

The Coptic Church is based on the teachings of Saint Mark who brought Christianity to Egypt during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero in the first century, a dozen of years after the Lord's ascension. He was one of the four evangelists and the one who wrote the oldest canonical gospel. Christianity spread throughout Egypt within half a century of Saint Mark's arrival in Alexandria as is clear from the New Testament writings found in Bahnasa, in Middle Egypt, which date around the year 200 A.D., and a fragment of the Gospel of Saint John, written using the Coptic language, which was found in Upper Egypt and can be dated to the first half of the second century. The Coptic Church, which is now more than nineteen centuries old, claims to be the subject of many prophecies in the Old Testament. Isaiah the prophet, in Chapter 19, Verse 19 says *"In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border."*

Although fully integrated into the body of the modern Egyptian nation, the Copts have survived as a strong religious entity who pride themselves on their contribution to the Christian world. The Coptic church regards itself as a strong defendant of Christian faith. The Nicene Creed, which is recited in all churches throughout the world, has been authored by one of its favorite sons, Saint Athanasius, the Pope of Alexandria for 46 years, from 327 A.D. to 373 A.D. This status is well deserved, after all, Egypt was the refuge that the Holy Family sought in its flight from Judea: "When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son" [Mathew 2:12-23].

The contributions of the Coptic Church to Christendom are many. From the beginning, it played a central role in Christian theology---and especially to protect it from the Gnostics heresies. The Coptic Church produced thousands of texts, biblical and theological studies which are important resources for archeology. The Holy Bible was translated to the Coptic language in the second century. Hundreds of scribes used to write copies of the Bible and other liturgical and theological books. Now libraries, museums and universities throughout the world possess hundreds and thousands of Coptic manuscripts.

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**Christianity
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The Catechetical School of Alexandria is the oldest Catechetical School in the world. Soon after its inception around 190 A.D. by the Christian scholar Pantanaeus, the school of Alexandria became the most important institution of religious learning in Christendom. Many scholars such as Saint Jerome visited the school of Alexandria to exchange ideas and to communicate directly with its scholars. The scope of the school of Alexandria was not limited to theological subjects, because science, mathematics and the humanities were also taught there: The question and answer method of commentary began there, and 15 centuries before Braille, wood-carving techniques were in use there by blind scholars to read and write. The Theological college of the Catechetical School of Alexandria was re-established in 1893. Today, it has campuses in Alexandria, Cairo, New Jersey, and Los Angeles, where priests-to-be and other qualified men and women are taught among other subjects Christian theology, history, Coptic language and art--- including chanting, music, iconography, tapestry etc.

Monasticism was born in Egypt and was instrumental in the formation of the Coptic Church's character of submission and humbleness, thanks to the teachings and writings of the Great Fathers of Egypt's Deserts. Monasticism started in the last years of the third century and flourished in the fourth century. Saint Anthony, the world's first Christian monk was a Copt from Upper Egypt. Saint Pachom, who established the rules of monasticism, was a Copt. All Christian monasticism stems, either directly or indirectly, from the Egyptian example: Saint Basil, organiser of the monastic movement in Asia minor visited Egypt around 357 A.D. and his rule is followed by the eastern Churches; Saint Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, came to Egypt around 400 A.D. and left details of his experiences in his letters; Saint Benedict founded monasteries in the sixth century on the model of Saint Pachom, but in a stricter form. And countless pilgrims visited the "Desert Fathers" and emulated their spiritual, disciplined lives. There is even evidence that Copts had missionaries to Northern Europe.

Under the authority of the Eastern Roman Empire of Constantinople (as opposed to the western empire of Rome), the Patriarchs and Popes of Alexandria played leading roles in Christian theology.

At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, where the nature of Jesus was debated—was he human, divine, or both—the Coptic Churches in Egypt were accused of following teaching that claimed that Jesus ultimately only had one nature—the divine—and not two, which included being human.

But the Coptic Church did not actually believe in “Monophysitism,” or “one nature,” the way it was described at Chalcedon. Copts believe that the Lord is perfect in His divinity, and He is perfect in His humanity, but His divinity and His humanity were united in one nature called "the nature of the incarnate word", which was reiterated by Saint Cyril of Alexandria.

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**Christianity
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Copts, thus, believe in two natures "human" and "divine" that are united in one "*without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration*" (from the declaration of faith at the end of the Coptic divine liturgy). These two natures "*did not separate for a moment or the twinkling of an eye*" (also from the declaration of faith at the end of the Coptic divine liturgy).

