The Power of Coptic Women Saints: Historical and Analytical Study of Coptic Women Saints as Spiritual Models for Coptic Women in the USA and Egypt

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By
Trevena Adeeb Eskandar Hanna

Claremont Graduate University
2020

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Approval of the Review Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Trevena Adeeb Eskandar Hanna as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of PhD in Religion, with an emphasis on Coptic Women Saints.

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Abstract

The Power of Coptic Women Saints

By
Trevena Adeeb Eskandar Hanna

Claremont Graduate University: 2020

This study addresses the lack of research concerning Coptic female experience and Coptic female saints through the use of in-depth interviews of 21 Egyptian Coptic women living in Southern California and 21 Egyptian Coptic women living in Egypt. The interviews explore women’s relationships with, and knowledge of their female saints, as well as their gendered experiences within the Coptic Church, as it relates to gender and the relative importance or honor of female saints. Results show that Coptic women have a special and unique relationship with the female saints of their tradition, who act as role models, intercessors, and friends. Coptic women expressed a wide variety of opinions about and lessons from female saints that are not consistent with Coptic women’s own gendered experiences within their religion. While all women expressed a commitment to their religion’s ideals, many also expressed frustration with a lack of gender equality and representation in the Coptic Church, especially as it relates to leadership positions and opportunities to serve. A key finding of this study was the influence of culture on a willingness to identify or criticize patriarchal norms within the church. Those in cultures more accepting of feminism more likely to show criticism or call for reform, and those living in highly patriarchal societies more likely to express acceptance of patriarchal norms within their religion.
Dedication

To my family, to my friends, and the many extraordinary individuals that contributed to the realization of this project: without your loving support and continuous encouragement, this dream would have never been realized.
Acknowledgments

I would like to express deep gratitude and appreciation to my advisor, Dr. Nicola Denzey Lewis, for her continuous support and encouragement. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Karen Torjesen and Bishop Kyrillos, for their time and dedication to this project.

Special thanks go out to my family, who encouraged and supported me throughout the course of this Ph.D. adventure; they have shown me the true meaning of love. Words cannot express my gratitude!

Many thanks to my Lord who brought me to this moment, helped me to achieve my dream and gave me success in every step in my life. He was with me guiding me in all my ways in my life. He is arranging everything for good. May He give me blessings and be with me in whole my life.
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction............................................................................................................. 1
  Research questions and hypotheses ......................................................................................... 1
  Relevant Research .................................................................................................................. 3
  Theoretical and Epistemological Bases ..................................................................................... 5
    Feminist Lens ...................................................................................................................... 6
    Qualitative Method ........................................................................................................... 8
    Use of “I” .......................................................................................................................... 8

Chapter 2: An Overview of the Coptic Church ........................................................................ 10
  First: The Coptic Orthodox Church ....................................................................................... 10
  Second: Coptic Saints ........................................................................................................... 16
  Third: Coptic Women ............................................................................................................ 21
    1) Gender Roles .............................................................................................................. 26
    2) Coptic Women in California ....................................................................................... 34
  Fourth: Feminist Research ..................................................................................................... 36
  Fifth: Female Saints ............................................................................................................. 38
    1) Ascetic Women ............................................................................................................ 39
    2) Sinners ....................................................................................................................... 44
    3) Martyrs ....................................................................................................................... 45
    4) Virgins ....................................................................................................................... 51
    5) Mothers ..................................................................................................................... 53
  Conclusions .......................................................................................................................... 56

Chapter 3: Methodology .......................................................................................................... 58
  Methods and Philosophy ....................................................................................................... 58
  Process .................................................................................................................................. 60
  Focus .................................................................................................................................... 62

Chapter 4: Results .................................................................................................................... 64
  U.S.-Based Interviews ........................................................................................................... 65
    First: Coptic Saints ........................................................................................................... 65
      General Knowledge of Female Saints .............................................................................. 66
      Function and Characteristics of Female Saints .............................................................. 70
      Male versus Female Saints ............................................................................................ 74
    Second: Coptic Women ...................................................................................................... 76
      Roles of Coptic Women .................................................................................................. 78
    Third: Coptic Church and Society ..................................................................................... 81
      Freedom and Equality in the U.S. versus Egypt ............................................................. 81
      Gender Equality in the Coptic Church .......................................................................... 82
      Recommendations for the Church ................................................................................. 85
Egypt-Based Interviews .............................................................................................................................................. 89

First: Coptic Saints .................................................................................................................................................. 89
  General Knowledge of Female Saints .................................................................................................................. 90
  Function and Characteristics of Saints ................................................................................................................. 94
  Male versus Female Saints .................................................................................................................................. 99

Second: Coptic Women .......................................................................................................................................... 101
  Roles of Coptic Women ....................................................................................................................................... 103

Third: Coptic Church and Society .......................................................................................................................... 105
  Freedom and Equality in the U.S. versus Egypt ..................................................................................................... 105
  Gender Equality in the Coptic Church. ................................................................................................................ 106
  Recommendations for the Church ...................................................................................................................... 108

Chapter 5: Discussion .............................................................................................................................................. 111
  Summary ............................................................................................................................................................... 111
  Analysis .............................................................................................................................................................. 114
  Implications ......................................................................................................................................................... 116
  Limitations .......................................................................................................................................................... 123
  Recommendations ............................................................................................................................................ 123

Bibliography ............................................................................................................................................................. 126

Appendix A ............................................................................................................................................................... 128
  Part 1: Demographic Information (US Interviews) ............................................................................................. 128
  Part 2: Demographic Information (Egypt Interviews) ........................................................................................ 132
  Part 3: Most Common Female Saints Mentioned by the US Participants ....................................................... 136
  Part 4: Importance of saints according to Egypt Participants ........................................................................... 137

Appendix B ............................................................................................................................................................... 138
  Part 1: Interview Questions .................................................................................................................................. 138
  Part 2: Consent Form ........................................................................................................................................... 142
  Part 3: IRB Exemption ......................................................................................................................................... 145
  Part 4: Study Amendment ................................................................................................................................... 147
  Part 5: Interview Transcripts (U.S. Participants) ............................................................................................... 148
  Part 6: Interview Transcripts (Egypt Participants): ........................................................................................... 304
Chapter 1: Introduction

The problem addressed by this study is a startling lack of scholarly and academic research into the experiences of Coptic women and into the Coptic Church, in general. Within the research that does exist about the history, and culture of the Coptic Church, there is a clear bias toward male experience and authorship. This is true regarding all areas of study relating to Copts. However, in this paper I will focus on the topic of sainthood as it relates to Coptic women and feminism.

While sainthood is an important aspect of Coptic spirituality, female saints receive far less attention in official literature and research than their male counterparts do. In this dissertation, the focus will be on the lived experiences of Egyptian Coptic women currently living in California, USA and Egypt, specifically relating to female saints. The saints are the focus of this study because of their centrality to Coptic spiritual experience, as well as their role in Coptic Orthodox faith/religion in enforcing or reinforcing gender roles and norms by using female saints as examples of what it means to be a Coptic female. These female saints will serve as a window through which I will attempt to understand how Coptic women relate with their religious heritage and faith, and how this relation lines up with or differs from the perspective of official or “authorized” knowledge about Coptic faith or official Coptic teachings about women and/or gender roles.

Research questions and hypotheses

In this study, I present three main research questions:

_How do Coptic women in Egypt and the U.S, (specifically California), relate to and understand the female saints in their tradition?_

_How do Coptic women’s knowledge of, and relationship with, female saints shed light on the Coptic female experience within the church, especially as it relates to gender roles and equality?_
What are Coptic women’s perceptions regarding the church’s teaching about Coptic female saints and women in general?

I will be using the knowledge and experiences of Coptic women to address these questions, and will focus on two groups of women: Coptic Egyptian women living in Southern California (which has a large Coptic community compared to most of the U.S.), and Coptic Egyptian women currently living in Cairo. It should also be noted that I will be focusing my questions exclusively on female saints who are from Egypt or who have some significant connection to Egypt (i.e. they lived, died, or performed important works/miracles there). However, the importance of saints (whether they are Egyptian or not) will be largely determined by the participants since this study is using their personal opinions and experience as a primary resource.

The attempt to focus on Egyptian saints is in order to narrow the focus of the study to those female saints who are most “like” the research participants, as much of the interviews will focus on how women relate to their saints as Egyptian women. Despite their spiritual value, some of the major saints are neither mentioned in the literature review nor the interview questions, since their life experience on a different continent is not directly relevant to Egyptian women. A notable exception is St. Mary “Theotokos” because of her centrality to Coptic faith and her connections to Egypt during her life.

Through review of existing literature about Coptic faith and history, Coptic female saints, and modern Coptic women, as well as in-depth interviews with Coptic women, I hope to gain information not only about how Egyptian women relate to and understand female Coptic saints, but also about how their experiences compare to existing research and “official” church teaching, which is largely written or taught from a male perspective. In addition, I hope to assess the extent of feminism’s influence on Coptic women’s opinions and attitudes about their saints, their church,
and their position within their religion. I have several hypotheses about what I might find during the course of research:

• **Hypothesis I:** Respondents will express beliefs and opinions about female saints and Coptic teaching about female saints and/or women that diverge from official or “authorized” knowledge, consistent with much feminist theory and research which argues that historical androcentrism and sexism in academia and religion silence female perspectives and highlight the perspectives and experiences of men.

• **Hypothesis II:** Respondents will express beliefs and opinions about female saints and Coptic teaching about female saints and/or women that are consistent with official or “authorized” knowledge, consistent with the research of Cassese and Holman (2016) which argues that the lack of opportunity for religious women to exercise power within their group leads more women to adopt literalist tendencies and fundamentalist attitudes in order to reinforce their status as a group member and identify with the group’s norms and values.1

• **Hypothesis III:** Respondents will express beliefs and opinions about their faith, the Church, and gender that reflect the importance of feminism as an increasingly influential ideology in Egypt and in the U.S. Coptic diaspora.

**Relevant Research**

Directly relevant research relating to my research question is scarce for several reasons. First, a history of mostly male scholarship in Coptic Studies has led to a focus on male experiences and subsequently, a focus on male saints. Research pertaining to female saints is treated as a subcategory of saints and often afforded only a small section or chapter in larger works related to saints.

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Secondly, the lived experiences of Coptic women have received almost no attention in published research. The history and current state of the Coptic church has contributed to a lack of information about Coptic spirituality, culture, and experience in general. This is related not only to a long cultural isolation within the Coptic church, but also to the lack of availability of English Coptic resources. Regardless of the importance of saints to Coptic history, the field of Coptic studies is still a relatively new discipline with many unexplored opportunities for research. Therefore, much of the most important data will come directly from the Coptic Synaxarium and other authorized knowledge about female saints. The stories of female saints in resources like the Synaxarium are a direct resource for Coptic women to learn about Coptic history and sainthood, and will therefore shed light on the importance of these stories in teaching women about the role of Egyptian women within the Coptic church or, more indirectly, about accepted gender roles based on these saintly female role models.

There are a few important and relevant resources outside of the Synaxarium that made this current study possible. First, a currently unpublished doctoral dissertation entitled “From Cairo to California A Journey through the Lives and Roles of Coptic Women from Egypt to the Diaspora” by S.M. Morcos (2015) stands as a figurative needle in a haystack of research about Coptic women, being the only accessible study that focuses specifically on the qualitative experience of Coptic women living in California. This is currently the only piece of research I have encountered that studies the same population as the one I have studied, and will significantly influence my approach in this study. Febe Armonios’ study “The ‘Virtuous Woman’: Images of Gender in Modern Coptic Society” (2013) is a valuable resource about gender norms and ideals in Coptic spirituality. Other feminist studies of Coptic women that have proven valuable to understanding the historical and social location of Coptic women include Lucia Sorbera’s 2014 essay “Challenges of Thinking
Feminism and Revolution in Egypt Between 2011 and 2014” and Kathryn M. Yount’s 2009 study on Egyptian women’s justification of domestic violence.

Concerning Coptic history and religion, especially relating to saints, two authors provide the bulk of research. Otto Meinardus’ *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* (1999) and *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages* (2007) are thorough and detailed accounts of Coptic history, religious values, saints, and major issues. Jacobus de Voragine provides a great deal of information on specific saints and dedicates more time to female saints than many other resources in *The Golden Legend Readings on the Saints* (2012). These resources were used heavily in partnership with the Coptic Synaxarium, which lists many of the important saints in Coptic tradition and their feast days. This resource allowed me to cross examine “official” Coptic saints with other resources and narrow down those female saints that are truly part of the Coptic tradition and who are Egyptian themselves, as many minor saints have common or repeated names or are relatively unknown even in other Orthodox literature. In addition, it will help me clarify the responses of participants when specific female saints are mentioned by name.

**Theoretical and Epistemological Bases**

I begin my research with the same assumptions as Kristina A. Bourne in her 2011 paper examining the process of researching gender as a performance, including the assumption that gender is a basic organizing principle of society. She writes,

Gender is a relational system based on the logic of difference: female and male are distinct categories with asymmetrical positions of power. Separating femaleness from maleness is an everyday aspect of our lives. Like most binaries, the male / female dichotomy has an underlying hierarchy based on power relations. Woman, female, femaleness, and femininity are often considered inferior to man, male, maleness and masculinity, regardless of the individual women and men under consideration.²

This assumption, that established categories and norms concerning gender reflect social power relations, is implicit in this study and will guide much of my examination of how the treatment of Coptic female saints and the treatment of modern Coptic women who venerate them are intertwined in social and religious life.

**Feminist Lens**

My research is conducted from an explicitly feminist viewpoint. By this I mean I am attempting to privilege female experience within a male-dominated category, in order to better understand a topic that has been widely ignored. It also means that throughout this study I will acknowledge and attempt to understand the impact of patriarchy and gender inequality on my research subjects and their understanding of, and relationship with, Coptic female saints. I will accomplish this by using a qualitative approach, via interviews, to gain information from the lived experiences of Coptic women. By focusing solely on female perspectives and experiences, I acknowledge the clear and historical bias in academia, especially religious academia, toward the male experiences.

According to Gayle Letherby (2003), men have historically used their positions of power to structure language and theory, which has allowed them to promote their own interests within most academic fields. According to Sian Hawthorne (2005), academia’s bias toward male perspective has much to do with the academy’s preoccupation with establishing the authority of the scholar, which serves to legitimate male authority in general. Hawthorne argues in favor of perspectives that liken the writer’s pen to a figurative penis, and the act of authorship to God’s act of creation, which is historically associated with maleness: “The symbolic device that ensures that men are promoted as the sole progenitors, and thus fathers, masters and owners of their ‘brainchildren,’ is one that deprives women of any authoritative share in cultural production,” Bourne writes. “In this

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schema, because writing, reading, and thinking are, by definition, male activities, they are portrayed as inimical to female abilities.” Therefore, this study’s intentional privileging of female knowledge and storytelling is meant to be a feminist act in itself as a unique feminine contribution to Coptic academic literature.

Therefore, my role as a researcher is not only to unearth new information, but to seek new perspectives that come from female “authorship” and female knowledge which is not generally accepted as legitimate in the religious or academic realms. Gayle Letherby (2003) argues that knowledge has been historically constructed from a man’s perspective, making women’s experiences subjective and inauthentic in a sexist framework. Studying women is an important task, but studying women “from the perspective of their own experiences” is rarely done and is vital to create an accurate picture of “the whole cultural and historical experience of women (and of men).” This means focusing on women’s experiences “in their own right with no reference to a male ‘standard’.” As a researcher and as a member of the group I am studying, my feminist perspective as well as my personal connection to the research provides an impetus to accurately portray the experience of Coptic women independent of stereotypes associated with gender, race, or nationality. In the words of Rey Chow, “The task that faces Third-World feminists is thus not simply that of ‘animating’ the oppressed women of their cultures, but of making the automatized and animated condition of their own voices the conscious point of departure of their own intervention.”

5 Letherby, 74.
Qualitative Method

I approach my topic using a qualitative method in order to explore the topic of female saints without the boundaries imposed by a quantitative study. This qualitative research will be conducted via in-depth interviews on the topic of female saints and respondents’ personal connections to their stories and values. The goal of these interviews is to gain information through women’s experiential knowledge, as opposed to “authorized knowledge” typically published in research and religious media. Letherby defines “authorized knowledge” as knowledge legitimized within certain institutions. Because women have historically been barred from participation in many of these institutions such as universities and organized religion (the Coptic church does not ordain women), “authorized knowledge” has typically meant “masculinized knowledge.” Letherby explains, “Conflict between the knowledge of the academy (authorized knowledge) and knowledge drawn from everyday experience (experiential knowledge) is an issue of great interest to feminist philosophers and social scientists. Women, alongside many other subordinated groups, have long had their experiential knowledge discounted in favour of the authorized knowledge of the academy.” Therefore, while I will draw extensively on authorized knowledge of Coptic saints and traditions as a frame of reference and a point of comparison, the experiential knowledge and opinions of Coptic women will be treated as a legitimate authority on the subject of Coptic female saints, contributing to an open-ended dialogue as the primary method of obtaining data.

Use of “I”

Throughout this dissertation, I will sometimes refer to myself in the first person, and will use the personal pronoun “I” when appropriate. This is in order to remain consistent with a feminist viewpoint that sees the use of “I” as a challenge to traditional academic writing which distances an author from their research and connotes a separateness typically associated in academia with

7 Letherby, 23.
masculinity. The use of “I” communicates the researcher’s personal responsibility for what they write, and acknowledges the impossibility of separating myself and my personal biography from my research. Feminism’s assertion that “the personal is the political” brings to light the need to situate myself within my research in order to avoid a finished product that is “loaded in favour of the researcher.” Järviluoma et al’s argument that research is conducted by “the whole of the human being, including gender” is relevant here. As a researcher, I participate in the construction of gender via my research, making self-reflection relevant and necessary to the project as a whole. Therefore, my acknowledgement as a part of the population I aim to study is important in order to avoid bias.

8 Letherby, 7.
9 Letherby, 9.
Chapter 2: An Overview of the Coptic Church

In order to understand the need for research about Coptic women’s relation to female saints, it is necessary to understand the role that saints play in Coptic religion, as well as the nature of gender relations for Coptic women today. In this literature review, I will present information about five topics to prepare the reader to understand the information provided in the in-depth interviews. First, I will give an overview of the Coptic Church’s history and its relative isolation until recently, which at least partially accounts for the minuscule amount of research available about Coptic religion and Copts. Second, I will examine the importance of saints and sainthood within the Coptic Orthodox tradition. Third, I will examine the lack of information about Coptic female experience as it relates to Egyptian and Coptic women’s current social and religious situation. Fourth, I will summarize feminist research that relates to this topic, including theoretical research about the lack of representation of women in scholarly research and the influence of culture and religion on the experiences and opinions of women as they relate to gender. Lastly, I will provide an overview of Coptic female saints, their importance, and the general categories they fit into in religious literature, all of which are considered valuable religious teaching for Coptic women and men alike and will likely be understood at least on a basic level by all participants.

The Coptic Orthodox Church

The Coptic Church, though isolated from the rest of the Christian world for much of its history, has nevertheless played an important role in the history of Christianity. Famous figures such as Antony and the Desert Fathers hail from Egypt’s rich Christian history and have affected the entire Christian world in some way or another. Despite the important contributions of the Copts to Christian history, their history, theology, and culture have yet to be studied to the same extent as other branches of the Christian church (for example, Catholic or Eastern Orthodox). Even with the spread of Coptic churches all over the world (referred to as the Coptic diaspora), much remains to
be learned about the Coptic Church by the rest of the Christian world. Coptic religious history, including the rich tapestry of Coptic saints and their academic possibilities, remains largely unexplored.

Copts are proud of their unique cultural and religious heritage. Ethnically, Copts consider themselves true Egyptians, “sons and daughters of the pharaohs.” Religious, Copts are fundamentalists who believe in the infallibility of the Scriptures and adhere to the theology set forth in the first three ecumenical councils. Spiritually, Copts trace their lineage to apostolic times. According to tradition, Saint Mark the Evangelist is responsible for officially establishing the church in Egypt. Saint Mark preached the gospel in Alexandria. He converted the first Egyptian to Christianity, a man named Anianus who was later ordained a bishop by Saint Mark. Mark subsequently suffered martyrdom, laying the foundation of the Coptic Church with his blood.

