

The Church, My Curls, & Their Roots

The modern world is a jungle with millions of twists and turns, tons of ups and downs, and more decisions than imaginable. In this day of upcoming technology and an increase in general intelligence, the Church, although it may not seem like it, is more important than ever. The Coptic Orthodox Church, although one of the oldest Churches, maintains its integral role in the lives of its constituents, aiding with more now than ever before. As a Coptic-Egyptian, I have been blessed with crazy curls; each curl is stuck amongst thousands of other twists, but only at its root does the curl truly understand its place—much like the curl, it is important that we don't get lost in the midst of all the other people with hectic lives and our own hectic life, and in order to reorient yourself, it's important to return to the root. As we move into a much more modern world, especially in secular thought, it's important that the Church maintains its stance on truth and purpose, as it will continue to tremendously guide all of its people in their modern endeavors. As we delve deeper into the thought of the Church being the people's rock as we move through a period of modernization, it's important to stay conscious that the Church is a symbiotic being, comprised of lowly servants who understand the mutually beneficial relationship—the Church would never be a Church without the people.

To begin, we must explore what it means to live in modernity. The world today is nothing like it was 25 years ago, the exponential growth in science and technology speaks numbers to this, but the harder thing to prove is the social movements of the people. However, statistically, the US is becoming more and more secular, what historians are labeling the fourth religious revolution. The role of the Church during times like this is the same as it always has been: to stay true to itself and its role as an axiom for truth. Pope Shenouda spoke on this core function of the Church as it moves through time periods, claiming that the aim of the Church is to carry the

message of the Gospel to the world without compromising its essence, while embracing the language and tools of the present age.¹ Truly placing down the law when it comes to the role of the Church, really regardless of the time period. It's important that we remain focused in our role as the Church, maintaining our roots, and being the root that the people can refer back to. It's hard as we move into a time period where abstract thought and challenging norms is the standard (another key part of living in modernity), but Christianity as a whole will always transcend these mundane and immature challenges of thinking. Kierkegaard explains in his work *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* that, "Christianity is a living existential truth that cannot be reduced to mere intellectual abstraction. It must be experienced and lived out in the context of modern existence."² See, while I'm sure many will argue in this essay that the Church needs to reach out to the people or regain its touch with the people, it's clear, from the stance of one of the most famous theologians, that the people will always need to regain their touch with the Church. The Church will never be turned into something like an abstract thought, its teachings and sacraments will always be at the heart of the people, and in this period of modernity, the people will soon need it more than ever. We see many churches changing their beliefs to conform to modernity, to maintain its following, but as one of the oldest churches—the Coptic Church must maintain its roots in this turmoil, and soon the people will realize that the only way to find themselves is by returning to their roots.

As we move forward in this discourse, we have already defined what it means to be living in modernity, and we have been reiterating the need for the Church to maintain its stances on facilitating truth as we move forward, but, we need to define what it means to facilitate truth.

¹ Pope Shenouda III. N/A. N.D.

² Søren Kierkegaard, Howard Vincent Hong, and Edna Hatlestad Hong. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*. Princeton (N.J.): Princeton University Press, 1992.

While it may seem like I was insinuating that the Church does not need to go out and try to rally the people to return, I by no means meant that. In fact, I meant the opposite—the Church must proclaim its stance on the truth, and set forth individuals to rightfully represent it. While I wholly believe that following this stark shift to modernity, more and more people will begin to return to the Church, it's important that they know the Church will accept them. Pope Tawadros II once explained that the Coptic Orthodox Church's mission in the 21st century is to foster unity and dialogue among diverse communities, promoting peace, justice, and understanding as we navigate the challenges of a globalized world.³ Understanding that we must send out sojourners for truth into the world, so that they can not only promote the Church, but the Church's values as well, is an important aspect of being rooted. Throughout our history, the Church has had a strong emphasis on evangelism, and in the modern day, evangelizing is becoming more and more difficult. It's important that the Church also returns to our roots, to be able to facilitate the truth with an emphasis on apologetics and love. Once again, this move outward into regaining the hearts and minds of the people in the world starts with the Church focusing on drillings its roots in its current people. The Church must maintain its stance on all topics, not chipping the armor of our age-old beliefs by contradiction, we must push for continued understanding of integral parts of our religion. The Bible outwardly tells us what we should do in times like this: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."⁴ It's important that the Church doesn't budge on its stance of what is righteous to continue to be the root for the masses as they struggle with their journey through modernity. It's also important to continually

³ Pope Tawadros II. N/A. 2015

⁴ *The Holy Bible: ESV, English Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments*. New York: American Bible Society, 2007.

“renew” the minds of our upcoming generations, for the Church to thrive in modernity, we must make sure we stay rooted in our thoughts for generations to come. To facilitate truth is to continually maintain age-old and generational beliefs, without bending or changing, regardless of backlash, and in order to do this while we move forward through modernity, we must instill it into the hearts of the next generations as well.

In conclusion, my ancestry lives in the curls on my head, and those same curls give us imperative insight into the future. Yes, the past will always be applicable to the future, much like the Church will always play an imperative role in people’s lives, especially following times of extreme secular thought. It’s important that we don’t waiver as a Church, that the Church maintains its role as a beacon for truth, and that we continue to push forward in our evangelism in the midst of backlash. The Cairo Press published a piece writing: "The Coptic Orthodox Church, as a living witness to its ancient roots, serves as a reservoir of cultural and spiritual identity for the Coptic community, enabling them to navigate the challenges of modernity while maintaining a sense of continuity."⁵ The Church must maintain its ancient roots, it must recoup its reservoir of spiritual identity and must proclaim it fearlessly to the people. As we move forward I know the Church will stay vigilant in maintaining its role amid modernity, it will continue to stay rooted in the true doctrine of the faith and be a home for all those who were lost in the tangles and split ends of life to come back to—the role of the Church in modernity is simple, as simple as taking care of some curly hair.

⁵ Otto F.A. Meinardus. “Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity.” *American Univ in Cairo Press*, October 15, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.5743/cairo/9789774247576.001.0001>.

Bibliography

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