The debates at Chalcedon as well as other political and church issues, led the Coptic Church of Egypt to become independent of the Churches of Rome and Byzantine, and they remain so to this day, although they continue to work toward ecumenical understanding.

For the four centuries that followed the Arab's conquest of Egypt, the Coptic Church generally flourished and Egypt remained basically Christian. This is due to a large extent to the fortunate position that the Copts enjoyed, for the Prophet of Islam, who had an Egyptian wife (the only one of his wives to bear a child), preached especial kindness towards Copts: "When you conquer Egypt, be kind to the Copts for they are your protégés and kith and kin". Copts, thus, were allowed to freely practice their religion and were to a large degree autonomous.

Throughout that period, the Coptic language remained the language of the land, and it was not until the second half of the 11th century that the first bi-lingual Coptic-Arabic liturgical manuscripts started to appear. The adoption of the Arabic language as the language used in Egyptians' every-day's life was so slow that even in the 15th century al-Makrizi implied that the Coptic Language was still largely in use, but eventually it was replaced with Arabic.. Up to this day, the Coptic Language continues to be the liturgical language of the Church.

Today there are over 10 million Copts who pray and share communion in daily masses in thousands of Coptic Churches in Egypt. Copts observe seven canonical sacraments: Baptism, Christmation (Confirmation), Eucharist, Confession (Penance), Orders, Matrimony, and Unction of the sick. Baptism is performed few weeks after birth by immersing the whole body of the newborn into especially consecrated water three times. Confirmation is performed immediately after Baptism. Regular confession with a personal priest, called the father of confession, is necessary to receive the Eucharist. It is customary for a whole family to pick the same priest as a father of confession, thus, making of that priest a family counselor. Of all seven sacraments, only Matrimony cannot be performed during a fasting season. Polygamy is illegal, even if recognized by the civil law of the land. Divorce is not allowed except in the case of adultery, annulment due to bigamy, or other extreme circumstances, which must be reviewed by a special council of Bishops. Divorce can be requested by either husband or wife. Civil divorce is not recognized by the Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church does not have and does not mind any civil law of the land as long as it does not interfere with the Church's sacraments.

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**Christianity
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The Church does not have (and actually refuses to canonize) an official position vis-à-vis some controversial issues (e.g. abortion). While the church has clear teachings about such matters (e.g. abortion interferes with God's will), it is the position of the Church that such matters are better resolved on a case-by-case basis by the father of confession, as opposed to having a blanket canon that makes a sin of such practices

The worship of Saints is expressly forbidden by the Church; however, asking for their intercessions (e.g. Marian Praise) is central in any Coptic service. Any Coptic Church is named after a Patron Saint. Among all Saints, the Virgin Saint Mary (Theotokos) occupies a special place in the heart of all Copts. Her repeated daily appearances in a small Church in Elzaytoun district of Cairo for over a month in April of 1968 was witnessed by thousands of Egyptians, both Copts and Muslims and was even broadcast on International TV. Copts celebrate seven major Holy feasts and seven minor Holy feasts. The major feasts commemorate Annunciation, Christmas, Theophany, Palm Sunday, Easter, Ascension, and the Pentecost. Christmas is celebrated on January 7th. The Coptic Church emphasizes the Resurrection of Christ (Easter) as much as His Advent (Christmas), if not more. Easter is usually on the second Sunday after the first full moon in Spring. The Coptic Calendar of Martyrs is full of other feasts usually commemorating the martyrdom of popular Saints (e.g. Saint Mark, Saint Mina, Saint George, Saint Barbara) from Coptic History.

The Copts have seasons of fasting matched by no other Christian community. Out of the 365 days of the year, Copts fast for over 210 days. During fasting, no animal products (meat, poultry, fish, milk, eggs, butter, etc.) are allowed. Moreover, no food or drink whatsoever may be taken between sunrise and sunset. These strict fasting rules -- which have resulted in a very exquisite Coptic cuisine over the centuries -- are usually relaxed by priests on an individual basis to accommodate for illness or weakness. Lent, known as "*the Great Fast*", is largely observed by all Copts

The Coptic Orthodox Church's clergy is headed by the Pope of Alexandria and includes Bishops who oversee the priests ordained in their dioceses. Both the Pope and the Bishops must be monks; they are all members of the Coptic Orthodox Holy Synod (Council). The direct pastoral responsibility of Coptic congregations in any of these dioceses falls on Priests, who must be married and must attend the Catechetical School before being ordained.

Daily, in all Coptic Churches all over the world, Copts pray for the reunion of all Christian Churches. They pray for Egypt, its Nile, its crops, its president, its army, its government, and above all its people. They pray for the world's peace and for the well-being of the human race.