This promising field of research is, as the Coptic historian, Aziz Atiya, puts it, “still in its infancy.” This is largely due to the long isolation of the Coptic Church from the rest of the world. This isolation, partially due to years of religious persecution, ended in some part due to the ordination of Pope Shenouda III as Coptic patriarch. In May 1973, Shenouda III was invited by Pope Paul VI to visit Rome--the first meeting between a Coptic and Roman pope since the year 451. In 1991, Shenouda led a delegation of eleven Copts to the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches. His election as one of the presidents of the World Council, and later as one of the presidents of the Middle East Council of Churches, represented a drastic change in orientation for the Coptic Church, as well as its emergence into the bosom of the global Christian church.

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12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 29.
15 Dr. Otto F. A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity*, (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 5.
Until then, the Coptic Church remained in a position of isolation and self-sufficiency best embodied by the thirty-eighth patriarch of Alexandria, Benjamin I, during the seventh century.

It was during Benjamin I’s time as patriarch that Islam penetrated the Nile Valley. Since this Islamic emergence, Copts have endured periods of persecution and peace. Atiya describes the effect of this persecution on the church as an “oblivion imposed on it after the Arab conquest and its consequent separation from the rest of the Christian world.” The term “new martyrs” refers to the Coptic Christians who were martyred during the various Islamic dynasties. During some of the most dangerous times for the Copts, Coptic churches and monasteries were destroyed, and many innocent lives were lost. While this time period of the “new martyrs” is significant in Coptic history, it is certainly not the Coptic community’s first experience with persecution.

The most famous era of persecution, and the one that produced the majority of Egypt’s Christian martyrs, came well before the emergence of Islam in Egypt under the reign of emperor Diocletian (284–305) and is known commonly as the “Era of the Martyrs.” To this day, the “Era of the Martyrs” is commemorated by the Copts, and is especially relevant today because of the modern persecution faced by the Coptic church in Egypt. Meinardus explains, “It is impossible to list all of the violent actions of the militant Islamists against their countrymen. According to the statistics of the Center for Egyptian Human Rights, there have been 561 incidents of violence against the Copts since 1994.” The centrality of the old and new martyrs in Coptic spirituality has much to do with the painful history of persecution against Christians in Egypt and its continued existence today.

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16 Ibid., 65.
17 Atiya, “Saints”
18 Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 27.
19 Ibid., 28.
The Coptic Church’s emergence into the global Christian church has been due in part to immigration. In her recent unpublished dissertation *From Cairo to California: A Journey through the Lives and Roles of Coptic Women from Egypt to the Diaspora*, Sarah Mehany Marcos details some of the history of Coptic communities in the United States. Early Coptic immigrants came to the U.S. for a myriad of reasons, including opportunities unavailable to them at home in Egypt, such as higher education or a better lifestyle. Prior to 1955, many Copts who immigrated to the U.S. came temporarily for work or education, but the first Coptic community in the United States, formed in 1955, was composed of Egyptian immigrants who had no intention of returning back home.\(^{20}\)

At first, Copts who immigrated to the U.S. had no Coptic communities or churches waiting to receive them. Many were left with no option but to worship at Orthodox, Protestant, or Catholic churches instead. In 1954, a name named Father Makari sent with permission to the United States to pursue an education, and while in America he gathered local Copts to celebrate the liturgy.\(^{21}\)

This was the humble beginning of a Coptic community in the United States. Eventually, Copts found other ways to reach out to their native community, including holding an event called “Day of Egypt,” in which Copts attempted to represent Egypt and create relationships with members of the community. Eventually, this led to the formation of a Coptic organization. According to Morcos, in the beginning the entire leadership was made up of men, with women serving on certain subcommittees. As the organization spread throughout the country, representatives joined from various states, and by 1964 the organization had more than 200 members. The organization was also responsible for establishing the first Coptic Church in the United States and sent newsletters

\(^{20}\) Sarah Mehany Morcos, “From Cairo to California: A Journey through the Lives and Roles of Coptic Women from Egypt to the Diaspora,” (Diss. Claremont Graduate University, 2015), 88.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
and other printed materials to Coptic families around the country to assist Copts in acclimating to their new culture.\textsuperscript{22}

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Hart-Celler Act, which opened the doors for immigrants with certain skills or with family members already in the United States to immigrate. During the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Egyptians suffered from economic and political turmoil. Egyptians in increasing numbers looked beyond their native borders for their future prospects, especially Egyptian Christians who “increasingly withdrew from society mainly from the ascent of Islamism.”\textsuperscript{23} Less than 15,000 Egyptians immigrated to the U.S. between 1967–76. Coptic churches during this time grew and flourished in several states, including New Jersey, New York, Michigan, and California. Often, they consisted of home churches or small spaces rented out for the purpose of congregating.\textsuperscript{24}

In Southern California specifically, the Coptic community “flourished since its start in the early 1960s.”\textsuperscript{25} In 1963, roughly fifty Copts resided in the entire state of California. This number jumped to several hundred within the following five years. Eventually, the Coptic Association in California was formed in response to these growing numbers.\textsuperscript{26} Priests were sent from Egypt to the U.S. to serve the growing congregations. Nothing was done without approval from Coptic authorities in Egypt, including buying land. Eventually, in 1973, Fr. Antonious Henein was ordained as the first permanent priest in Southern California. Later, more priests were ordained, and parishes established. Morcos explains, “Many of the priests’ wives that came from Egypt were instrumental in the development of the church in the Diaspora. Lay Coptic women also were active in serving and developing the growth of the church.”\textsuperscript{27}

\begin{center}
\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 89.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 91.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 92.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 93.
\end{thebibliography}
\end{center}
As stated before, most of the leadership of the Coptic Association in California was made up of men. Women worked behind the scenes, not only on subcommittees, but wives also helped their husbands serve without personal recognition. But after many years, women finally began to serve as leaders. In 1966, the first female was appointed to a leadership position. Eva Masri Sidhoi acted as Vice President of the organization and was eventually elected president of the organization, standing out among the otherwise 100% male leadership.\(^{28}\) Hers is a rare example of female leadership at this time in the newly formed Coptic Orthodox Church established in America. According to Morcos, the diaspora has created many new opportunities for Coptic women, some of whom have accomplished things they would not have been able to do in Egypt. For the Coptic Church as a whole, many things are easier in the United States, including building churches, which is difficult in Egypt due to Muslim opposition and state regulation.\(^{29}\)

For many Coptic women who immigrated to the U.S., however, the church became a “comfort zone” in a new and strange culture. According to Morcos, female Coptic immigrants to the U.S. left Egypt for many reasons, including religious asylum and economic instability.\(^{30}\) Many of the women interviewed for the purposes of Morcos’ study received help from the church to immigrate, and often received great help from Coptic churches in getting used to their new culture. According to Morcos, the women faced different challenges after immigrating depending on their class. Upper class immigrants faced challenges in adapting to a new lifestyle in expensive Southern California, and often women suffered from the sudden lack of social life they had been accustomed to.\(^{31}\) However, Coptic women continued to participate in many ways in their new churches and

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 90.
\(^{29}\) Ibid., 226.
\(^{30}\) Ibid., 167.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 169.
communities in the U.S. by volunteering in such services as Sunday school, choir, and their church kitchens.32

Second: Coptic Saints

The Coptic Church has its foundation in the martyrdom of Saint Mark, who, as I have stated, is credited with founding the Coptic church. This foundation gives a clue as to the high importance placed by Coptic Christians on the roles of saints and martyrs. Meinardus characterizes Copts thus: “The Copts pride themselves on the apostolicity of their national church, whose founder was none other than Saint Mark, the author of the oldest canonical Gospel used by both Saints Matthew and Luke, and probably also by Saint John. Mark is regarded by the Coptic hierarchy as the first in their unbroken chain of 117 patriarchs.”33

Martyrs play a specific and highly important role in the Coptic Church, not only due to the fact that its founder (Saint Mark) was a martyr, but also due to the many subsequent martyrdoms endured by Egyptian Christians. The medieval Coptic Synaxarium includes 184 commemorations of martyrs, compared to only 63 for ascetics, who also hold a position of relatively high importance. Early Egyptian Christians showed an enthusiasm for martyrdom befitting the zeal of the ancient church, inspired by Saint Mark himself. According to Meinardus, “Egyptian Christians often sought death by purposely insulting the magistrates, sometimes even by breaking the idols... Nonetheless, these men and women endured terrible tortures—even if one subtracts some of the obvious exaggerations from the martyrrologies—rather than abandon their faith.”34 The importance of martyrs is still observable in the Coptic church today.

However, the lineage of the Coptic Church has even deeper origins in the story of a different saint: Saint Mary, the Holy Virgin, or as she is commonly referred to by Copts, the

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32 Ibid., 223.
33 Meinardus, Two Thousand Years, 29.
34 Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 26.
Theotokos (God-bearer). While Christianity in Egypt can be traced back to Pentecost, when Egyptians filled with the Holy Spirit returned to their country and established Christian communities, many will trace it back farther to the flight of the holy family to Egypt.\textsuperscript{35} The flight of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus into Egypt represents a significant tradition for Christians in Egypt. According to tradition, the holy family remained as refugees in Egypt for three years before returning home. Some Copts believe that Egyptians began accepting Jesus as their Savior as early as this time, and many narrate accounts of the miracles performed by the Christ Child during the family’s time of refuge.\textsuperscript{36}

From this period also come many legends concerning the Virgin Mary, who is without doubt one of the most important and widely venerated saints by Christians throughout Egypt. One legend concerns Magharat al-Sayyida (i.e., “The Grotto of the Lady”), a sanctuary southeast of the Basilica of the Nativity. According to the legend, while traveling, Mary stopped there to suckle her child. Some of her milk fell upon the rock, and it immediately turned white. Today, this site is a favorite destination for female pilgrims.\textsuperscript{37}

The importance of Mary’s connection to Egypt can be seen in as many as thirty-two feasts in her honor and a service known as the Theotokia performed in the month of Kiyahkh which calls for a special prayer in her honor. Otto Meinardus cautions readers to remember that Egyptians actively venerate very few saints, and the Holy Virgin is by far the most widely venerated with Saint George receiving almost as much.\textsuperscript{38}

While only a few saints are actively venerated throughout Egypt, the number of saints recognized by the Copts are many. Atiya argues that “Any listing of saints is an infinitesimal

\textsuperscript{35} Meinardus, \textit{Two Thousand Years}, vii.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 98.
fraction of the true number, who were not concerned with what posterity would say about them."\(^{39}\) In Coptic tradition, pilgrimages in honor of the saints are not uncommon. “At one time, almost every settlement along the Nile had its local shrine or shrines to which believers made their annual or semiannual pilgrimages. These pilgrimages were made in commemoration of the ‘birthday’ of a saint or some other historical event related to the particular locality...”\(^{40}\) Copts, like other religions, consider the martyrdom of a saint a “birthday.” Often, pilgrims come to these shrines expecting to be healed from ailments or to have evil spirits cast out.\(^{41}\)

In addition to the tradition of pilgrimages, the veneration of saints in Egypt often includes the preservation of relics, a practicing going back to the first century. The belief that a saint’s body will not decay (\textit{corpus incorruptum}) is a Coptic doctrine shared with Western and Byzantine churches and may have been taken from them relatively recently.\(^{42}\) The earliest recorded reference to saintly relics is the description of the martyrdom of Saint Polycarp. Eusebius Pamphilus writes about the Christians obtaining Polycarp’s corpse: "Many of us eagerly wished to have communion with the sacred body . . . At last we took his bones, more valuable than precious stones, and more tried than gold, we deposited them where it was proper they should be" (\textit{The Ecclesiastical History IV, 15}).\(^{43}\) An equally famous relic is the head of Mark the Evangelist, which was supposed to have been preserved for many years and was reported to have been used in the consecration of Coptic patriarchs. Today, it is believed to be preserved at the Saint Mark’s Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Alexandria.\(^{44}\) The church of the Holy Virgin in Harat ai-Rum possesses what is alleged to be the right hand of Saint Marina.

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39 Atiya, “Saints”
40 Meinardus, \textit{Two Thousand Years}, 97.
41 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 63.
44 Meinardus, \textit{Two Thousand Years}, 32.
In fact, nearly every Coptic Church contains relics of some kind.\textsuperscript{45} Often they are something small, like a piece of bone or a fragment of clothing. Coptic relics also tend to not be as ornate as in some other Christian traditions. The relics must appear more modest, and therefore don’t rely heavily on gold or ornate decoration.\textsuperscript{46} These relics, while religiously and spiritually important to Copts, are also symbolic of the rich heritage of the Coptic Church. Modern day Copts belong to an impressive lineage of saints and martyrs that lead directly back to Mark the Evangelist. This apostolic connection, as well as the coveted history of Egypt’s protection of the Holy Virgin herself, have solidified the high value assigned to the place of the saints in the Coptic tradition.

Currently, the Coptic Church is adapting to the challenge of maintaining a coherent and unified religious community that is spread throughout the globe. In 1971, only seven Coptic Churches existed in the diaspora. By 1999 almost eighty existed in the United States and Canada alone, along with twenty-six in Australia and around thirty in Europe.\textsuperscript{47} According to Meinardus, the current diaspora of the Coptic Church is “undoubtedly one of the most significant demographic movements in the history of the Coptic Church,” and church leadership has had to adapt by appointing new bishops to oversee the increasing congregations overseas.\textsuperscript{48}

Much of the impetus for this diaspora comes from the struggle for peace and human rights Copts face in Egypt. While freedom of religion technically exists in Egypt, the government does not recognize conversion from Islam to any other religion, and sectarian violence continues to threaten Coptic churches. Many times, the government will fail to investigate or prosecute crimes that target religious minorities such as Copts.\textsuperscript{49} Copts, therefore, have been immigrating to

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\textsuperscript{45} Meinardus, \textit{Coptic Saints}, 64. \\
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{47} Meinardus, \textit{Two Thousand Years}, 6. \\
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 130. \\
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countries that allow greater religious freedom, while at the same time, confronting new and vastly
different social mores and values. Meinardus describes the realities often awaiting Copts in the
diaspora:

Often, they are settled in the new satellite suburbs, where they are socially and
religiously disconnected. They are confronted with the material wealth, prosperity,
and fortune that the city offers... To them the lives of the Coptic saints are a spiritual
reality. They carry the devotional pictures of their patron saints, along with a bit of
the hanut, the sacred spice mixture, in their wallets, pocketbooks, or handbags...
Those with a traditional family background continue in observing the major
Christian fasts and feasts; others have largely followed the modern "Zeitgeist," that
is not a religious, but indifferent to the teachings and practices of the church.50

Copts who leave Egypt, according to Meinardus, often have little to cling to that is familiar.
These familiarities include their beloved saints. In Egypt as well, there has been a recent increase in
recordings/reportings of apparitions of angels and the Theotokos. The changing world, including
modern conveniences and new social mores, drive many to lean on what Meinardus calls a
"religious defense mechanism" against a changing world. Saints, relics, and icons are part of this
so-called defense mechanism, a tool to stay connected to the traditional values of the Coptic
church, Egyptian Coptic culture, and a sense of belonging. This same impetus has led to new
discoveries of relics of saints.51

The Coptic Church wishes to preserve the unique theological identity of Copts around the
world, “even if the ethnic identity may somehow evaporate over the years.”52 With the growing
diaspora and numerous churches planted around the world, this is no small job. The Church will be
required to use numerous bishops, priests, and administrators to adequately handle this task.53 Of
course, as the Catholic Church can attest to, this is not an impossible task, even if it is very
difficult.

50 Meinardus, Copite Saints, 102.
51 Ibid., 103.
52 Ibid., 104.
53 Ibid.
But the Church must also take into account the vastly different cultures Copts now belong to. Many of these cultures have a history of feminist activism similar to Egypt’s. Countries such as the U.S. have adopted some tenets of feminism more readily over recent years, and the language of feminism is commonplace to many, especially in more urban areas. With the increasing globalization of the Coptic Church, and the current diaspora of Copts all around the world, the challenges that feminism brings to religious patriarchal culture will without a doubt affect the Coptic Church increasingly in the future.

Many Christian churches in the United States have accepted the need for gender equality, including the ordination of women. Even the American Coptic church has created the position of deaconess, for which there is no equivalent for Egyptian Coptic Churches. For many Copts, the struggle to cling to familiar traditions will be challenging in these new cultures.

This challenge may be even more difficult for Coptic women, who are held to specific standards of Coptic womanhood, yet are becoming parts of communities and cultures that may view these standards as outdated. In those countries, as well as in Egypt, Coptic women will encounter and may adopt feminism. The Coptic Church must accept that the diaspora, as well as the revolutionary struggles of late in Egypt, have much to do with gender. As Mona Eltahawy argues, “The real battle, the one that will determine whether Egypt frees itself of authoritarianism, is between the patriarchy — established and upheld by the state, the street and at home — and women, who will no longer accept this status quo.”

It is highly likely that the gendered experience of Coptic women in the overtly patriarchal culture of Egypt and the less overtly patriarchal culture of the United States will be vastly different from one another.

**Third: Coptic Women**

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The isolation of the Coptic Church, along with years of persecution, has meant that the world is only now discovering the rich heritage of the Copts. Christians represent a minority in Egypt, at less than 10% of the population.\textsuperscript{55} Coptic women as a religious minority have the added burden of their gender in a country far behind modern standards for equality. In the World Economic Forum’s “Global Gender Gap Report” in 2012, Egypt ranked 126th out of 135 nations in terms of the status of women. Christian women are especially vulnerable, as Islamic law is lenient toward “honor killings,” and men are favored in many aspects of the law, including those that apply to adultery, marriage contracts, divorce, and child custody.\textsuperscript{56} For Coptic women who do not have the advantage of observing the dominant religion, these issues can affect them in unique ways.

Coptic women are not only less privileged in social life but are nearly invisible in Coptic studies. If the study of Coptic saints is indeed in its infancy, the study of female Coptic saints is almost nonexistent. Currently, peer-reviewed research written in English has scarce resources available concerning the Coptic Church. Within the little research that exists, the focus tends to follow similar patterns. There is adequate information about the history of the Church, including its many patriarchs and most important early figures. There is ample information about Coptic theology and its evolution. And there are resources dedicated to the saints and martyrs within the Church. Where there is information about Coptic women or female saints, it is included as a subcategory that amounts to a broad overview of either gender roles within the Coptic Church or some of the most famous female saints’ hagiographies. The relationship of Coptic women with their saints has not been explored. In addition, complete studies of Coptic female experience are lacking greatly, and female saints’ stories and significance hardly get the in-depth treatment that male saints do.


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
Over time, this problem may only become more significant for the Coptic Church due to the recent surge of feminism within Egypt. The increasing awareness of Egyptian women of their marginalized social position as well as their increasingly passionate calls for change will without doubt also affect Coptic women.

Egyptian feminism is not new by any means. Between 1914 and 1922, during which time Egypt was a British protectorate, female activists played an important role in speaking out against colonialism in the Arab world. The first female cohort of students enrolled in Cairo University began their schooling in 1929. At this time, women still did not have any political rights. In fact, the female right to vote was only obtained in 1956. Through all of these challenges, Egyptian feminists have fought for the right to self-representation, often through their writing. As Lucia Sorbera reports, “Egyptian women proposed their own vision of gender and history in biographical and autobiographical writing, a literary space where they were both authors and objects of narration, and where narration was part of a broader political agency.”

Feminism in Egypt has consistently challenged both indigenous and colonial patriarchal culture, which favors the rights of men over those of women, and exercises control over women’s bodies as well as their political rights and social influence. More recently, the events surrounding the 25 January Revolution in 2011 have brought new approaches to feminism to the forefront. Young Egyptian women are criticizing the “masculinization of the public space and the political discourse,” and seeking to carve out a larger space in Egyptian society for all women. This is taking place both through women’s writing and through the greater participation of women in protest and revolutionary demonstrations. Feminism has also started to spread outward from urban areas and the upper, educated classes to rural areas in Upper Egypt and the Nile Delta, producing

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an intersection between gender and class in the new feminist thought that will make feminism more accessible.  

The Revolution of 2011 has also led to a greater focus on sexual violence as a political act. The thought itself is not new: “The will to rebel against gender violence is a leitmotif in Egyptian feminist history. Since the beginning, Egyptian feminism has challenged both local and colonial patriarchal violence.” However, greater participation of women in the revolution has pushed the problem of sexual violence and intimidation to the forefront. Female marchers often faced sexual assault as a tool of intimidation. Since March 2011, women have faced increased danger from street harassment and police aggression. According to human rights groups, between February 2011 and January 2014, at least five hundred women were sexually assaulted by street mobs, and thousands more were the victims of sexual harassment. But, for the most part, this has not stopped the impetus of the feminist movement in Egypt. Sorbera concludes, “Rather, these experiences again positioned gender justice at the centre of the revolutionary agenda.”

The problem of violence against women in Egypt is a serious one that is not limited to street protests or revolutions. As one Egyptian woman put it, “The revolution hasn’t reached our homes yet.” Domestic violence and marital rape remain serious problems throughout Egypt. A 2009 study of domestic violence in Egypt found that the justification of domestic violence and gender violence is common among married Egyptian women. Of the 5,450 female participants surveyed, around half justified wife-beating for one reason or another. One-fourth of the women justified wife beating for at least four different reasons. Often these reasons included acts of disobedience,

58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
61 Eltahawy, “Egypt Has”
62 Sorbera, “Challenges”
63 Eltahawy, “Egypt Has”
such as going out without informing her husband or refusing sex.\footnote{Ibid., 1133.} These numbers demonstrate the significant impact that patriarchal structures have on the lived experiences of Egyptian women.

Feminist scholars believe that systems of gender stratification dictate how women view experiences of domestic violence. “One link between women’s structural subordination and experiences of violence is ideological. Namely, men’s preponderance in economic, social, legal, and political institutions legitimizes and sustains policies and practices that naturalize their dominance and women’s family roles.”\footnote{Ibid., 1128.} In other words, the dominance of men in all areas outside the home, including in religious life, justifies their dominance and even outright aggression inside the home. One could argue that male dominance in the public and private spheres could affect women’s view of themselves spiritually the same way it affects the way they view their role within a marriage. Indeed, gender violence and inequality affect Coptic women in a myriad of ways.

One of the most pressing issues of violence facing Coptic women has been a rash of kidnappings undertaken by Muslim men who target young Coptic girls for forced conversion, rape, and marriage. This bizarre and unsettling phenomenon is linked not only to the danger of gender violence faced by many Egyptian women, but also to the sectarian violence between Christians and Muslims. “With Islam as the official religion and sharia (Islamic law) as the primary sources of legislation, Christian women are especially vulnerable” to this form of violence, which has seen an increase in recent years.\footnote{“Egypt: Uptick in Abductions, Forced Marriages and Conversions” (2013).} Tragically, it is often women under the age of 18 who are the targets of these forced marriages. Often, they also come from low-income families or families experiencing internal strife of some sort, either financial or interpersonal (such as the death of a parent). Experts believe that social pressures, “particularly the centrality of marriage to a woman’s identity,
combined with many Coptic women’s ignorance of the law” are key factors in the ability of the perpetrators to lure the girls unwittingly into their new situations.68

The patterns of these abductions are often the same. Victims are usually romanced by older Muslim boys or men, who use charm or deception to make the girls more comfortable. Often, they will ask the victim to meet them somewhere, where family members are waiting to kidnap the girl. What follows often involves physical and psychological abuse, including rape and forced isolation, in order to coerce the victim into converting to Islam and marrying her abuser. Often, the victim’s family is ignorant of her situation.

What follows the forced marriage is often a continuation of the horror. While many cases are not reported because of the negative stigma attached to sexual assault, those that are reported often are not taken seriously by police. It is often assumed that the victims were willing participants in their conversions. For those women who are able to return to their homes, the Egyptian government will not restore their legal Christian identity, since religion is a required part of a legal ID. While IDs can be changed from Christian to Muslim, they cannot be changed from Muslim to Christian. Without this document, women are sometimes unable to remarry within their church. Many women are never even able to return home, especially if they have borne children to their captors. Once the children are born within the forced marriage, they remain legally Muslim and the legal property of the male head of household.69

1) Gender Roles

The persecution of Coptic Christians has created a unique situation for Coptic women within their own communities. For many years, Copts struggled to find a secure place within Egyptian social

69 Ibid.
life. To establish a consciousness of belonging, lay Copts clung to an image of themselves as being direct descendants of ancient Egyptians. This supposed Pharaonic heritage came with specific ideas of the ideal Coptic community, or “Coptic Nation.” Families became a sort of microcosm of this nation, and women, as the child-bearers for the Coptic community, faced enormous pressure to live up to certain ideals as well. Women, as the child-bearers and as those mainly responsible for teaching children Christian values, have a significant role to play in forming this community.

The ideal Coptic woman—that is, the ideal Coptic wife, mother, or daughter—became the keeper of the family’s purity and spiritual discipline. She was expected to compensate spiritually for her husband’s natural “preoccupation with the outside world.” The ideal Coptic woman needed to maintain certain personal virtues as well. Namely, she is “obedient, docile and spiritually conscious.” The obedience and submission a wife is expected to show her husband is shared with, yet second to, her obedience to her “Christ-husband.” Yet as Febe Armanios, points out these two authoritative male figures in a Coptic woman’s life share “characteristics of authority, domination, and control over the home.” Despite the revered position of mother and spiritual caretaker, Coptic women are still subordinate to men in most areas of social and religious life.

The roles of women in the Coptic Church are similar to those of women in other Christian communities around the world, who take gender-based prescriptions from the Bible, often from Paul’s writing. Coptic women are prohibited from assuming any priestly or sacramental duties. They are also subject to rules in regard to “ritual impurity.” Early in the Church’s history, women were even subject to Old Testament ritual impurity laws that highly regulated a woman’s body based on menstrual cycles and sexual activity. These regulations often made it difficult for women

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71 Ibid., 115.
72 Ibid., 115.
to participate in regular worship activities. According to Morcos, female purity rituals segregated women in a very visible way. A church canon from the second century CE—a canon that is still in force today—forbade Coptic women from partaking in Communion during menstruation, and in some churches, women may not even take the Baraka after church or light a candle before an icon when they are menstruating. This results in a manufactured fear of the uncleanliness of menstruating women, who respond to these rules in various ways. Some follow them without understanding why. Others partake in Communion regardless of the rule. Still others avoid church altogether while menstruating to avoid a questionable or embarrassing situation. These ancient female purity rules are still observed in many Coptic churches in Egypt, their persistence is possibly influenced by the surrounding culture in which they are practiced.

Women are segregated in church in other ways as well, including through the burden of waiting 80 days to baptize female children versus 40 days for boys. Marcos says that “the churching of women also segregates females and illustrates the superiority of the male gender whether intended by the church or not.” Often it is only widows who sometimes avoid these prescriptions and can assist with baptism or serve as deaconesses. Following the explanation of 1 Timothy 2, it is Eve’s disobedience that is used as justification for barring women from certain forms of service in the church. However, women are finding ways to serve their church, including ascetic practices, according to Meinardus:

The religious renewal in the Coptic Church, which had its beginnings in the second half of the twentieth century, led also to a revival of the ascetic life among women... By 1965 Bishop Athanasius of Beni Suef and al-Bahnasa had instituted the Daughters of Saint Mary (Banat Maryam), a community for women that combined the monastic life with the social aspects of Christian service....in addition to these socially active nuns, Pope Shenuda III initiated toward the end of the 1970s the ‘consecrated women’ (mukarrasat), as a step to the officially recognized

73 Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 45.
74 Morcos, 161–2.
75 Ibid., 162.
76 Ibid., 161.
deaconesses...Also, the number of contemplative nuns in Cairo, the Delta, and Upper Egypt has significantly increased. Today, more than five hundred contemplative nuns serve in the nine Coptic convents.77

Today’s Coptic women are also participating in an important part of worship, which is the painting of icons to facilitate worship or tell stories about saints. Historically, women have been barred from this art, yet in recent years women have begun to learn the art form from certain monasteries in Egypt and places like the Isaac Fanous.78 Morcos relates the story of a female iconographer who remembers having to ask a bishop in Egypt to give her absolution so that she could enter the altar and paint her icon, but he refused, saying that when she is fifty she may go into the altar and paint icons. Often female iconographers have to have male assistants to complete the jobs they are hired to do.79 So, while some progress has been seen in allowing participation for women, participation is still not yet equal.

Coptic women obviously desire to serve and be involved in their religious communities to which they are highly committed. The extent to which they are able to do so depends not only on the avenues available to them, but also the social expectations of marriage and childbearing that they face from a young age. Many women have little choice but to prescribe to these expectations in order to remain full and accepted members of their community.

These gendered expectations may impact Coptic women on a deeper level than simply their dogmatic adherences. Erin Cassese and Mirya Holman (2016) investigated a negative correlation between religious involvement and political participation among women that was not observed among men.80 They found that gendered religious beliefs about authority (i.e., seeing God with male characteristics, ascribing masculinity with spiritual authority) are associated with more

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77 Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 48–49.
78 Morcos, 129.
79 Ibid., 130.
80 Ibid.
traditional and restrictive gender roles. They also found that religious women who worshiped in such communities were more likely to have a literal interpretation of the Bible than their male counterparts, even if this negatively affected them or barred them from certain activities. The reason, argue Cassese and Holman, is that when women cannot express their commitments to a group through leadership and power, they will find other ways of identifying with their community. Often, a commitment to biblical literalism and acceptance of group rules, norms, and values (like gender prescriptions) become an avenue for women to engage in group acceptance and religious expression.\(^81\)

Presently, Coptic women, especially in Egypt, do not have many avenues to leadership or power within the church unless they are able to pursue life in a convent. In some cases, married women can also pursue some leadership positions (as deaconesses) if they are widowed and over the age of fifty. Otherwise, socially accepted roles for Coptic women include helping in the kitchen, serving as Sunday school teachers, working as volunteers, or in some cases serving on church councils or on church financial boards.\(^82\) The other option, the historically socially accepted avenue of marriage and childbearing, is another way for Coptic women to contribute to their communities by ensuring the future stability of the Coptic Church and its traditions. If Cassese and Holman are correct, these avenues also serve to situate Coptic women firmly within their communities as valued and contributing members, allowing some form of social power not available through the same avenues afforded to men.

This again has much to do with the position of the Coptic Church within a Muslim-dominated society. Evangelizing to the mainly Muslim public is a punishable offense in Egypt, meaning the Coptic Church cannot easily grow outside its established communities via evangelism.

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\(^81\) Cassese and Holman, “Religious beliefs.”

\(^82\) Morcos, 97.
Rather, the church has chosen to focus on ensuring that those who are born into Coptic communities remain there. This means that the pressure to bear children and safeguard their spiritual virtue (or in other words, pass on Coptic teachings and values to the next generation) is especially high for women. Indeed, the survival of the Church may, in part, depend on them.

Coptic women face a difficult dilemma in regard to the virtues they are expected to uphold. Armanios cites examples of Coptic virgin-saints to show “the lengths to which Coptic writers are willing to go in order to advocate, on the one hand, staunch virginity for women, and on the other hand to reprimand those women who choose to keep their virginity and avoid marriage.” One example is Saint Bertanoba, a nun who was kidnapped by a pagan king and was faced with forced marriage. Rather than sacrifice her chastity, the nun is praised by the author for instead throwing herself into a fire and dying. “[T]he author, a Coptic priest, explicitly rejects the idea that this was an act of suicide. According to him, Bertanoba's death was a high degree of divine love: the protection of one's chastity.”

Kasia Szpakowska (2012) found that ancient literary texts from Egypt often present an idealized view of the world from the author’s perspective. “When women are mentioned they conform to the conventional ideals of the time and in a capacity to further the aim of the author.” Yet other evidence shows that women at the time of these writings held important positions outside the home in business and organized religion. Rather than representing reality, male-authored literature concerning women often serves to reinforce certain standards, such as the chastity of Christian women. As can be seen, these standards are often difficult or impossible to live up to.

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83 Armanios, 116.
84 Ibid., 119.
85 Ibid., 120.
87 Ibid.
The double standard virtues of marriage/childbearing and chastity can also be observed in the traditional Coptic marriage ceremony. While male chastity is mentioned briefly during the ceremony, it is not covered to the extent that the chastity of the bride-to-be is. The Pauline text of the ceremony is Ephesians 5:22–6:3, instructing wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to love their wives.\textsuperscript{88} The groom is instructed to care for his wife as her parents cared for her and the couple is encouraged to have children and avoid divorce. The bride is then given instructions from the deacon: “Listen O (insert bride’s name here) the bride and lend your ear; forsake your people and your father’s house, for your chastity has appealed to (insert groom’s name here) the bridegroom, for he is your husband and to him you will submit.”\textsuperscript{89} According to Morcos, the Coptic marriage ceremony defines a Coptic wife as obedient, faithful, and intending to bear children.\textsuperscript{90}

Coptic Patriarch Shenouda III has also written about the standards a Coptic wife must uphold by using the example of a female saint. According to him, the merits of a Coptic woman include the ability to “allow her husband to feel a greater sense of freedom.” She must not be a nag, and she must work hard to win over her husband with kindness and gentleness. Finally, she must be concerned over her physical appearance inside the home to avoid her looks being only “foreign export,” rather than for the benefit of her husband. “Pope Shenouda ends by noting that the highest (and all but impossible) example of the most virtuous woman is the Virgin Mary, and it is only the lucky husband who can attain this sort of woman—she who does only good and no evil.”\textsuperscript{91}

To meet the standard of the Virgin Mary is not only impossible, but also unreasonable. Yet this is a standard often used in the Christian religion—not only in Coptic circles. Meinardus

\textsuperscript{88} Morcos, 98.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 101.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 102.
\textsuperscript{91} Armanios, 110.
observes, “No biblical person has been more used and misused for political intentions, designs, and purposes by secular and ecclesiastical sovereigns than the Holy Virgin Mary.” According to Armanios, the use of the female virgin-saint in the construction of female Coptic sexuality is becoming more common. This means that the painful double standards applied to Coptic women are often rooted in examples of female saints whose terrific example is, to say the least, a hard act to follow. Coptic women in Egypt often face experiences more similar to those of martyrs, yet they are expected to live within the narrative of a holy virgin.

On the other hand, equating Coptic wives and mothers with revered saints may impose a certain solemn respect. Armanios points out that “by conceptions of the virtuous woman in the domestic sphere, virtue, on a certain level, might provide a means for a woman's assertion in the home.” However, this self-assertion is not supported by the Church outside the home in the form of supporting women’s public rights.

This was the same dilemma faced by many Egyptian feminists engaged in revolutionary activities throughout Egypt’s history. While the men fighting alongside them against colonialism certainly supported their right to be there, their support didn’t go much farther. As Lucia Sorbera reports:

In a period when women were still un-enfranchised, were not allowed to run for or vote in elections, and were not even enjoying equal opportunities in education and paid work, feminists challenged two patriarchal cultures: the indigenous patriarchal culture (both the secular and the religious), and the colonial patriarchal culture. Both of them represented significant segments of modernity, which was certainly promoting women's modernization, but was ambiguous towards their emancipation. This was the context which was the dawn of women's revolution.

The adoption of feminism by Coptic women does not necessarily mean the abandonment of a unique Coptic identity. Rather, the rich history of female saints within the Coptic tradition can

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92 Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 5.
93 Armanios, 118.
94 Sorbera (2014).
provide strength, inspiration, and an impetus for devotion for Coptic women, both feminist and not. The experiences of spirituality and religious persecution shared by female saints and modern Coptic women are a clear reason for a greater emphasis on their stories. Therefore, the clear lack of thorough research about Coptic female saints’ points to a need for further investigation. Is this the case because there is just not enough information? Are the female saints not important in the minds of Copts? Or, is it the case that there is a wealth of knowledge, much of it in the experiences and oral traditions of women themselves, that has yet to be explored by academia?

2) Coptic Women in California

It is not widely known exactly how Coptic women engage spiritually, emotionally, or mentally with their female saints, or if this engagement can be a tool within the Coptic Church to help women maintain their unique Coptic identities while also engaging with the changing cultures around them in ways that women may find empowering. Clearly, the role of saints and martyrs within the Coptic Church is very important. The familiarity of saints is helping Copts adjust to cultural and generational changes at home and abroad. Coptic women need their own stories and spiritual themes to connect to a world that increasingly sees women as equal and active participants in social and religious life.

The stories of Coptic women are scarce within academic research. However, Morcos’ qualitative study in 2015 encouraged the Coptic female respondents to share their stories and perspectives on their faith as part of the Coptic diaspora. All of the women interviewed at the time were living in Southern California and had immigrated from Egypt at some point. Morcos found that the women had generally encountered more opportunities as a result of immigrating to the United States. However, this differed according to which church the women attended and the opinion of their clergy on female roles.95

95 Morcos, 221.
When presenting varying questions about their faith and gender, Morcos found generally optimistic views about how the Coptic Church’s view of women shaped their identities. 32% of respondents said the Church’s view made them feel confident; 23% felt happier; 14% felt weaker, 17% felt submissive, and 14% felt angry.\textsuperscript{96} When asked if the church promotes a healthy view of women, 35% said yes, 34% said maybe, and 30% said no.\textsuperscript{97} When asked if they would change anything about the Coptic Church’s view or treatment of women, 47% said yes. What they would change in regard to this included things like women’s empowerment programs and an increase of women of all ages learning hymns and church history, as well as an increase in female leadership roles.\textsuperscript{98}

Morcos also asked questions pertaining to knowledge of church history and saints, which pertains to my own study. Only 10% of respondents were very knowledgeable about church history, while 71% were somewhat or fairly knowledgeable, and 19% said they were not very knowledgeable or did not know anything about church history at all. In response to other questions, 80% had a desire to learn more about church history; 75% knew about various female saints and their stories. However, 58% knew more about male saints than female saints. Only 4% knew more about female saints than male saints. Lastly, 70% of the respondents said they had a Coptic woman role model, and 57% said that having a female relative serving in church influenced their service in church as well.\textsuperscript{99} These answers varied in many cases, and further study will provide more depth to the reasons for these answers as well as suggest new ones. Morcos’ study found that Coptic women in Southern California do not feel equal to men in general, and want certain issues affecting them

\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 158.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 161.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 164.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 163.
(like purity rituals) to be explained or changed. Many also notice the lack of female representation in church leadership as well as disparities in the popularity of female versus male hagiographies.\textsuperscript{100}

To understand the role of female saints, as well as the possibilities for their use in spiritual edification, education, and reinforcement of Coptic values, the best resource is Coptic women themselves. Researchers as well as the church must do a better job of understanding the lived experiences and perspectives of religious women. Coptic women, as minorities within their own country as well as abroad, have a unique perspective and story to tell concerning their relationship with their religion. Female saints in the Coptic female perspective is a great place to start understanding this perspective, as saints are often used as moral examples for religious people (especially women) to follow.

**Fourth: Feminist Research**

The peculiar disparity between information about male saints and female saints in Coptic literature is not a new or strange phenomenon from a feminist perspective. Rather, the absence and silence of women in historical, religious, and academic writing is a well-documented phenomenon across many disciplines. Morny Joy attributes this problem to the fact that within academia most writing about women has been done by male scholars “whose methods reflect their own cultural biases—often incorporating the familiar dualist tendencies, especially with regard to sexual stereotypes.”\textsuperscript{101} The issue goes far beyond simply that of gender and more disproportionately affects women in certain groups or parts of the world. White, educated women are no less to blame than male authors. Joy says that more and more, women of color, women outside of North America, indigenous women, and lesbian women “do not recognize themselves in the descriptions of women that reflect the interests of white, middle-class, educated, straight women.”\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 223.
\textsuperscript{101} Joy, “Postcolonial and Gendered Reflections,” 28.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 31.
The problem of representation is especially severe within religious studies. Hawthorne observes this phenomenon in the United Kingdom, “evidenced by the lack of integration of gender perspectives in the core syllabi of religious studies departments, the comparatively low volume of publication in the area, the poor profile of the subject at international conferences, the difficulty of getting university libraries to stock copies of relevant publications, and the under-representation in UK university departments of academics researching in the field.”

Joy says that other evidence of androcentrism in religious studies lies in the tendency for an emphasis on the “official cult” of the religion being studied, often disregarding other important areas of devotion within religion that allow more room for women and minorities to exercise power and influence. For example, Thecla is a seldom studied figure in Christian history, and is even less seldom revered as an important saint. Yet a thriving cult of Thecla existed in the fourth and fifth centuries that gave women added opportunity for religious devotion free from the male gaze. Thecla is not a topic one will easily find in any publication about saints in Coptic Orthodoxy, even though Egypt was where the main hub of Thecla devotion existed in the mid-fourth century, which prompted Athanasius to draw on images from the Acts of Paul and Thecla liberally in his treatise On Virginity. It is possible that modern devotion to female saints among Coptic women is common, yet not widely understood.

The absence of women’s authentic experiences from religious literature is not only a problem because it distorts reality in the past. The issue of representation is extremely important for current and future generations. This can be seen clearly in disciplines such as the math and sciences. Henrion (1997) details how women in mathematics face struggles within their field not

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103 Hawthorne, “Rethinking Subjectivity,” 40.
104 Joy, 29.
shared by their male counterparts because of the difficulty envisioning themselves, as women, as leaders in their field. Women more often choose alternative trajectories for themselves because of social stereotypes about women, as well as a lack of female role models to help young women envision the possibilities of the future.\textsuperscript{106} Female saints may act as role models for Coptic women, yet if they are not given adequate attention in literature or church teaching, their positive message for women today may be missed entirely.

The same dangers exist for religious women who struggle to see opportunities for themselves in religious leadership or the field of religious studies. According to Hawthorne, “The importance of female role models in demonstrating what is possible cannot be under-estimated. Ursula King has suggested that the absence of any sustained attention to the women pioneers ‘highlights the invisibility and general marginality of women in the history of religions as a field of studies, so far largely defined by male scholars of religion’ (King 1986:84).” \textsuperscript{107} For Coptic women, the stories of female saints represent the “women pioneers” in their community. This is why understanding Coptic women’s relationship with and understanding of these saints is so important for the future of the Coptic church, whose growth relies so heavily on maintaining the commitment of the faithful and finding ways to ensure the commitment of future generations who will undoubtedly be more influenced by ideologies such as feminism, either within or outside the church.

**Fifth: Female Saints**

In the Coptic tradition, saints have a special significance. However, the specific meaning of saints varies according to many factors, including what categories they fall into. Martyrs often stand alone as a category of holy people because of the immense significance and honor bestowed upon

\textsuperscript{107} Hawthorne, 45.
those who died for Christ; yet, not all martyrs are canonized saints. Those saints who are martyrs have special significance. In addition, ascetic saints, including monks, have special significance because of their example of holiness. Female saints are no exception, and have their own, sometimes uniquely female, categories that can be recognized by Christians all over the world. The categories I will explore are female ascetics (including female monks), “sinners,” martyrs, virgins, and mothers. Each of these categories has specific meaning and often contains patterns or themes that show up repeatedly.

1) Ascetic Women

Egypt is often associated with the vast and unforgiving desert. Likewise, Egyptian Christianity is often associated with the famous desert fathers. Antony is the most easily recognized of these desert fathers, and Christians around the world have learned of his story. However, the equally important desert mothers are less understood and less frequently taught. Saint Syncletica is often compared to Antony and likened to him as the “mother” of asceticism, though not much is written about her life. A saint named Theodora is credited as being the author of some of the sayings cited in the *Apophthegmata*, a collection of sayings from the elders of Scetis. The Coptic Synaxarium is replete with other examples of female ascetics of the Egyptian desert about whom little is known, but on whom honor is still bestowed.

It is important to understand female ascetic saints because of the important role asceticism and monasticism have played in the Coptic Church’s history. Egypt is the origin of both eremitical and cenobitic forms of monasticism. The monastic movement has been considered Egypt’s “outstanding contribution” to the world of Christianity. In fact, the existence of monastic orders in many places around the world can be credited to the inspiration of Egyptian monks. Monasticism

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108 Meinardus, *Coptic Saints*, 47.
109 Ibid., 48.
110 Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years*, vii.
Spread from Egypt into areas such as Ethiopia and Palestine early on. Many famous ascetics were inspired by ascetic thinkers from Egypt, including figures like Saint Hilarion and Johannes Cassianus.\textsuperscript{111}

Asceticism has deep roots in Scripture, with some of the original inspirations being prophets of the Old Testament as well as John the Baptist, who lived in the desert with no material possessions. Ascetics from early Christianity strived to model their lives after a certain eschatological vision captured by these figures. Meinardus observes:

Since the fourth century, some of the Egyptian desert fathers have endeavoured to recapture the original heavenly state of paradise as well as glimpse the eschatological truth. To realize this goal, they shed all worldly habits, including their garments, and lived naked, covered only with their hair, which God had provided (30) ... It was this heavenly utopia symbolized by the picture of wild beasts and dangerous reptiles in peaceful companionship with domesticated animals that inspired such naked saints as Saints Onuphrius (Ba’una16/June 23), Timothy (Kiyahk 23/January 1), and Mary the Egyptian (Baramuda 6/April 14).\textsuperscript{112}

Dedicated/consecrated virgins have been an important part of this rich history of asceticism and monasticism. The church commemorates twenty-two holy virgins who are meant to be “models of chastity and devotion.” The chastity of these holy women is honored even above marriage, which is a highly sought after good for women in Coptic Christianity and Egyptian culture in general. However, the Coptic dogma, in the manner of many New Testament passages accredited to Paul, values virginity over marriage: “For marriage is holy, but celibacy is better and holier.”\textsuperscript{113}

Yet Egyptian women have historically faced barriers when it comes to practicing their faith as virgins. Marriage is a highly emphasized goal for Coptic women, and the pressure to become a mother is intense.\textsuperscript{114} Women are barred from performing in any sort of priestly office, which is accredited to the disobedience of Eve as well as the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 35–6.
\textsuperscript{112} Meinardus, \textit{Coptic Saints}, 31.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{114} Armanios, “The ‘Virtuous Woman.’”
This leaves few options for women to serve aside from removing themselves from regular society altogether and entering ascetic life. For this reason, a revival of ascetic life among Coptic women began in the second half of the twentieth century and is still growing today. In 1965, Bishop Athanasius of Beni Suef and al-Bahnasa instituted the Daughters of Saint Mary, a monastic community for women that emphasizes Christian service. Toward the end of the 1970s, Shenouda III initiated the “consecrated women” (mukarrasat), a step toward women having positions similar to deaconesses. Today, more than five hundred contemplative nuns serve in nine Coptic convents, a significant increase from several decades ago.¹¹⁶

But this has not always been an achievable option for women. In fact, according to Morcos, even though ascetic roles are encouraged by the Coptic faith, it is often difficult for women to serve even in this way because of the highly difficult transition from family life to being “dead to the world.” “Ascetics cannot see their family at any time. There are special times for visiting but even then, it is very difficult on the family when one chooses the monastic lifestyle.”¹¹⁷

The barriers of entry for Egyptian women into the monastic life have a long history. This history is best exemplified in the thrilling stories of female monks, a very unique group of ascetic saints. Meinardus (2007) explains that because of the strict laws prohibiting women from serving God in the established channels of the church, some women “discovered strange and unusual methods and means to fulfill their religious inclinations.”¹¹⁸ During the fourth through the seventh centuries, women disguised as male monks entered the deserts of Scetis and Wadi al-Natrun to live as hermits under the direction of a monastic father. These women, often daughters of Roman emperors, kings, or governors, were inspired by the Egyptian desert fathers. Meinardus speculates

¹¹⁵ Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 45.
¹¹⁶ Ibid., 45.
¹¹⁷ Morcos, 97.
¹¹⁸ Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 45–46.
that they may have also been inspired by the *Gospel of Thomas*, in which Jesus said, “For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Regardless of the source of their inspiration, female monks’ ascetic devotion often surpassed that of their male counterparts, making them known for gifts such as healing and exorcisms.\(^{119}\)

One such famous saint was Marina. Her story is one of the more dramatic of the female monks, and variations of her story appear alongside saints such as Apollinaria. Marina was disguised as a male from a young age, when her father took her (his only child) to enter a monastery with him. Together, they were received into the monastery and Marina was called Brother Marinus by all. Marina lived a life of strict religious obedience until her father died. On his death bed, he urged her to remain steadfast and not reveal her sex to her peers. However, when the daughter of a man whose home Marina had visited was impregnated by a soldier, she blamed the pregnancy on “Marinus,” and she took the blame rather than reveal she was a woman. She was expelled from the monastery, and stayed outside the gate for three years, living on scraps. When the child was weaned, he was sent to the Abbot. After two more years of patience, the monks were moved by Marina’s dedication, and admitted her back in. She lived the rest of her life doing good works, and it was only upon her death that her peers found out her true sex and were grieved at how she had been mistreated. According to legend, many miracles took place at Marina’s grave after her death, including the exorcism of a demon from the very woman who accused “Marinus” of ravishing her.\(^{120}\)

Key elements of Marina’s story are common among all the female monk saints. Some common elements are that the woman’s sex is never found out until her death, except in cases where a family member or former spouse meets her by chance. This is true of Apollinaria, who

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\(^{119}\) Ibid.

entered the desert of Scetis as an adult and was famed for many miracles of healing, including the exorcism of her own younger sister. This situation revealed to her father that his long-lost daughter was in fact the monk “Father Dorotheus” (Apollinaria’s new male name).121 Anastasia fled to Egypt and also disguised herself as a monk, but it was in order to escape a marriage with emperor Justin I. Only the abbot of her monastery knew her secret, which was revealed upon her death.122

Another common theme is false accusations and the ability of the saints to endure such accusations patiently until they are rewarded for their steadfastness. Marina’s debacle is shared by Theodora, who faced several tests of her devotion and is shown by the author to pass each one. Theodora was a noblewoman in Alexandria, married to a Christian man. When she refused the sexual advances of a rich man, he sent a sorceress to enchant her, and she unwittingly slept with him. When she realized her mistake, she was filled with remorse and fled to the desert of Scetis to do penance, and entered a monastery disguised as a man (“Theodore”). There, she performed many miracles, including bringing back to life a man who had been mauled by a wild beast.

When a girl approached one day and asked Theodora (“Theodore”) to sleep with her, Brother Theodore refused. Yet later, when the girl became pregnant by another man, she accused Theodore of sleeping with and impregnating her. For this supposed crime, Theodora was kicked out of the monastic community and given charge of the child. Then, like Marina, Theodora stayed outside the monastery, this time for seven years, nourishing and raising the child of the woman who accused her. The devil continually tempted her with food, and even gold, but she resisted. Finally, the Abbot took her back in. Just two years later, she admonished her adopted son to follow in her footsteps, and she died. The revelation of Theodora’s sex was revealed through a vision to the Abbot in his sleep and brought remorse upon everyone involved with her previous scandal. The

121 Atiya, Saints.
122 Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 47.
Abbot also sent for Theodora’s husband, who came to grieve for her, and lived in her cell until his own death.123

2) Sinners

The themes of penance, justice, or the righting of wrongs often arise in the stories of female saints. This is especially true of ascetic women but is most prominent in a category of female saints that often co-mingles with the ascetics: the “sinners.” While Theodora’s attempt at penance was for a sin committed against her will, many female saints are women who turned from lives of lavish indulgence to intense religious devotion and asceticism.

Mary of Egypt (or Mary the Egyptian) was a famous ascetic who was also called “the Sinner.”124 She was born in Egypt, and at twelve years of age went to Alexandria, where she lived as a prostitute for seventeen years. When she heard that people were traveling to Jerusalem to worship, she traded her body for passage. But upon arriving at a church, an invisible force pushed her back from the door and did not allow her to enter. She realized that it was because of her sinful life, and she beat her breast and cried out, and subsequently saw a vision of the Virgin Mary. When she pledged that she would do penance by forsaking the world and her life of sin, she was allowed to enter the church. She then spent forty-seven years in the desert, until a priest named Zosimus found her and, upon her request, gave her the Sacrament. She asked that he return the next year, and when he did, he found her body, along with instructions in the sand to bury her.125

Pelagia’s story crosses into both the sinner and ascetic/female monk category. She was “first among the women in the city of Antioch” in wealth and beauty, and she was very vain. One day as she was parading herself through the city, a man named Father Veronus saw her and wept at her vanity. Pelagia was present for his sermon at church one day and, upon hearing the gospel, she

124 Ibid., 227.
125 Ibid., 228.
was so stricken with remorse over her selfish lifestyle that she requested a meeting with the bishop, in which she confessed: “I am Pelagia, a sea of iniquity crested with waves of sin; I am an abyss of perdition; I am a whirlpool, a sink to catch souls. I have misled many and deceived them, and now I shudder at the thought of all this!”

She vowed to repent and live a life serving God. The night of her baptism, the devil arrived to beg her not to forsake him, but she resisted, gave all she had to the poor, and went to Mount Olivet where she donned male attire and became the hermit “Pelagius.” Like other female monks, her sex was discovered upon her death, and her peers “marveled and gave thanks to God.”

Stories of female sinner-saints demonstrate dramatic transformations from lives of indulgence, sexual or otherwise, to lives of strict religious obedience, asceticism, and sometimes miraculous spiritual gifts. These women usually end up in the deserts of Egypt, part of the rich tapestry of saints who ended their lives there. They are reminiscent of characters like Mary Magdalene or even Paul. The chastity and obedience of these women are emphasized in such stories, but above all the emphasis is on sacrifice. Often, these women gave their great wealth to the poor and left lives of luxury or beloved family to do penance for their sins. Sacrifice is indeed a common theme in stories of all sorts of saints, both male and female. But no group of saints better exemplifies sacrifice than martyrs.

3) Martyrs

The history of Christianity is rich with examples of martyrs who gave up their lives rather than forsake Christ. Scripture itself is riddled with examples of admonitions to hold fast to Christ in the face of death, and to be witnesses for Christ in the face of persecution. “In the beginning, every Christian was a witness, a person who had personal knowledge of the Christ-event and could talk

126 Ibid., 617.
127 Ibid., 617–18.
of it based on his or her firsthand experience. To witness for Christ was a certain way to eternal life. The Christians of Smyrna received the admonition, "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). In fact, scripture seems to promise the threat of death to early Christians, some who sought the honor of martyrdom without fear because of such promises as this: “Then they will hand you over to be tortured and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of my name.”

Martyrs hold a place of great respect and admiration throughout most of Christendom because of the dramatic, inspiring, and often hyperbolic stories of their great sacrifice in the name of Jesus. In Egyptian Christianity, stories of martyrs have a special significance because of the great numbers of martyrs who have died in Egypt from the early history of Christianity through the modern period. In the Coptic synaxarium, the number of martyrs honored with sainthood (184) dwarfs the number of ascetics (63), despite the famous association of asceticism with Egyptian Christianity. This is partially due to the high number of martyrs whose lives ended in Egypt, and also due to the nature of the birth of Christianity in Egypt, which emerged from the martyrdom of Saint Mark himself. The sacrifice of martyrs is part of the fabric of Egyptian Christianity, which accounts for the dramatic legacy of the church, according to Meinardus:

The apostolic foundation of the Coptic Church is both glorious and tragic: glorious in the number of its illustrious leaders such as Saint Athanasius, Saint Cyril, Saint Antony, and Saint Pachomius, to mention but a few, and tragic in the vast number of its followers who suffered martyrdom in the various persecutions for their adherence to the Christian faith... Following the Diocletian persecution in Egypt from 303 to 305, Egyptian Christianity emerged victorious and dynamic, so much so that its theology and Christology were to leave a lasting impression on the whole church.

129 Matthew 24:9 (NRSV)
131 Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years*, 38.
Christianity was a new and strange religion at the time of its emergence in Egypt. Meinardus argues that some emperors may have seen little choice but to persecute these strange and foreign witnesses. Christianity appeared not only strange, but even immoral and unpatriotic to many Egyptians, resulting in the infamous martyrdom of Saint Mark, who became the example and inspiration for many later Egyptian Christians who sought martyrdom with zeal. Meinardus says, “Egyptian Christians often sought death by purposely insulting the magistrates, sometimes even by breaking the idols. Their enthusiasm for martyrdom, for the eternal life, often became self-centered. Nonetheless, these men and women endured terrible tortures—even if one subtracts some of the obvious exaggerations from the martyrologies—rather than abandon their faith.”

Persecutions in Egypt have come in waves, with some periods mostly calm and favorable for Christians, and others rife with persecution including the forcible wearing of identifiable markers, burning of churches, and physical abuse and murder of Copts. The first state-sponsored persecution was under the reign of emperor Septimius Severus (193–211). Later, under emperor Decius (249–51), began “the series of historically well-established martyrdoms,” the majority of which came later under the infamous persecutions of emperor Diocletian (284–305).” Eusebius described the persecutions under Diocletian as varied and terrible: “Some, after being tortured with scrapings and the rack and the most dreadful floggings and other innumerable agonies, which one might shudder to hear, were finally committed to flames; some plunged and drowned in the sea, others voluntarily offering their own heads to the executioners...” Church historians have estimated the number of martyrs during this time at anywhere between 144,000 and 800,000. To this day, Copts commemorate this horrible time. In the Coptic calendar, the “Era of the Martyrs”

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133 Ibid.
134 Ibid., 27.
135 Ibid.
begins on August 29, 284, when Diocletian became emperor, even though the persecution did not begin until 303.136

Christians killed during the various Islamic dynasties in Egypt are usually referred to as the “new martyrs.” Even without official policies toward the “people of the book” under Islamic rulers, Copts have undergone waves of persecution. In 722 many Coptic churches were destroyed, and the patriarch imprisoned. Later, under Fatimid caliph al-Mu’izz (972–75), Copts were treated favorably for a short period. However, between 1007 and 1012 Copts experienced one of the most “senseless persecutions” on record under caliph al-Hakim.137 And later in 1320, many Coptic churches were sacked and destroyed. In Cairo alone, fifty-four churches were destroyed.138

When the Decian persecution ended, a flourishing cult of martyrs emerged in Egypt. “Despite the opposition of Athanasius, the custom spread of exhibiting mummified martyrs on stands for veneration. Around the year 600, a network of martyrs’ sanctuaries covered the country. As the criticism of Shenute of Athribia shows, the feast days of the martyrs were very popular festivals.”139 The increasing veneration of martyrs led to the creation of a body of literature of legends about martyrs, which portrayed them as “true victor and friend of God to whom one could commit oneself in veneration.”140 The legends were patterned on the genuine acts of martyrs and followed the general form of Greek hagiographies. Coptic passions are more uniform.141 But in the true fashion of stories of martyrdom, they usually contain aspects of hyperbole that reflect the admiration of the writers.

136 Ibid.
137 Ibid.
138 Ibid., 28.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
Today, the topic of martyrdom is still not far from the modern Copt’s psyche. Meinardus claims that it is “impossible to list all of the violent actions of the militant Islamists against their countrymen. According to the statistics of the Center for Egyptian Human Rights, there have been 561 incidents of violence against the Copts since 1994.”¹⁴² This does not include those acts that were not reported. The Egyptian government has often failed to prevent, investigate, or prosecute crimes against minorities such as Copts. They have also failed to protect Christians targeted for kidnapping and extortion. Often, police do not even respond to reports of such crimes.¹⁴³ Considering the tendency for Coptic women to be targeted for kidnappings, martyrdom because of one’s belief is not just an issue for Coptic women. But the stories of historical female martyrs are surely among some of the most awe-inspiring in light of Coptic women’s experiences.

The patterns in the stories of these female martyrs are often similar. One such pattern can be seen in the story of Catherine, the daughter of King Costus. When she heard that Emperor Maxentius was forcing Christians to sacrifice to idols in Alexandria, she left the comfort of her palace and boldly entered the emperor’s presence to attempt to remedy the situation. She greeted the emperor with confidence and argued at length with him to convince him of the one true God. Maxentius sent for masters of logic and rhetoric to come argue with Catherine, but Catherine prayed to God, and she was assured by an angel that she would convert them. Indeed, she did convert them, and when they told the emperor that they would be converted to Christ if they didn’t hear an argument better than Catherine’s, he sent them to their own fate of martyrdom. Catherine, after admonishing the men as they went to their deaths, was locked up by the emperor and held without food for twelve days.¹⁴⁴

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¹⁴² Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 28.
¹⁴⁴ de Voragine, Ryan, and Duffy, 721–25.
Later, the queen herself rushed to see Catherine in her cell, and upon seeing angels tending to Catherine and providing her with food, heard the gospel preached by her and was also converted. Furthermore, the captain of the guard and two hundred of his soldiers were converted because of Catherine. Even the emperor’s servants were eventually converted. This made the emperor furious, and he gave Catherine a choice between torture or conversion. She chose torture but was subsequently beheaded when the emperor had no patience left for her enduring faith. According to legend, when Catherine was beheaded “milk flowed from her body instead of blood, and angels took up the body and carried it from that place a twenty-days’ journey to Mount Sinai, where they gave it honorable burial. (An oil still issues continuously from her bones and mends the limbs of all who are weak.)”145 This is a good example of the miraculous claims associated with stories about martyrs, and these types of claims reappear often in various hagiographies.

Catherine’s story has relatives in stories like Euphemia, the daughter of a senator under the reign of Diocletian who also heard about the torture and persecution of Christians and was righteously angry. She boldly approached a judge, Priscus, and proclaimed her faith in Christ to him. Her story shares a number of things with Catherine’s, including her noble birth, her willingness to proclaim Christ in public, her defense of other Christians, and her imprisonment before her ultimate martyrdom. Side characters are also converted because of Euphemia just as they were in Catherine’s story, sometimes simply by coming near her. However, Euphemia does not argue at length using logic as Catherine did. Also, her story shares other aspects of many martyrdom stories, including the miraculous survival of varied tortures and attempts on her life. One attempt involved a wheel of death with spokes of fiery coals, and another a pit of beasts who

145 de Voragine, Ryan, and Duffy, 721–25.
refused to eat her. Eventually she was killed by a servant of Priscus who drove a sword into her side.\textsuperscript{146}

4) Virgins

One aspect of Euphemia’s story puts her in another prominent category for female saints: virgins. At one point in Euphemia’s story, Priscus tries to rape her but is paralyzed before he is able to lay a hand on her. He believed he was under a spell of some kind, but the reader knows that God has come to Euphemia’s defense after she resisted his advances “manfully.”\textsuperscript{147} Virgin saints are a category of female saints that are totally unique from male saints, because their commitment to remain chaste is emphasized above all. In some cases, God protects the woman from any compromise of her chastity, as with Euphemia. In others, the saint goes to drastic lengths to preserve her virginity, even choosing death rather than allowing herself to be taken advantage of by the man in the story.

One such saint is Saint Bertanoba. Though her story is not as widely known as that of Catherine, it is an excellent example of the prototypical virgin-saint hagiography. Bertanoba was a nun, as are many of the widely venerated virgin saints. Her beauty attracted the attention of a pagan king who kidnapped her and forced her to marry him. On their wedding night before the marriage was consummated, Bertanoba cleverly convinced the king to allow her to have personal time in her chambers to “beautify” herself, but instead she prayed to God, and threw herself into the fire to be killed. Febe Armanios remarks on the shocking implications of such stories: “Remarkably, in the context of a Church and a Christian tradition which forbids suicide and considers it a mortal sin, the author, a Coptic priest, explicitly rejects the idea that this was an act of suicide. According to him, Bertanoba's death was a high degree of divine love: the protection of one's chastity.”\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 567–9.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 568.
\textsuperscript{148} Armanios, The Virtuous Woman, 120.
Another example of the harrowing struggle to protect one’s chastity is Anastasia. Anastasia, like many of the saints explored so far, came from a noble family. She was given in marriage against her will and feigned sickness in order to preserve her chastity after marriage. When her husband discovered that she had been sneaking out to visit the Christians in prison, he kept her confined without food, hoping her death would allow him to live in luxury. Eventually, however, it was the husband who died, and Anastasia was set free and remained chaste. Her story continues with many attempts at marriage and consummation by various prefects who could not convince her to sacrifice to the gods, and who forcefully married her but could not get her to consummate the marriage. One prefect was struck blind when he attempted to have sex with Anastasia. Another had her thrown in prison when she would not give him her money. Eventually Anastasia was imprisoned and then banished to the island of Palmaria along with other Christians, where she was burned alive at the stake.  

Anastasia’s story is indeed a martyrdom, but her story emphasizes her chastity more than any miraculous happenings usually associated with martyrs’ hagiographies. Her story even emphasizes the chastity of her maids, Agapete, Theonia, and Irene, who were almost raped by a prefect, but God confused his senses so that his attempt failed. When he ordered that the women be brought before him and stripped, “it turned out that their clothing clung so tightly to their bodies that no one could take it off.” Eventually these three virgins were also crowned with martyrdom. The theme of chastity is the most heavily emphasized theme in connection with Saint Anastasia.

Other virgin saints have simpler stories, but ones that still revolve around and glorify the preservation of chastity. Saint Syncletica is considered the “mother of Christian nuns,” “the role model for those women who voluntarily relinquished this world to dedicate their lives to God.”

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149 de Voragine, Ryan, and Duffy, 43–44.
150 Ibid.
151 Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 47.
She was the daughter of aristocrats in Alexandria and lived in fear of God her entire life. When her parents died, she left her life of nobility, distributed all of her possessions among the poor, and withdrew to the desert. There she remained a virgin for the rest of her life, and lived among other nuns, who learned the practices of asceticism from her until she died around the age of eighty.\textsuperscript{152}

The stories of virgin saints often blur the lines of other categories, such as martyrs (like Euphemia and Anastasia) and ascetics or desert mothers (like Syncletica). But the emphasis on virginity shows the high importance placed on chastity for female saints. Authors of hagiographies often go to great lengths to demonstrate the chastity and subsequent blamelessness of female saints even in the face of temptation or sexual violence. For Coptic women still today, chastity is a high virtue, and female saints are often used as exemplars of female behavior and devotion. Armanios comments on the increasing tendency of Coptic culture to exalt the female virgin-saint, and its effect on the construction of sexuality in the Coptic community. Some, including former Pope Shenouda III, have used the Virgin Mary herself as an example of what a virtuous woman should strive to attain.\textsuperscript{153} This of course presents a huge problem for Coptic women, who at once are told to strive for the perfection of virginity, and also to make marriage and motherhood a primary goal.

5) \textit{Mothers}

This conundrum of seeking the goods of marriage and family but also exalting the state of virginity is softened in the study of mother-saints. The category of mothers is one that is obviously unique to female saints. These women are honored not only for their personal sacrifice (most of them are martyrs) but for their dedication of their children to God, regardless of the consequences. This way, they somehow attain the epitome of dual roles of martyr and mother, which garners them great

\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 48.
\textsuperscript{153} Armanios, “The ‘Virtuous Woman”
respect from Christians and makes them ideal models for a certain prototype of Christian female behavior.

They are also reminiscent of the most revered of Coptic saints, the Virgin Mary, who is above all a mother. Mary’s life was one of great sacrifice, for though she was not herself a martyr, she patiently endured the torture and death of her son in order to honor God’s plans. The mother-saints share this experience with Mary, as many of them witnessed their children become martyrs. Mary’s pain in becoming a mother is also acknowledged in Coptic liturgy which refers to her labor pains. For this reason, the Coptic Church does not adhere to a painless delivery as the Roman Catholic Church does. Not only Mary’s honor at being the mother of Jesus, but also her pain because of her motherhood, are a deeply important part of her story for Copts.

Mary’s importance in Coptic spirituality may give clues to why the mother-saints are a category of their own. While Mary is important also in other branches of Christianity, Copts have historically seen her as a mediatrix between Christians and Muslims, giving her a political significance on top of her spiritual one. *Theotokia*, poetry praising Mary, is a large part of Coptic liturgy. The many names and symbols used by Copts to describe Mary often have motherly associations, or they allude to her perpetual virginity. Names like the common *Theotokos* (“God-bearer”), *al-mustafiya* (“chosen one”) the tent of the congregation, the true ark of the covenant, the pure golden vessel of the hidden manna, and the burning bush all allude to her motherhood and her role of carrying the divine presence of Jesus. Names like the perpetual virgin, the mistress, and Aaron’s rod (which yields blossoms and almonds) all allude to her virginity. She is also identified with the ladder of Jacob, the great mountain, Ezekiel’s gate, the swift cloud upon which the Lord rides, and the New Jerusalem.

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155 Ibid., 6.
Jan Pelikan argues that Mary’s importance is oftentimes highly cultural. The fact that she is actually mentioned very seldom in the New Testament forces her venerated to look for her imagery in the Old Testament as well, “searching through the ancient Scriptures of Israel for prophecies and parallels, topics and typologies, that would enrich and amplify the tiny sheaf of data from the Gospels...”

Regardless of the small amount of real data in the New Testament, Mary’s importance as the mother of Jesus has inspired an enormous amount of literature and devotion throughout Christendom. The Coptic Church in particular has vastly more data about Mary than does the Bible, including her biography and the nature of her death. The power of this particular mother’s story is related to the power of the saints that followed her, and are identified firstly as mothers in their hagiographies.

One of the more graphic and also tragic mother-saint stories is that of Sophia and her three daughters, Faith, Hope, and Charity. Sophia brought her daughters up to fear God, and regularly preached the gospel to other women. Because of the number of women she converted, Sophia and her daughters were charged before the Roman emperor, Hadrian. Faith was punished first by being beaten by soldiers and having her breasts torn off. According to the story, witnesses saw milk flowing from her wounds. She was then put on a hot gridiron but was unharmed. Then she was put in a frying pan with hot oil, and finally was beheaded. Hope was then punished by being put into a hot cauldron of pitch, wax, and resin, and was finally killed with a sword. Then Charity was stretched on a rack until her joints were pulled apart, beaten with clubs, and scourged with lashes. She was then thrown into a fiery furnace but was unharmed by the flames. Finally, she was killed by stabbing. Through all this horror, Sophia encouraged her daughters to remain steadfast and not succumb to sacrificing to idols. Finally, she buried her daughters and, “lying down on the grave,

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said: ‘Dearest daughters, my desire is to be with you.’ So, she breathed her last in peace, and those present buried Saint Sophia with her beloved children. She had borne the sufferings of each of them and therefore was more than a martyr.”

Such graphic descriptions are not uncommon in martyr hagiographies.

Other mother-saints experienced the martyrdom of their children, like Dulagi and Rebecca. Rebecca’s story is very similar to Sophia’s. She and her five children were martyred under the Diocletian persecutions. Rebecca watched each of her five children be tortured and killed, the last of whom was slaughtered upon her lap. She was finally beheaded. One of the more popular pilgrimages in Egypt takes followers to the Church of Saint Rebecca at Sunbat, which holds relics of Rebecca and her children, Agathon, Peter, John, Amon, and Amona.

The awe-inspiring sacrifice of these mother-saints may exemplify the power of female saints in the Coptic tradition. The cultural mores of Coptic women that emphasize the virtues of marriage and motherhood, and also those of religious devotion, chastity, and prayer, can be easily identified in the stories of female saints. The mother-saints represent a tightrope many Coptic women will walk as they strive to maintain their spirituality and their devotion to family. These powerful figures and their harrowing stories represent the enormous sacrifices of both martyrs and mothers.

Conclusions

Many of the aforementioned saints are either Egyptian or spent part of their lives in Egypt. They are not only historical and religious figures for Coptic women—they are their forerunners and spiritual ancestors of their faith. The discipline and simplicity of the ascetics, the redemption and humility of the sinners, the bold sacrifice of the martyrs, the singular focus of the virgins, and the

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158 de Voragine, Ryan, and Duffy, 185–6.
159 Meinardus, Coptic Saints, 50.
strength and sacrifice of the mothers are all directly relatable in some way to the experience of Coptic women today. The role of saints is very important in the Coptic tradition, and yet, as we have seen, the experience of women is marginalized or silenced within the study of Coptic history and sainthood. The in-depth interviews with Coptic women about their saints will begin a process of filling this gap in research and help scholars to begin to understand how Coptic women themselves experience the saints of their own gender.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Methods and Philosophy

This study was conducted using the qualitative method, and with an explicitly feminist lens. The feminist perspective of my research is significant in that it affects the way I approach respondents. Some feminist researchers have asserted that the qualitative method is essential for a feminist approach, since the quantitative method have a limiting affect and are associated with androcentric research and literature. However, Gayle Letherby asserts that it is too simplistic to label qualitative methods “feminist”, and quantitative methods “anti-feminist” “androcentric” important matter is how the method is used.¹⁶⁰

In fact, the interview model is historically masculine, with the interviewer posited as an aloof expert and the respondent as a passive and subordinate participant. In order to remedy this unequal relationship, researchers concerned with using a feminist approach should focus on ensuring “mutual interaction” with respondents. Interviews should be loosely structured, and interviewers should openly answer questions from respondents and talk about themselves and their relation to the research.¹⁶¹ As Gayle Letherby notes, “Letting women speak for themselves and (in part at least) set the research agenda is likely to produce work which can be used by women to challenge stereotypes, oppression and exploitation.”¹⁶²

According to Letherby, feminist research can be distinguished from non-feminist research “by the questions feminists ask, the location of the researcher within the process of research and within theorizing, and the intended purpose of the work produced.”¹⁶³ With regard to the questions asked, I will be interviewing respondents using open-ended interview questions meant to guide the

¹⁶¹ Letherby, 83.
¹⁶² Letherby, 85.
¹⁶³ Letherby, 5.
conversation but that allow respondents to control the conversation. This is important, especially because the interview questions will be of a personal nature. The goal is to reveal “what is going on in women’s lives... and to undertake research in a way that is non-exploitative.”164 In addition, participants were each read relatively less known stories of female saints and asked to respond in any way they would like, further eliciting responses about lesser known saints and allowing women to respond in their own ways.

With regard to the location of the researcher, I acknowledge that I am part of the group of women I intend to study within this research project. As stated in my introduction, I use the personal “I” because it is impossible to separate myself from my research. During my interviews, it is much less possible. For this reason, I do not refrain from answering personal questions posed by respondents, and sometimes I even share my own experiences or stories about female saints to help break the ice and prompt respondents to share their own experiences when necessary. The idea that I could remain cool, professional, and aloof during the process of interviewing women about personal and intimate parts of their life is unrealistic. Letherby addresses this as well:

Historically, research has been presented as orderly, coherent, and clean: as hygienic...Yet all research is ideological because no one can separate themselves from the world from their values and opinions, from books they read, from the people they have spoken to and so on. Thus, the product cannot be separated from the means of production and feminists not only acknowledge but celebrate.165

In other words, feminist research must not be afraid of the “messiness” of research with human participants.166

With regard to the intended outcome of my work, I hope to begin unearthing Coptic female experiences relative to their religion and figures of faith, especially as regards their own gendered position within the Coptic church is important because it is a perspective that has been ignored.

164 Letherby, 6.
165 Letherby, 6.
166 Letherby, 6.
Too often, research about women in regards to religion treats women’s concerns and experiences as “not male” and therefore as “other,” or deviant.\textsuperscript{167} Using qualitative methods with a feminist lens will allow the research to give respondents a voice rather than to serve the purposes of the researcher.

**Process**

For the qualitative portion of the study, I selected twenty-one Coptic Egyptian women living in Southern California and twenty-one Coptic Egyptian women living in Egypt and asked them to participate in the interview process. Each woman signed a release form granting the researcher permission to conduct the interviews, record them using an audio recorder, and use the information in her dissertation. Each participant’s name has been changed in the study in order to provide privacy and anonymity, and any materials with participant names or contact information will be destroyed following the completion of the study. Instead of using names as identifiers, each participant was asked to “name” their interview in some way. Therefore, each interview is titled with a phrase of the participant’s choosing, by which they will be identified in the results/discussion section. Participants will have the opportunity to have a copy of the study given to them upon its completion, and will be contact information for the researcher as well as for the faculty adviser.

Once I gained permission from the women to participate in the study, I gave each woman a short questionnaire to ascertain the basic demographic information, including age, geographical location, gender, race, language, level of education, birthplace, and which part of Christianity she identifies with.\textsuperscript{168} Following the demographic questions, I conducted extensive interviews with

\textsuperscript{167} Letherby, 6.
\textsuperscript{168} See Appendix A and B (Part 1) of this dissertation for demographic charts and the list of questions.
Each interview lasted between one and two hour. United States-based interviews were done in person and Egypt-based interviews were conducted using video chat.

The interview questions that I developed pertained to the women’s knowledge, understanding, and emotional or intellectual responses to Coptic female saints. The questions also assessed gaps in their knowledge, compared to the researcher’s information about female Coptic saints. The general categories of questions included the importance of Coptic saints to each woman; the saints they relate to most and why; their thoughts on the tradition of sainthood; Coptic saints in childhood; how each woman applies knowledge of Coptic saints to their own lives; thoughts on women’s positions in Coptic, American, and Egyptian society today, and the future for Coptic women.

Each woman was also read a random story of a female saint and asked to react to it, allowing me to observe the process of listening and responding to these important stories in real time as well as assessing any gaps in knowledge between women’s understanding of the saints and their “official” hagiographies. The purpose of this is to assess the value of having the Coptic church change its method of teaching about female saints or of placing more emphasis on female saints that women find especially relatable or spiritually important after they have learned about them. There are also certain female saints, such as Apollinaria, who are recognized as saints by the Orthodox church, but not by the Coptic church. Understanding Coptic women’s connection with such women is important for suggesting future directions in the church and religious education.

I found the interview participants through the recommendation of our local Coptic priest Fr. Mina Girgis, who knew of women in Coptic churches throughout Southern California who might possibly be willing to participate. Egyptian participants were interviewed via video chat technology while Southern California participants were interviewed face to face. I recorded each interview.

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169 See Appendix B (Part 5 and 6) of this dissertation for the transcriptions of each interview.
then transcribed it word for word, then analyzed each one individually for any patterns or commonalities between the women that could point to widespread experiences among Coptic women.

**Focus**

This study focuses narrowly on the qualitative experiences of Egyptian Coptic women living in Southern California and Egypt. Because of the limited scope of this study, its results will not be generalizable to the entire population, but will instead provide a starting point for more research into this topic. For Southern California participants, in addition to being mainly Egyptian and living in Southern California, each woman interviewed was under the age of 44 except one, who was between the ages of 45 and 54. The rest of the participants were almost evenly split among the age groups of 18-24, 25-34, and 35-44. Most participants were college-educated and most were born in Egypt or the United States, with a few participants born in other non-US nations.

For Egyptian participants, the average age was only slightly older, with 80% of participants under the age of 44. The bulk of participants (around three fourths) were between the ages of 25 and 44. Two participants were over the age of 65 (whereas no US participant was) making these results only slightly more generalizable in terms of age. Similar to the US group, most were college educated with the vast majority receiving a bachelor’s degree. Lastly, 100% of participants were female, Coptic Orthodox, and spoke either English, Arabic, or a mix of both languages. Because of the specific focus of this study, the mix of research participants is one limitation of this research as it prevents results from being generalizable outside of this specific group and geographical location.

The saints discussed during the interviews depended on the relative importance of specific saints to the women interviewed, as well as the amount of information available about certain female saints, since some saints have very little information available, especially in English or
published and widely available outside of Egypt. I thus focused on those saints who were considered important to the women; those saints to whom women related only a little I examined to a lesser extent, and only to determine the reason for this difference in importance. Therefore, each interview was structured, yet different and unique based on the women’s individual responses and interests.

During the interview process, it was also my goal to find the limits of the participants’ knowledge of female Egyptian saints in general in order to understand how well integrated these saints are in the daily lives and religious education of Coptic women. Overall, the goal was to find parallels or differences between official information and research about female Coptic saints and the experiences of Coptic women in relation to these saints. The personal knowledge and experiences of the women interviewed will be treated as a new, original body of data to support or challenge existing research surrounding the topic of Coptic women and Egyptian female saints.

The Claremont Graduate University Institutional Review Board has reviewed this study and considered it exempt from IRB approval number for this study is 3461 (see appendix B part 2, 3 and 4).
Chapter 4: Results

My research questions at the beginning of this study were as follows: How do Coptic women in Egypt and women in the United States, specifically in California, relate to and understand the female saints in their tradition? How do Coptic women’s knowledge of and relationship with female saints shed light on Coptic female experiences within the church, especially as it relates to gender roles and equality? and What are Coptic women’s perceptions regarding the church’s teaching about Coptic female saints and women in general? I hypothesized that female respondents would express beliefs, opinions, or knowledge that a) diverged from official Coptic teaching about female saints or the female gender, b) were consistent with official Coptic teaching about female saints or the female gender, or c) reflected the importance of feminism as an increasingly influential ideology in Egypt and in the Coptic diaspora.

The results of the interviews reflected each of these hypotheses at various turns, with some common patterns that show increasing divergence of Coptic Egyptian women living in the U.S. from Coptic teachings about gender, as well as the influence of feminism expressed as a desire to see more equality between men and women in the church, or frustration at the lack of focus on female saints as compared to male saints. While this was the most common tendency in the U.S.-based interviews, a few U.S.-based women consistently expressed beliefs or opinions consistent with official Coptic teaching about gender roles and had few or no qualms concerning lack of female representation in church teaching or regarding male/female equality in the church.

Results from the Egypt-based interviews also reflected each hypothesis in some respects, with Egypt-based women sometimes expressing frustration with the lack of representation or inclusion of Coptic women in the church. However, this was less pronounced than in the U.S.-based interviews, with many women expressing optimism about positive changes already occurring in the church and in Egyptian society to support equality and representation. Despite this optimism,
respondents consistently called for more equality or representation in the church with several specifically referencing the Revolution as a positive influence on gender equality, confirming that feminism or feminist-inspired viewpoints are impacting how women view their roles, positions, and history in the Coptic church, although not to the extent of California-based women.

The following results will be split into U.S.-based interviews and Egypt-based interviews. Each of these categories will have three main foci drawn from interview responses. Results from each group of respondents will focus on the following broad categories: Coptic Saints, Coptic Women, and Coptic Church and Society. Each of these categories will be broken down into subcategories that best demonstrate the most common themes from the interviews related to the respondents’ knowledge of, experience with, and opinions about Coptic female saints, Coptic women today, and the Coptic Church as it relates to female saints, gender equality, and respondents’ recommendations for the future of the Coptic church as it relates to these topics. Extensive quotes will be used from interviews to expound upon common themes, demonstrate exceptions to those themes, and provide pertinent examples to shed light upon generalizations or patterns. When quotes are used, participants will be identified in parentheses after their quote according to the name they gave their own interview.

**U.S.-Based Interviews**

*First: Coptic Saints*

The general understanding and relation to Coptic saints found in the interviews was consistent with research showing the primary importance of saints within the Coptic religion. When asked about the importance of saints to the respondents as Coptic Christians, participants consistently remarked on the centrality of saints to their faith. Of the 21 U.S. participants, 14 said the saints were “very important” to them personally. Three others said the saints were “extremely,” “most,” or “fairly”
important. Three simply stated they were important, and one participant answered by commenting on the function of the saints in her life.

When asked what the tradition of sainthood means to them personally, participants varied in their answers with some key commonalities. Some provided a definition of sainthood as they understand it. For example: “Sainthood is the ultimate expression of Christian life; it is the person who has strived more towards the 'holiness without which no one shall see God.' It is what we as Christians are called to be. As such, the saints are not a separate category of human beings, but are very relatable, down-to-earth persons whose main focus was on God, through whom they related to the whole world, during their mortal lives and beyond” (Female Saints and Their Relevance in the Coptic Church Today).

Other participants answered the question by commenting on the function of saints in the Coptic tradition, such as the following: “The tradition of sainthood is alive in all the sacramental churches. It gives us a connection to the victorious church and to those who came before us in a way that Biblical teaching on its own cannot. It helps us to identify with a people who came before us and reached the ultimate goal” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith). Consistent patterns in responses included comments about the saint’s importance in Coptic tradition, their holy lives, and the importance of saints as role models or moral influences on modern Christians.

**General Knowledge of Female Saints.** The 21 U.S. participants expressed varying levels of knowledge of female saints, with many remarking that they know more about male saints than female saints. When asked how many female Coptic Saints they were aware of, two participants said they knew “a few;” six participants said they knew “many” or “a lot;” two said they knew between five and ten Coptic female saints; six said they knew between ten and 20; one said she knew between 20 and 30; three said they knew of over 30 Coptic female saints; and one did not
comment. When asked to rate their knowledge of female Coptic saints on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledge), the majority of respondents (15) rated themselves at a 5 or below and six women rated themselves at a six or higher. Specifically, two women rated their knowledge at a “2,” three rated themselves at a “3,” five women chose “4,” five women chose “5,” one woman chose “6,” three women chose “7,” one woman chose “8” and one chose “9.” The mean rating in terms of knowledge of female saints was 4.85. When asked to list the Coptic female saints, they knew off the top of their head, respondents listed between three and fourteen saints. The mean number of saints listed among the group was approximately 7 (7.24).

Reactions to the randomly chosen stories of female saints confirmed the limited knowledge of more obscure Coptic female saints among participants. Of the 21 participants, only five had previously heard the story read to them, and 16 had never heard of the saint in question. Of those 16, every participant expressed interest in learning more about the saint and provided specific ways in which she could apply the saint’s story to her life or to an understanding of her faith. For example, when read the story of Saint Theodora one participant remarked, “I can apply this story by knowing that beauty is not an important measure of who we are and to stay confident in my faith no matter what temptations approach me in my daily life” (The Power of Women in the Coptic Church). When participants were asked where they would like to gain knowledge about the saints they had never heard of previously, the most common response was in church.

In terms of the actual names mentioned by the participants, responses showed varying levels of awareness of different types of female saints (i.e. martyrs, ascetics, nuns) as well as varying levels of awareness of which female saints are Coptic (Egyptian) and which are not. When the responses for the request to list some female Coptic saints off the top of their heads are taken together, 154 total responses were recorded, and 32 different women in total were listed. Of this list, only twelve of the women were Egyptian; the other 20 were non-Egyptian female saints.
Among the total 32 women listed, twelve were martyrs, six were mothers, four were ascetics (including female monks), three were nuns, two were sinners, one was a virgin, three were unknown, and one was a category of its own: Mary, the *Theotokos*. Tamav Irini was also listed quite often, though she is not a canonical saint. Many of the participants’ responses throughout the interviews mentioned her however and spoke of her as if she is canonical; therefore, she will be treated as such for the purposes of clarity within this paper.

As can be inferred from the 154 responses with only 32 unique names, there was significant overlap between respondents, with many saints listed more than once. Whereas martyrs made up 37.5% of the 32 unique names, martyrs were mentioned a total of 71 times of the 154 responses, or 46.1%, showing the most significant amount of overlap among responses. While only four separate ascetic saints were mentioned, they were mentioned 18 different times, or 11.7% of the total responses. However, if nuns are included in the category of ascetics, it brings the total percentage of mentions to 25.3%, which would make ascetics the second largest category in terms of total mentions, coming in just behind martyrs. Mothers made up 18.75% of the 32 names but were only mentioned 11 times (7.1% of 154, showing significantly less overlap). St. Mary was also mentioned 11 times. Two sinners, St. Mary of Egypt and Mary Magdalene, were mentioned 18 times (11.7% total). Overall, in terms of saints listed off the top of their heads, respondents’ answers showed the greatest awareness of martyrs and ascetics.

The most common female saint in respondent’s lists was Demiana, a Coptic martyr. She was named in their responses by 18 women. Saint Marina was listed by 16 women, Saint Verena by 15, Saint Mary of Egypt by 15, Saint Mary *Theotokos* by 11, Saint Youstina by nine, Marina the Monk by nine, Tamav Irini by eight, Saint Barbara by eight, and Saint Mohrail by six. The rest of the women listed were mentioned four times or less.
Participants were then asked which female saint or saints they relate to the most. A total of nine saints were listed by the 21 participants, with some participants listing several names; five of the saints mentioned were Egyptian, and four were not. The two most common answers were Saint Mary of Egypt (5) and Saint Mary Theotokos (5), followed by Marina (4), Verena and Demiana (3), Mohrail and Tamav Irini (2), and finally Monica and Helena (1). Again, martyrs were the most commonly mentioned category of saint with nine total mentions (Marina, Mohrail, and Demiana).

Participants were then asked to list the most important saints (male and female) in the Coptic tradition. The answers were consistent with participants’ description of their greater knowledge of male saints than of females. They were also consistent with many later responses from women that revealed a frustration with the greater importance placed upon male saints than upon females. There were 72 total responses, with 26 unique names among them. Of these 26 names, 20 were male and only six were female.

Male saints were mentioned a total of 50 times, with Mina, George, Mark, and Kyrillos the most commonly listed ones. Women were listed a total of 22 times, with Saint Mary Theotokos the most common (8 mentions), followed by Demiana (6), Verena (4), Tamav Irini (2), Marina (1) and Regula (1). Three of the six of women listed as being most important in the Coptic tradition were Egyptian (Demiana, Verena, and Tamav Irini). Half of the perceived most important women were martyrs as well; martyrs were mentioned a total of eight times, along with Saint Mary Theotokos.

When asked specifically about the most important female saints, only five named were mentioned: Mary Theotokos (13 mentions), Demiana (6), Verena (2), Tamav Irini (1) and Dolagy (1).

Overall, participants showed varying levels of knowledge of Coptic female saints, with many including non-Egyptian saints as Coptic saints in their responses. Martyrs appeared the most in these list-based responses, consistent with martyr’s overall representation among male and female saints. There were several female saints who were mentioned more often than others and
that appeared in all three questions where participants were asked to list names of saints: Demiana, Marina, Verena, Saint Mary of Egypt, Saint Mary Theotokos, Tamav Irini, and Mohrail. Of these seven women, only Marina and Saint Mary are not Egyptian—however, they are both important figures in Coptic Orthodoxy. Saint Mary Theotokos holds a special place of importance, with many remarking on her centrality in the Coptic faith regardless of her ethnicity. One respondent commented on Mary’s ability to transcend these barriers: “Growing up, I was not aware of the distinction between Coptic and non-Coptic women saints. Some of my favorite female saints are the Virgin Mary, Saint Monica and Saint Rita, none of whom are actually Coptic in origin! However, the Virgin Mary is very highly revered in the Coptic church, so she transcends all church differences and ethnicities” (Female Saints and Their Relevance in the Coptic Church Today).

This relative lack of awareness of the distinction between Coptic and non-Coptic saints was common among participants. For this reason, distinctions between Egyptian and non-Egyptian saints were not addressed directly in the interviews, instead deferring to the subjective experience and knowledge of the participants. The continual mention of Mary throughout the interviews as also common. Despite other saints, such as Demiana, being mentioned more in list-based questions than Mary, Mary’s name was brought up in other areas of the interviews the most often, usually with a sense of reverence or closeness distinct from other saints. One participant remarked, “She is literally my mother. I tend to ask for her help all the time” (Female Saints Need More Exposure).

**Function and Characteristics of Female Saints.** Participants named many characteristics of female saints when discussing the importance of the meaning of sainthood in general. The most common characteristics or attributes mentioned by participants were strength, love, purity, faith, courage, repentance, devotion, patience, and a strong prayer life. Some other less common attributes included assertiveness and leadership (both mentioned three times), especially in relation to Demiana, who led forty of her friends to a convent in the desert and finally to martyrdom. One
participant included “defiance of power structures: whether the patriarchy, societal expectations (like marriage) or even governmental authority” as a main attribute of female saints (Female Saints and Their Relevance in the Coptic Church Today).

Strength was the most common descriptive attribute given for female saints and was addressed specifically later in the interview. In their responses, participants gave many specific examples of how Coptic female saints displayed strength. Many mentioned martyrdoms specifically: “Religious strength is not measured physically but through their faith. There are a lot of female Coptic Orthodox martyrs that stayed very strong in their faith, lived through persecution until beheaded. There are others who lived through the devil's temptations and allowed that to bring them closer to God” (Female Egyptian Saints Light). Others brought up comparisons to male saints directly or indirectly, such as one participant who mentioned a “male dominated culture” as evidence of female saints’ strength (My Identity is Christ) or others who lamented at the lack of attention on female strength: “They are definitely strong enough, though we do not give them enough attention in our society” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith).

Participants often talked about saints in terms of their function, either for the church or in their personal lives. The most common function of saints mentioned was as role models or moral/spiritual examples. For example: “They are the ultimate examples of what it is like to ‘fight the good fight’ and to struggle on Earth for the Love of Christ in order to inherit His heavenly kingdom. Saints give us a practical application of what Jesus Christ Himself taught us to do” (Fight the Good Fight). When asked if a particular saint acted as a role model for them, 14 participants had specific examples of saints they looked up to or saw as a role model, and six others said they saw saints as role models but could not think of a particular name. Only one participant answered no. Of those that provided specific names, five participants mentioned only male saints; eight mentioned only female saints; and two mentioned both male and female saints as role models.
Saint Mary *Theotokos* was mentioned the most, followed by Verena; other women mentioned include Demiana, Takla, Mary of Egypt, Mohrail, and Tamav Irini. Many of the examples included attributes of saints that the participants wished to imitate. For example: “Of course, St. Mary in her purity. I also admire St. Anthony’s determination and wisdom” (My Identity is Christ). One description of Demiana was particularly specific: “I have chosen St. Demiana as my role model due to her living a chaste life, which is something that I hold as a model for myself. Also, her leadership over 40 other virgins is very admirable as I strive to also lead my peers. Furthermore, she was not afraid to speak out against things that were wrong. I aspire to have her assertiveness” (Women from Rocks).

Many responses expressed a sense of awe at female saints’ faith or strength, and a desire to model their lives after them. Demiana was frequently mentioned in this regard, such as in the following response: “St. Demiana, her story fascinates me. She was the daughter of a wealthy governor and not only she did leave her wealth and prestige to serve the Lord, she was able to convince 40 of her friends to join her. She must have had great conviction in order to do this” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith). Some talked specifically about saints’ example of what it means to be a woman. For example, Saint Mary was called “a great representation of what a female should be like. I look up to her as a role model and hope one day I can be half of the person she was” (It is Time for a Change).

Several participants mentioned the possibility of becoming saints themselves as a personal aspiration. For example: “Sainthood is the path of those who are genuinely pursuing the Lord. It is a path I personally hope to reach” (Eventful). The second most common function was related to saints’ intercession on behalf of Christians who pray to them. Other less common functions mentioned included the ability to help one overcome fears, inspiration, and guidance in daily life.
One participant stated, “Saints are an inspiration to me. Their stories give me hope and often they light the way for me when I feel lost” (Eventful).

Participants also commonly expressed a sense of intimacy, friendship, or commonality with female saints. Some said they related most to a certain saint because they learned of her when they were the same age as the saint at their death. Others related to saints’ characteristics. For example: “St. Marina, she is persistent, and so am I. I tend to be persistent about the things I truly want. If I put my mind to it, I will do it” (Female Saints Need More Exposure). The description of female saints as friends was very common. One participant was named after a female saint: “Growing up my mom told me this saint is my best friend and that I should talk to her every day” (Eventful). Another described saints as “friends in Heaven. I don’t need to wait for heaven to meet them, but I can know them and befriend them here on earth. Even if I can’t see them, I can feel their support and love” (The Spiritual Wheel).

This sense of saints as present in one’s personal life carried over into other questions, including the question “Do you have any personal experiences with saints?” In total, 14 of the 21 participants said they had personal experiences with saints at some point in their lives; six said no, and one was unsure. Of those who shared specific stories, all were about a female saint. Some women’s experiences were associated with their physical health, such as the following: “St Mary. When I was going in for an operation, I asked for her blessing. But I had a complication in the surgery, and everything was going wrong. So, I am sure it was she who made everything easy at the end” (Coptic Female Saints in Our Lives). Other responses dealt with spiritual healing or correction: “Yes, I was under masturbation for a long time and then pornography…Day after day, month after month, year after year, I called Mary of Egypt and asked her to help me to stop that and be a good person…I felt her power in my life and after a year I stopped it and I feel that I have more peace, more self-confidence, more active brain and more love for the life that I live. I have
pictures of her hanging in my room to help me feel her presence and feel her support” (History Repeats Itself). Two participants reported sightings of saints; one reported seeing Saint Mohrail as a child (The Spiritual Wheel), and other reported seeing Saint Mary Theotokos “as a dove in the Barstow monastery” as well as Mary Magdalene and Mary of Egypt in her dreams (Love). Two participants shared family members’ experiences of healing or miracles associated with Tamav Irini during her life.

The last area in which the centrality of saints to modern life emerged was when participants compared modern persecution of Coptic Christians in Egypt with the persecution faced by female martyrs. Several allusions to modern day persecution or martyrdom were mentioned as events that sparked reflection upon the saints. For example: “One has thought repeatedly of such situations due to the persecutions of Christians that have happened in our homeland, Egypt, over the past decades. One would hope to have their courage to testify and face death rather than succumb to fear” (Female Saints and Their Relevance in the Coptic Church Today). Another example was more specific: “They are very steadfast in faith, strong in their personality, tough enough to claim their freedom in a restricted Egyptian society. The women in Botrosia Church in Egypt, they faced the death of the bomb and they became martyrs while attending the liturgy. Victims’ families were very brave to face the death of their children or relatives and they prayed for the murderer to receive forgiveness from God” (History Repeats Itself).

Male versus Female Saints. When asked how often they hear stories of Egyptian female saints in church, participants’ responses were mixed. While seven said they rarely heard stories of Egyptian female saints in church, six said they heard them “often” or “a lot.” Four women specifically said they did not hear stories of female saints as often as stories of male saints. One answered, “once in a while,” another said about once every other week, and another said once a month. One participant did not respond. When asked where these stories typically came from, the overwhelming response
was the Synaxarium. Five women mentioned Sunday school as a source of these stories, one said Bible studies, and another mentioned movies.

Overall, the majority of women said that they heard stories of female Egyptian saints less often than those of men, or rarely at all. Some mentioned the fact that the stories were only heard in Synaxarium readings: “Unfortunately, we do not give as much attention to the female saints as we do the male saints. Perhaps this is because history was written by men and they did not bother to offer a complete history of female saints. Unless I seek it out, I do not hear about Coptic women saints unless it is in the Synaxarium on Sunday morning” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith). Others explained the deficiency by pointing to our current culture rather than the culture responsible for writing church history: “I learned that women saints are not under the same stigma as in today’s world where women are looked down upon or not respected like men are. Coptic female saints are under the radar and sometimes undervalued by youths today, and honestly by myself as well because we do not hear about them as much as we do the big-name saints like Saint Mark, Saint Maurice, or Saint John” (Fight the Good Fight).

When asked how they see the Coptic church honor female saints, responses were mixed with some positive and some negative answers. Some implied equality in how male and female saints are honored: “The church honors their Coptic female saints the same way they commemorate the Coptic male saints” (Female Egyptian Saints Light). Others explicitly saw inequality in how female saints are honored. One participant said that female saints “only get honored if they are well known” (It is Time for a Change). Another mentioned Demiana specifically as the one and only Coptic female saint she sees receiving honor from the church (Love). Still another said, “I don’t feel that there is a special honor for the Coptic women saints in the church. I still feel that they are honored less than the male saints” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith). In terms of how the church actually represents the honor for female saints, the most
common responses were iconography, commemoration in church or on feast days, and naming buildings or children after female saints.

When asked specifically about equality between male and female saints, responses revealed the same tendency to express frustration about lack of female representation in church teachings. When asked if Coptic female saints are considered equal to Coptic male saints, six women said yes. Five said no. Ten answered less directly, saying no but including qualifiers or explanations, usually related to the difference between equality in God’s eyes and man’s eyes. For example: “To God, of course. To the people, no. I am a woman, yet I still do not see the church talking about female saints as much as male saints. They can name the churches after them, but that’s about it” (Female Saints Need More Exposure). Those that answered “no” also mentioned the lack of teaching on female saints in church: “No, and I am speaking based on experience. During all my Sunday school days when I was a student, I found opportunities very rare to learn about Coptic Women Saints, and this remains true today even though the roles switched, and I am now a teacher. Unfortunately, the curriculum and the mindset of the committees that are full of men making these decisions never changes” (It is Time for a Change).

**Second: Coptic Women**

During the course of the interviews, participants shared opinions and beliefs about Coptic women—notably, about their attributes, roles, and their comparison to Coptic female saints. When asked what they believed are characteristics are of Egyptian Coptic women today, responses were widely varied and produced a list of 40 attributes. The most common characteristic used to describe Egyptian Coptic women was “strong,” with 13 women using this word to describe modern Coptic women. Six women described them as “generous.” Other attributes repeated three times or more included faithful, patient, loving, kind and pure. Descriptions of Coptic women as servants, caring, humble, and family-oriented were repeated twice. Other descriptions not repeated varied widely
and included: still, gentle, holy, trustworthy, honorable, lovable, courageous, determined, passionate, forgiving, self-sacrificing, stubborn, persistent, confused, passive, judgmental, abrasive, enduring, strong willed, opinionated, firm, talkative, emotional, simple, smart, fast learning, meek, bold, and fearless.

In the interviews, Coptic female saints as well as Coptic women were consistently described as “strong.” When asked specifically about this strength, participants provided many examples of strength in saints as well as in modern Coptic women. Only five participants gave negative answers regarding the strength of modern Coptic women, and most of these negative answers were given in comparison to female saints. For example: “Not as strong as the women in the past. Now women are taught to be fragile and vulnerable which causes a lot of issues. Women now are faced with a lot of pressure from social media and their families to present a certain image or form and sometimes it is really hard for them to do so. I believe this is one of the main reasons why women struggle so much to have both the Coptic Orthodox life as well as a normal life” (It is Time for a Change).

However, most women responded with very positive views of the strength of Coptic women today, often with specific examples of hardships that modern Coptic women endure as evidence of that strength. For example: “I do believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong. Women are harassed in the world, but Christ helps women remain strong. Mothers who lose their children to persecution, victims of kidnap and rape are just some examples of women who are strong” (The Power of Women in the Coptic Church). Others mentioned modern day persecution: “Yes, we have a lot of recent martyrs and their moms still stand strong and tell us how we love God and say that life doesn’t matter for us, we live our lives for God. Also, these women of faith teach us how to forgive people who hurt us and even pray for the bad people who caused a lot of pain in our lives, which is a very hard discipline to practice for non-believers” (Coptic Saint, Past, Present,
and Future). Others made more general comments about today’s society: “People are getting meaner and more barbaric; women have to endure much more from society than before. They are stronger than ever!” (The Spiritual Wheel).

When asked about how they would have reacted in the same situation as the female saints they said they relate most to, only four women responded confidently that they would have reacted in the same way. For example, one participant said, “I would be confident and also die for Christ” (Love). Nine women said no, and eight women said they were unsure, or “maybe.” The most common reasons that women said they would not have reacted in the same way (i.e. accepting martyrdom, staying chaste, living as a hermit etc.) was that they were not as saintly or moral as the female saint was, and suffered from fear or anxiety, lack of faith, weakness, or because of the impracticality for them.

**Roles of Coptic Women.** When asked about the role of Coptic women in the Coptic church, responses were mixed and often mentioned roles related to marriage or children, domestic activities, caring for others (such as children, the sick, the elderly) within church, and serving as role models to young women. Specifically, 11 women mentioned either marriage or children in their response, six mentioned Sunday school teaching or helping, and four mentioned other domestic activities such as cleaning or cooking. Three women cited the role of Deaconess as a specific role for Coptic women in church.

The roles of motherhood and childbearing were generally talked about in a positive light. For example: “The role of Coptic women in the church is to raise their children to love the Lord and to be the ultimate example in marriage. The symbolism used by the church to depict marriage presents the husband’s role as emulating Christ and the wife’s role as representing His Church. Both are very important roles and crucial for the growth of the Orthodox church” (Fight the Good Fight). Also, “The Coptic mother for example is almost single-handedly responsible for instilling
faith in her children and ingraining in them a love for the church. It is the mother, the woman, not the father who takes on the role of teacher and spiritual guide in the lives of her children” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith).

Participants also shared what they understood or learned about femininity or being a woman from the examples of female saints. Overwhelmingly, participants shared understandings of femininity as being related to strength, equality, and courage. “A woman is not weak but courageous. She stands up for her people. She stands up for what is right” (My Identity is Christ). “I learned that femininity is not just a bunch of dresses and makeup. Femininity has no real value, and God does not differentiate between men and women when it comes to his love. These saints taught me that I can be as powerful as any man” (Female Saints Need More Exposure). “In general, I have learned about the importance of assertiveness in the Christian faith. Many of the saints were faced with temptations and disagreements from opposing parties, but the saints were able to overcome by remaining assertive. For this reason, I learned that womanhood is not equated with silence, but rather, the voice of the woman can hold true value” (Women from Rocks). “I learned and believe that female saints are equally precious to God. Male and female saints can love the Lord equally and can give up their lives to our Lord without a second thought” (Coptic Women Saints Offspring).

One participant related the female saints directly to feminism: “These women were feminists before feminism was a popular thing. They were strong willed and, on many occasions, defied their fathers or husbands in order to obey the Lord. Many of them led people to Christ in a way that men were not able. St. Demiana for example, defied her father, who wanted her to marry, in order to obey God’s call on her life to live for him, and she led 40 others to do the same” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith). Often, participants mentioned
equality between male and female saints, and men and women in general, as lessons they learned from Coptic female saints’ stories.

Participants often emphasized the transfer of faith to the next generations as a central role or common activity of Coptic women. Some women did not agree with this emphasis: “From when we are children, we are told that our role in the church is to teach the coming generations. I do not agree with this. Women should have a bigger role in the church, a bigger role in religious services, as well as a bigger teaching role” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith). Others saw this role as having great importance: “Coptic women in the church lead their families and children to God through their strong faith, prayers and teachings. They are role models to young women and children” (Female Egyptian Saints Light). “Seeing my parents pray, go to church, serve, and love God showed me how to have faith for myself. I am going to teach my children by being an example, teaching them the importance of prayer, and taking them to church regularly so they can grow up in the church environment and love it” (The Power of Women in the Coptic Church).

Several other women emphasized their plans to impart to their children or the next generation not only faith, but other important qualities: “From my parents, I learned how to be loud and show those around me that I am somebody worthy of being heard. I would inspire the next generation to be confident, and not worry about society’s view of you” (Female Saints Need More Exposure). While many women spoke about this in relation to their own parents, some had other unique journeys in their faith that they planned to impart: “I was fortunate enough to have a member of the clergy encourage me to ask questions and seek out knowledge and empower me in every way a woman can be empowered in the church. I plan to teach my children to question everything, and not rest until they have an answer that satisfies them” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith).
**Third: Coptic Church and Society**

The final part of the interviews focused on women’s perceptions of freedom, equality, and opportunity for Coptic women in the U.S., Egypt, and the Coptic church. Women were asked specifically about freedom and equality in these three areas and how they viewed each arena as being supportive or not supportive of Coptic women. Finally, women were asked for their recommendations for the Coptic church going forward (though many included recommendations for the church in answer to other questions, which will also be included in this section).

**Freedom and Equality in the U.S. versus Egypt.** When participants were asked if they feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt, thirteen women said no. Many of these women cited examples of persecution or violence to support their answer: “Egypt is predominantly a Muslim and patriarchal society and religious freedom is barely tolerated. There is a division in the Egyptian society based on religion and gender. Copts in Egypt are often attacked and persecuted for their religious beliefs” (Eventful). Six said yes, and all but one paired their answer with some sort of qualifier or explanation. For example: “Yes, at a higher risk” (My Identity is Christ) or “In certain areas of Egypt, yes, but Copts in general do not flaunt their worship and are peaceful and keep to themselves about it, so as not to stir up violence or persecution for any reason” (Fight the Good Fight). Two participants did not answer the question.

Participants were then asked to provide examples of how they viewed the support (or lack thereof) of Coptic women in Egyptian society. The responses were almost all focused on the ways in which Egyptian society does not support Coptic women, though some provided positive examples. For example: “The Egyptian society supports Coptic females by understanding the mother’s role in the lives of youths and creating the ultimate respect between youths and their parents. On the other hand, it does not because they make it hard for Copts to practice their faith. There are also a lot of terrorist attacks on Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt. So, every time a
woman sends her children to church, she is risking their lives but believes in God and trusts in Him” (Female Egyptian Saints Light). Several women focused on the dual danger of being both Coptic and female in Egyptian society: “Since Egypt is mostly Islamic, you see the people not accepting the Copts more. Being a woman is already hard in Middle Eastern countries, so being a Coptic woman is harder” (Female Saints Need More Exposure).

When asked if they feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and worship freely in the United States, every woman answered yes, though a few included some qualifiers related to the ability to see a contrast between Coptic and dominant American values. For example: “Yes, we have the freedom to practice our beliefs; however, the USA is becoming extremely liberal and our views are not always respected and often attacked” (Eventful).

When asked to provide examples of how they saw American society supporting and/or not supporting Coptic women, responses were mostly positive except for some comments about Coptic faith and values not being widely accepted by Americans. Many of the women compared Egyptian and American society in their responses. For example: “I think the American society helps more women in general than Copts. In their careers, motivation, and even motherhood” (My Identity is Christ). Others, as stated before, commented on the difficulty of practicing the Coptic faith in a culture whose values may clash with it: “The American society is extremely liberal and supports all kinds of women doing whatever they please; however, the American society does not support Coptic women in being Coptic. Our religious faith is called too conservative and our views are not respected” (Eventful).

**Gender Equality in the Coptic Church.** Participants were asked the same question about the Coptic community and how it supports or does not support Coptic women. Of the 21 women, seven gave only positive examples of support; five gave only negative examples; and nine gave both positive and negative examples. Regarding the ways in which the Coptic church does support
women, most of the examples concerned service in church, support of faith, or support in motherhood. For example: “The Coptic community supports Coptic women and vice versa through the service that they give to the children. Whenever a problem arises, the priests of the church are there to listen to the problem and give advice on how to resolve it, with respect and dignity toward the woman, knowing that they are teaching and helping shape the Coptic community of the future” (Fight the Good Fight).

Others spoke positively of the church and were careful to explain things that may be perceived as negative according to their beliefs: “The Coptic Community supports Coptic women through nunnerys, opportunities to serve (like Sunday School), and participation in church activities. Coptic society prohibits such things such as abortion, divorce, participation in altar services, receiving communion when menstruating. However, the church justly does things and is not sexist towards women” (The Power of Women in the Coptic Church).

For those who provided examples of lack of support for Coptic women in the church, reasons were focused mainly on the following, in order of frequency: lack of freedom and autonomy; inability to voice opinions; lack of participation in leadership/liturgy; and lack of education. Regarding the lack of freedom or autonomy, many examples surfaced, including the taboo of divorce: “I feel like there are some common misleading ideas and taboos about women and the church is not addressing them. The church also hurts women by forcing them to stay in harmful marriages because ‘what God combined cannot be torn by a human.’ This led to a woman being killed by her husband in Canada” (The Spiritual Wheel). Others referenced the general inequality between men and women: “A lot of times I feel that the Coptic Community looks at Coptic Women as slaves to their men and that is very unfortunate” (It’s Time for a Change).

Regarding the inability to voice opinions, participants referenced the common disregard for female opinions. For example: “I feel like when a woman takes any stand, even in righteous things,
she is ridiculed” (Love). Additionally: "Repressing the voice of the woman, in that women’s opinions are not as valued as men’s opinions” (Women from Rocks).

Regarding leadership, women usually referenced the limited opportunities to lead or participate in liturgy outside of the choir or in subsets of service. And in terms of education, the lack of emphasis on teaching women, who are supposed to influence the next generation, was common: “We are not encouraged to be knowledgeable in church affairs, though we are still required to teach the faith to our children. We are not encouraged to question male authority (the priesthood), yet we are required to be 100% faithful so that we may impart this faith to the coming generations. I feel that this is absolutely unfair” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith).

When participants were asked whether they see Coptic women being given equal rights in the Coptic church, the answers were mixed, but elaborated on many of the same frustrations concerning women’s inequality in the Coptic Church. Of those who answered positively, they often referenced women’s important roles in the church such as in Sunday school, or the honor of Theotokos: “Yes, we can see that they honor St. Mary, she is a woman and they rank her above the angels, prophets, and martyrs” (Saving Our Faith Upon All Generations). Some had mixed answers: “Some churches empower women and give them the credibility they deserve. Other churches, however, try to preserve how things are and they don’t like ‘change’ because they are worried about any conflicts that might happen. Some fathers just treat the women of their church as if they were gentle things, and do not accept the fact that they could actually be powerful” (Female Saints Need More Exposure).

Among those who gave negative responses, reasons were similar to those already expressed including lack of participation opportunities or taboos. “No! There are a lot of things that get taken away from women and most of them are opinion based. For instance, there is always a huge
discussion about whether or not a woman should take communion during a menstrual period or even praying when they are unclean, but we never hear anything about men and their limitations inside of the Coptic Church” (It’s Time for a Change). Others had personal experiences to share: “I had to fight to attend hymn class because women were not allowed to. I feel like men can do so much more in the church” (Love).

**Recommendations for the Church.** Three questions prompted a wide variety of detailed recommendations for the church: (1) how equality can be achieved in the Coptic church; (2) how Coptic women can be empowered from generation to generation; and (3) if they had any other recommendations for the church. Responses will be addressed question by question in this section.

When asked how equality can be achieved in the Coptic Church, most women had specific ideas. Only one said nothing could be done to achieve equality, and three women stated they believed equality already exists between men and women in the Coptic church. Of those who provided ideas for promoting equality, responses were largely related to how the Coptic church can “teach” equality, either by teaching more about female saints in church or by explicitly addressing gender equality and/or difference in church. Other ideas centered around allowing more leadership roles or activities for women in the church.

Regarding how the church can “teach” equality, the following were some of the participants’ recommendations: “More research should be done to discover more of these Coptic women saints and there needs to be much more effort to teach their stories in the same way we teach about St. Mina and St. George (neither of whom is Coptic). Coptic girls need to grow up seeing an abundance of good examples and role models in front of them” (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith); “By teaching groups of both men and women the principle of equality and by practicing that in the church community. Making a day in a Coptic church for celebrating equality” (History Repeats Itself). Others wanted more teaching, but only if
it was paired with action: “First, we have to begin by teaching that there is equality between men and women. Just because someone is born a male does not mean this individual should have any more advantages compared to another one who happens to be born a woman. From there we can begin applying what was learned. Maybe give women the opportunity to do certain things at church besides sit and serve the kids” (It’s Time for a Change).

When asked how Coptic women can be empowered from generation to generation, responses focused overwhelmingly on education and the introduction and preservation of female role models. Regarding education, female saints as well as women’s rights were focused on: “By reading, giving lectures and in some churches beginning a group for women who are interested to know more about Coptic women saints. Also, by publishing some articles and research studies about Coptic women and their roles” (History Repeats Itself). Also: “Make women today aware of their rights, know that they have support and resources, know that they are not alone, and be more knowledgeable in general” (Coptic Women Saints Offspring).

Many answers addressed female role models, both saints and modern women: “Continue to have women in the church who are successful be role models for young females. They can see that doors are open for them in that way. Also, teaching more about female saints” (Women from Rocks); “By passing on the stories and attitudes of influential Coptic women, not just the saints, and also of Egyptian women as a whole. They need to feel connected to their homeland and its powerful women from history and into the present” (Female Saints and their Relevance in the Coptic Church Today).

Other women identified themselves as modern role models who can empower Coptic women: “I can start educating my Sunday school class on female saints. I can stop the discrepancy between males and females at an early age because I teach kindergarten” (Eventful); “I have a huge
following on social media in which I do just that. I go against the status quo and I talk about being a role model for Coptic women. And, I believe I am one (not to sound arrogant)” (Love).

Lastly, women were asked for their recommendations for the Coptic Church, which produced a wide variety of answers. Many of the answers were related to teaching more about female saints in church and including women in more roles within the church. Regarding the teaching of female saints, some answers were straightforward: “Spread more awareness of the stories of Coptic Women Saints” (The Power of Women in the Coptic Church). Others had specific and unique ideas: “Try to create more cell phone applications that help the kids to know more about the Coptic church and its saints” (The Spiritual Wheel).

Regarding women’s roles, general and specific answers also emerged, such as: “Always respect and appreciate the role of the female inside our church, our families, also in our society” (The Women Can Be the Mother of Future Saints) or “Teach equality in the church. Men should respect women and vice versa. Make a day to achieve equality ‘Coptic Equality Day.’ Include more women in services and believe in women’s power. More scholarships for Coptic women to support their education” (Saving Our Faith Upon All Generations). This was one of two women who mentioned the creation of a Coptic Equality Day in their response.

Some participants called for more respect for women in general, or more open spaces for discussion in church surrounding the topic of gender and equality. Some others had specific ideas related to women’s wellness: “Having certified psychiatric services at church for women so that we can go to for advice to someone besides our father of confession. Having support groups at church that would be there all the time for the support and help needed” (Coptic Women Saints Offspring).

One response in particular to this question embodied many of the desires and frustrations expressed by participants regarding women in the Coptic church throughout all the interviews, and warrants being quoted in full in order to preserve the integrity of the response:
In order for the faith and traditions of the Coptic church to survive, our women must feel empowered in the Church and by the Church. Allow women who are qualified to stand at the pulpit and speak and teach more than young children. We have been reduced to taking the word of an unqualified man in matters of faith because he is a deacon in the Church, rather than learning from a woman who has studied her faith with intensity. Allow the women to chant loudly in the church without being looked down upon for being too loud. It is much more acceptable these days for a young man who cannot read or understand Coptic, to chant in an incorrect tune, rather than allow a woman to lead liturgical responses or praises in proper Coptic and a correct tune. Why must we continue to treat women as second-class citizens in the church? Are we forgetting that the saint above all saints is a woman? Are we forgetting that the Lord found a woman to be the only vessel on earth and in all time worthy for him to dwell in for nine months? What man in the history of the Coptic church or any other church can say the same? If preserving the Coptic faith and traditions concerns you, please empower your daughters to ask questions and seek out the answers. Allow them to question the church’s authority if something doesn’t make sense. Seeking these answers will not push them away from the church, it will increase their conviction 100-fold (Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith)!
Egypt-Based Interviews

First: Coptic Saints

Consistent with interviews with U.S. participants, the general understanding and relation to Coptic saints found in these Egypt-based interviews also pointed out the importance of saints within the Coptic religion. When asked about the importance of saints to the respondents as Coptic Christians, participants consistently remarked on the centrality of saints to their faith. Of the 21 respondents, over half (11) said the saints are “very” important, six said they are “important,” two said they are “extremely” important, one said “highly” important, and the last respondent said they are “exceedingly” important.

When asked what the tradition of sainthood means to them personally, participants varied in their answers with some key commonalities. The most common answers focused on the centrality of a close relationship with God and a moral or “pure” life in order to be considered a Saint. Most respondents emphasized these two components, such as the following: “Sainthood means to be holy and grow up having a strong relationship with God” (Bouncing Stuff Off My Chest). In terms of what being “holy” means, respondents gave many different descriptions of what it means to be holy enough to be a saint. For example, “It means to be sad for committing sins and it means to treat people with mercy. Also, it means doing what is right and having a humble spirit and being pure in heart and being a peacemaker. You must also tolerate persecution with happiness and joy” (What You Can Learn from Women).

In addition to this emphasis on the goodness and holiness of saints, some respondents mentioned the function of saints as role models. For example: “Sainthood is very important; it is the ideal example of the life that we should all live” (The Connection Between Heaven and Earth). Or, “They are important. Examples to follow, reference in life, we can use it and get back to it anytime—represent a part of my culture and identity—knowing me and my Coptic history because
the Coptic church has saints every year” (Gold in a Haystack). Overwhelmingly, answers focused on the good deeds or righteous nature of saints as key to understanding their importance and their meaning in the Coptic tradition.

**General Knowledge of Female Saints.** The 21 Egyptian participants varied widely in their knowledge of female saints, just as did the U.S. respondents. The biggest difference in the knowledge of each pool of participants was the mention of many less well-known Egyptian saints by Egypt-based respondents that were not mentioned by U.S. respondents, such as Potamiaena, Paesia, or Mother Kereya. In addition, when asked about male and female saints (those that are most important or looked up to by respondents), many more Egypt-based participants mentioned former Egyptian popes as important or highly regarded saints, such as Kyrillos or Shenouda. However, the tendency to lump non-Egyptian and Egyptian saints together under the umbrella of “Coptic” was the same with Egyptian and U.S. respondents, showing some lack of awareness (or concern) with the distinction.

When asked how many female saints they were aware of, answers varied greatly. Six of the 21 respondents said they knew of “a lot” of female saints. Two women said they only knew three, and two women said four. Four women said they knew of between five and ten female saints, and three said they knew ten. One answered that she knew 15, one said 25, and one said “thousands.” Self-ratings were more insightful, with the highest number of women rating themselves at a six on a scale from 1 to 10 in terms of knowledge of female saints. Eleven women rated themselves at a five or below, and ten rated themselves at six or above. Specifically, one rated herself at a 2, four women rated themselves at a 3, two women at a 4, four women at a 5, five women at a 6, four women at a 7, and one at an 8. No one rated themselves at 9 or 10. The mean average for this question was 5.14, which was slightly higher than the U.S. respondents’ self-ratings whose mean average was 4.85. When asked to list the Coptic female saints, they knew off the top of their heads,
women listed anywhere from one to nineteen female saints. The mean number of saints listed among the group was 6.33, slightly lower than the U.S. respondents whose average was 7.24.

Reactions to the randomly chosen stories of female saints confirmed the limited knowledge of more obscure Coptic female saints among participants, almost duplicating the responses of U.S. participants. Only six of the women knew of the saint whose story they were asked to listen to, most of them remarking that they had heard the story through either family or church. The other 15 women had not heard of the saint, and 100% said they would like to know more about her.

Every participant also provided ways that they could learn from the saint’s story or apply their story to their own lives. For example, “To look always to the heavenly life. Not caring about what people say about me. God is looking to man’s heart. Also, I have learned not to desire anything in the world but focus on God” (What You Can Learn from Women). Or, “Appreciate and respect women because they have something special and some of them are very talented” (Eve in the Shape of Adam).

Some simply commented on the saint herself and the virtues or behaviors they most admired in her. For example, one woman remarked of Amma Syncletica: “She was strong; She was a leader for many women. She served God first in her place at home then she went to the desert” (She Is the Mother of our Saints). Most of the women said that they would like to learn more about these unknown saints through their church or through study of the Synaxarium, and many said through reading. A few said they would like to learn more through friends, audiobooks, or movies.

In terms of the actual names mentioned by the participants, responses showed varying levels of awareness of different types of female saints (i.e. martyrs, ascetics, nuns) as well as varying levels of awareness of which female saints are Coptic (Egyptian) and which are not. When the responses for the request to list some female Coptic saints off the top of their heads are taken together, 133 responses in total were recorded, and 36 different women were listed. Of this list, 15
were Egyptian and 21 were non-Egyptian female saints. Among the 36 women listed, twelve were martyrs, seven were nuns, four were mothers, four were ascetics, two were sinners, and four were unknown. In addition, Mary the Theotokos was mentioned by seven women and can be considered in a category of her own.

Just as in the U.S. interviews, there was a lot of overlap, with many saints being listed by several women. Whereas martyrs made up 33% of the unique names, they were mentioned 59 times, or just over 44% of all responses. Seven nuns were listed 15 times, or 11% of responses. Mothers made up 9% of responses. Mary Theotokos was named in 5% of the responses. Only four ascetics were mentioned, but were mentioned 19 times, or just over 14%. However, if nuns are included in the category of ascetics, this brings mentions to 34, or 25.5% of all names. Only two sinners were mentioned (Mary of Egypt and Paesia), but with 13 repeats, or 9.7% of the total responses. Just as with U.S. respondents, martyrs made up the greatest percentage of names said with significant overlap, making up 44% of all responses. If nuns are included in the ascetic category, ascetics come in second at 25.5%. Therefore, when asked to name female saints off the top of their heads, the respondents showed the greatest awareness of martyrs and ascetics, corresponding with the fact that these two categories make up a large bulk of important saints in Coptic culture.

Also mimicking the U.S. results, the most commonly mentioned name when asked to list all the female saints they knew was Demiana, a Coptic martyr. Nineteen women mentioned her (only one more than in the U.S. interviews). The next most common was Marina the martyr, mentioned by 13 women. Mary of Egypt was listed by 12 women, Rebecca was listed by nine, Mary Theotokos as well as Verena and Tamav Irini were mentioned by seven women. Mohrail, Anna Simon, and Barbara were all mentioned by five women. The rest of the names mentioned were repeated four or fewer times.
Participants were then asked which female saint or saints they relate to the most. A total of eight women was listed by the 21 participants, with a few listing several names. Four of the eight names were of Egyptian women, and four were non-Egyptian saints. The most common saint listed was Mary Theotokos with seven women listing her as a saint they relate to. The next most common were Demiana (5) and Marina (5), followed by Tamav Irini (4), Rebecca (2), and finally Verena, Hilaria, and Sophia (1). Once again martyrs were most commonly mentioned at 11 mentions (Demiana, Marina, and Sophia are all martyrs).

Participants were then asked to list the most important saints (male and female) in the Coptic tradition. Egypt-based participants did not explicitly express nearly as often as U.S. participants their relatively greater knowledge of male saints compared to female. While Egyptian participants did comment sometimes about their greater knowledge of male saints or the greater emphasis on male saints in their tradition, they did not offer this information as often or as repeatedly as U.S. participants. While more men than women were mentioned in answer to this question, the disparity was not as great as in the U.S.-based responses.

For Egypt-based participants, 27 unique names were listed among 102 total responses. Of the 27 names, 16 were male and 11 were female. Male saints were listed a total of 58 times, with George, Pope Kyrillos, and Mina the most commonly listed. Women were listed a total of 44 times, with Mary Theotokos being the most common (16 mentions), followed by Demiana (12). Rebecca and Marina were both mentioned by 4 women; Verena was listed by 2. The other women were mentioned once: Sofia, Barbara, Tamav Irini, Anna Simon, Philomena, and Tamav Youanna. When asked specifically about the most important female saints, only four women were listed: Mary Theotokos (16 mentions), Demiana (3), Marina (1), and two women said that “all” female saints were important. Similar to the U.S. interviews, martyrs in general and Mary specifically
were the most commonly mentioned female saints in terms of those important to the Coptic tradition.

Overall, participants showed varying levels of knowledge of Coptic female saints, with many including non-Egyptian saints as Coptic saints in their responses. Martyrs appeared the most in these list-based responses, consistent with martyr’s overall representation among male and female saints. There were several female saints who were mentioned more often than others and who appeared in all three questions where participants were asked to list the names of saints: Demiana, Marina, and Mary *Theotokos*. Rebecca was also mentioned often, as was Tamav Irini, but they did not appear in the list of most important female saints. Of these five women, only Mary *Theotokos* and Marina are not Egyptian. As stated before however, Mary’s position in Coptic faith is not dependent on her status as Coptic or non-Coptic. Just as in the U.S. respondents’ interviews, Mary was mentioned throughout interviews (not only in list-based responses) quite often as a central figure to the participants’ faith. For example: “Virgin Mary the mother of Jesus Christ—she had no leading position in the early church, yet she is the most powerful Woman in the entire Bible as ‘the mother of God—*Theotokos*’” (The Golden Gate to the Coptic Church). Another respondent said Mary is “my spiritual mother” (Women in Christianity).

**Function and Characteristics of Saints.** Participants described female saints in various ways throughout the interviews, with characteristics mentioned very similar to those in U.S. interviews, such as strength, love, purity, and faith. Other characteristics mentioned more often in Egypt-based interviews included silence, humility, and purity. For example, one participant described Mary this way when discussing her importance in the Coptic tradition: “She was pure and humble, and she was the mother of God. She raised Jesus Christ. She did not teach or leave words we can quote, but her silence was the greatest teaching for all nations. She kept everything in her heart. She became the mother of everyone” (Fragrances of Saints). There were fewer mentions of attributes like
assertiveness and leadership than in U.S.-based interviews, yet some responses stood out as highlighting the unique nature of female saints’ positions in their own patriarchal societies. For example, “[St. Demiana] was in charge of 40 virgins. She was able to live with these forty virgins at a time in history time that did not support women and only thought of women as being useful for marriage” (Eve in the Shape of Adam). In addition, one participant mentioned Marina the Monk as a role model because “she wanted to be a monk in a time when there were not monasteries for girls, so she challenged all obstacles and got into one monastery by dressing like a man” (Don’t Worry and Be Happy).

Similar to U.S. responses, the women consistently described female saints as strong, and when asked specifically about whether they displayed strength, all respondents said yes. Reasons for this strength were widely mixed, with some specifically mentioning female saints’ strength as being equal to male saints’ strength. For example, “Of course, they are strong because they have showed us that it does not matter if you are female or male. The females can do what males do. Both got martyred, persecuted” (Act Like a Man and Think Like a Woman). In addition, “The Coptic women saints were very strong in faith. The old book about monasticism (Bostan El Rohban) mentioned some women in the early ages and considered them equal to monastic fathers like St. Macarius and his visit to two ladies who were married; God revealed to him that they were equal to him in spirituality” (Eve in the Shape of Adam). Some mentioned female saints’ strength in terms of their unique vocation of motherhood, or credited their strength to their own mothers: “Yes, because the mothers of these women saints raised their children with the courage and love of God to make them willing to become martyrs” (Women Saints in All Ages).

The functions of saints were also frequently mentioned, just as in U.S. interviews. However, the emphasis on certain functions was unique. While U.S. respondents most often talked about saints in terms of role models or moral examples, the functions of intercession and mediation
were overwhelmingly the most common ones mentioned by Egypt-based participants, followed by the function of model or example. Intercession was the most common function in responses and was seen as highly important. For example, “I feel like saints are as important as my cellphone. Calling 911 and asking for help through my cellphone is exactly the same concept as asking the saints for Jesus’ help in my hard time” (The Golden Gate to the Coptic Church). Or, “It means being close to the saints who made it to heaven and be friends with them and ask them for their intercessions as they are alive in heaven and pray for us” (Honoring Woman Coptic Saints).

Just as in U.S. interviews, saints were seen as close and intimate sources of divine help and guidance: “The saints are highly important. They are like the lights that show us our way to God. They help us to grow in faith. They remind us what we should do and how we should act in life. God hears our prayers through them. Although the saints live in heaven, they still take care of us and they feel our emotions and needs” (Fragrances of Saints). Some also mentioned the function of saints as similar to friends: “They are important; in early ages and even now, the saints were the reasons for following the church’s teachings and spreading the faith through their stories. Also, the saints are important because they are like our friends in heaven” (Know More About Your Beloved Saint).

Many participants talked about saints as moral and spiritual examples for Christians today: “They are very important because they lived a life filled with tribulations and persecutions; so when I look to my life, I feel like what I have had to deal with in regard to problems and sufferings has been less compared to what the saints had to suffer. They give me an example that I need to be strong and tolerate what life has for me in regard to difficulties and misfortune” (Coptic Women Leaders for the Future). When asked if they had saintly role models, all of the participants said they did, and were able to name them. Men and women both were listed (17 men and 12 women).
Reasons for looking up to various saints varied, but mostly centered on either the personal attributes of the saints or some personal connection to a saint that was important to them. This example is of the former reason: “The women disciples of St. Paul that were mentioned in the Epistle to the Romans chapter sixteen because these women were serving God and were a strong foundation for the church at that time” (Fragrances of Saints). Also, “St. Rebecca witnessed each of her children being tortured and killed, the youngest was slaughtered on her knees. I have no idea how she could control her motherly instinct! In my opinion St. Rebecca must be the real ‘Wonder Woman!’” (The Golden Gate to the Coptic Church).

The latter reason was common as well. For example, “St. Demiana because I live in front of St. Demiana’s Church. St. Demiana is the intercessor for my family. I was baptized in St. Demiana church” (The Christian Dialogue). Many mentioned Mary Theotokos as a role model or example, in reference to her ultimate importance in the Coptic tradition: “All of the Copts love St. Mary so much. She is a mother for everyone. In every nation they love St. Mary and honor her. She is close to everyone and helps them through her intercession. She is a great mediator between humans and God” (I Have a Great Mediator). This way of talking about Mary was common: “She intercedes for everyone and she is close to God because she is the mother of Jesus. She took some of our nature and she took some from God because he came through her. She is unique. We will never find that in any saint. So, St Mary is very close to God and very close to us” (Good Scent of Saints).

One very common emphasis in the Egypt-based interviews was personal experiences with saints, including what some described as miracles. While many of the U.S. participants said they had experiences with saints (14 out of 21), 20 of 21 of the Egypt-based participants said yes, and only one said no. Of those 20, 16 shared specific stories, and several women shared multiple stories from their own and their family’s lives. This was true not only when the participants were asked specifically about their experiences, but experiences also came up in response to other questions.
organically much more often than the U.S. interviews. Stories ranged in theme, including healing, protection, and general blessings and well-being. Many of the stories saw participants attributing the positive outcome of a bad situation or the assuaging of their worries to a particular saint to which they had prayed concerning that situation.

Some examples of experiences related to health include the following: “St Demiana performed a miracle with my son when he was sick and went to the hospital. I cannot explain how strongly I felt St Demiana was with me, and I am sure she is always praying on behalf of my family and me before Our Lord” (Bouncing Stuff Off My Chest). Also, “I got through an accident (car hit me on my way from school) and I was in coma for a few days in the hospital. A lot of relatives came to see me. I had bleeding in the brain, had broken my vertebral column and suffered a concussion. I dreamt St. Mary came to me and at that time I woke up and returned to life” (Don’t Worry and Be Happy).

Other examples included protection or resolution of some dangerous or troubling situation. For example: “There were some thieves who stole things from our apartment. They entered all the rooms except the room that had St. Mary’s and St. Philopater’s pictures on the wall and in this is the room where we kept all our jewelry, gold and diamonds — so St. Mary and St. Philopater saved us from the thieves and protected our stuff” (Act Like a Man and Think Like a Woman). Also, “St. Marina, after I got married and I did not get pregnant, I was told by someone to go to St. Marina church in Cairo and I would be pregnant after that and it happened” (Good Scent of Saints). The mention of saints being patrons of certain things was more common for Egypt-based interviews, and Marina specifically came up a few times: “St. Marina is the patron saint of infertile women who have problems having a baby or getting pregnant. One of my friends for 12 years prayed to God and all the saints for a baby. One day she was told St Marina’s story so she began asking her
intercession that God would send her a baby – and truly after a couple of years she became pregnant and now has a cute baby boy” (The Connection Between Heaven and Earth).

Lastly, several women shared stories of seeing saints. For example, “St. Mary Mother of God, my son saw her in our apartment waving to him. Also, I saw her in a dream” (The Egyptian Saints Between the Past and Present). Some had very powerful experiences with apparitions: “When I was 22 years old, I got my first job, I saw St. Mary’s apparitions in her church in Zeitoun province in Cairo, Egypt. That was April 1968. There was a large crowd waiting for her apparitions, sometimes St. Mary appeared like a dove or light. For me one day when I was at her church at that time, I saw a light inside the church from heaven to earth; then suddenly her face appeared on the ceiling of the church. I was astonished and I felt like my mind had opened too wide. I could not concentrate; it was something beyond my normal mindset. For more than a month, I felt that mind was open” (Fragrances of Saints). These are just a few of the many personal experiences with female saints shared by participants. This theme was much stronger in Egypt-based interviews than U.S. interviews.

**Male versus Female Saints.** When asked how often they hear stories of Egyptian female saints in church, participants’ responses were mixed and were markedly different from U.S. participants. Six women said they heard their stories “a lot,” one said, “not often,” and the rest of the participants answered with specific occasions on which they hear these stories. The most common responses were that they hear female saints’ stories on their feast days or during Synaxarium readings. While several of the U.S. participants specifically mentioned the disparity between hearing of male and female stories, none of the Egypt-based participants mentioned this disparity in response to this question. While many U.S. participants disparaged the fact that they only heard female saints mentioned in Synaxarium readings, Egypt-based participants acknowledged this but did not specifically identify it as a problem.
When asked how they see the Coptic church honor female saints, the responses were similar to those mentioned previously. Most women mentioned feast days as the most common method of honoring female saints, followed by their inclusion in the Synaxarium. Several mentioned church liturgies in general, “stories,” or Sunday school lessons. Three women mentioned the naming of buildings or children after female saints as a form of honor, and two mentioned relics. Other less common responses were vespers, statues, shrines, and movies. Again, no women voluntarily mentioned any disparity between the honor given to male over female saints upon being asked this question, though some U.S. respondents were intent to mention this.

Inequality between male and female saints was not mentioned often among Egypt-based participants until they were explicitly asked about it. Still, fewer women in this group acknowledged inequality than in the U.S. group. Six believed that men and women are treated equally, 11 acknowledged some inequality, and 4 provided nuanced opinions for and against equality. Those who said “no” usually pointed to the greater number of male saints in the Synaxarium compared to females: “There is not an equality between Coptic women and Coptic men saints, and this can be shown in synaxarium that we have more men’s stories than women’s stories” (She is the Mother of our Saints). Others mentioned the liturgy in general: “No, I do not think so because the women saints are not mentioned like men saints in the liturgies” (What You Can Learn from Women).

Those who said “yes” were often straightforward, or sometimes included explanations or examples: “Yes, the important saint for Coptic culture is St. Mary and she is a woman. She is above all” (Good Scent of Saints). Others were more mixed or were hesitant to give a firm answer because of the complex nature of the issue. For example, “The Coptic women saints have a great influence in our church, and I cannot compare women and men saints from the equality perspective. Everyone has a specific role in the Coptic Church” (I Have a Great Mediator). While
some women did acknowledge a clear inequality between the treatment of male and female saints in the church, this tendency was not as common as in the U.S. interviews, and the frustration or anger expressed by U.S. participants was not expressed as often or as strongly in this group.

Second: Coptic Women

Participants were asked several questions about Coptic women that revealed many varying characteristics and attributes of modern Coptic women. When asked specifically about these characteristics, 39 unique attributes were listed, some more common than others. The two most common descriptions of Coptic women were “strong” and “caring/caregiver.” These both were mentioned by seven women. Coptic women were also commonly described as loving, faithful, and patient. Other descriptions varied widely, including brave, courageous, persistent, smart, thankful, generous, obedient, honest, straightforward, modest, virtuous, prayerful, and tolerant. As can be seen from the common description of Coptic women as caregivers, this was a common theme. One answer cited Proverbs 31; a common passage used in Christianity to describe the “virtuous” woman. Another response said Coptic women are the “column” that holds up their household. The following response showed this common emphasis: “A woman is a caregiver, taking care of everyone in her household. She is the main source of Christian teaching for her kids. And she takes care of her husband and is kind to him” (Know More About Your Beloved Saint).

Coptic female saints and modern Coptic women were consistently described as being strong. When asked specifically whether Coptic women today are strong, responses were mixed with many positive descriptions of strength as well as some more negative responses. Out of the 21 participants, nine gave a clear “yes” to the question of whether Coptic women today are strong. The other twelve gave more mixed answers or provided examples to demonstrate the perceived difference between modern Coptic women and Coptic female saints. For example, “Some of them are very strong and they have a significant role in society while others have less power because
they grew up in a society that believed men should be in authority and women should just have dreams about getting married. One example of a strong woman is Tamav Irini. She was the head of the monastery. She was very holy, and by the Holy Spirit she was able to see the other saints who live in the heaven” (What You Can Learn from Women).

Many of the responses gave specific examples of the ways in which Coptic women display strength. For example, “Yes, they are strong because of the persecutions that the Coptic women face and still they are bringing up their children not to fear death because of their religion” (Gold in a Haystack). Or, “Of course, they are strong because they become doctors and engineers and they have high positions” (Act Like a Man and Think Like a Woman). Others talked more of spiritual strength. For example, “The Coptic women was strong in the past, and they are strong at the present and they will be strong at the future because they receive their power from their strong relationship with God and the power of the Holy Spirit who supports them” (Fragrances of Saints).

When asked about how they would have reacted in the same situation as the female saints they said they relate most to, eight women confidently said yes, they would have reacted in the same way as the saint did (double the number of U.S. women). Twelve women said no, and one was unsure. The most common reasons that women did not perceive themselves as potentially reacting the same way were fear, the desire to defend oneself, and the desire to avoid hardship. For example, when speaking about Demiana one participant said, “I would not act like her. I could not take the responsibilities of forty virgins” (Eve in the Shape of Adam). Another expressed humility when talking about Saint Mary: “I cannot be like St. Mary; she is above all” (How to Be a Saint). For those who said yes, their answers were similar to the following: “If I were in [Tamav Irini’s] situation, I would do the same, praying to God to defeat the devil, fasting and helping the people in need” (She Is the Mother of Our Saints).
**Roles of Coptic Women.** When asked about the role of Coptic women in the Coptic church, responses were mixed and often mentioned roles related to serving in the church, especially in Sunday school, as well as general service to families and the church or as a role model to young women. Specifically, eight women mentioned Sunday school in their response, seven said serving, three mentioned the role of a mother, two said as a role model or advisor to other women, and two said “loving.” Other single responses including praying, preparing, loving her family, reaching out to other families, helping those in need, and preaching. This group did not emphasize the roles of wife and mother as much as the U.S. based group, but those who did placed a high importance on imparting knowledge and love to future generations. For example, “They are the mothers of generations and these generations are supposed to be the spiritual light of the world” (She is the Mother of Our Saints). One significant difference in this group concerning views of women’s roles is that “deaconess” was not mentioned as a role, since Coptic churches in Egypt do not provide this role. Participants had a lot to say about this lack of opportunity, which will be addressed in a later section.

Participants also shared what they understood or learned about femininity or being a woman from the examples of female saints. Responses varied, but many women specifically mentioned the value of understanding that being a saint has little to do with one’s gender. For example, “I learned that not only men can be saints but also women. This idea started from the very old ages. Before Jesus Christ like Hannah the Prophet, Miriam Moussa’s sister… So, there is nothing that can prevent the woman from serving God and dedicating her life to God and becoming a real Saint” (The Connection Between Heaven and Earth). Similar answers revealed a positive outlook on womanhood in general because of saints: “I have learned that the real value of the woman is not coming either from her beauty, body or the powerful positions; the real value of the human beings comes from knowing that we have been created in the image of God. ‘So, God created mankind in

103
his own image” (The Golden Gate to the Coptic Church). Many others mentioned strength and resilience, especially in the face of persecution. For example, “They were very brave. Women are usually known to have strong emotions that control them, but in the saints, I see they did not care about anything in the world and they were willing to sacrifice their children to martyrdom. Some of the children were beheaded while sitting on their mothers’ laps. That was not easy for them, so I see women as very brave and strong” (Good Scent of Saints). Others talked about various spiritual attributes or qualities they have gleaned from female saints’ stories. For example, “I have learnt from their stories to stick by the faith, be silent, to love others. Love Jesus. Serve everyone” (Fragrances of Saints). Or, “From St. Mary, I have learnt to be humble. From Mary of Egypt, I have learnt that there is always hope to become good and to repent” (How To Be a Saint).

Similar to U.S. participants, these women often mentioned the transfer of faith or Christian values to the next generation, applying this role not only to modern Coptic women but also to saints. Overall, this was seen to have a great deal of importance. Some credited saints with revealing more value in motherhood: “It is not necessary to be a single female to be a saint. A lot of them had kids and they taught them the right way to God” (Bouncing Stuff Off my Chest). When asked how to empower Coptic women from generation to generation, many emphasized teaching children and sharing the stories of saints. For example, “As the yeast does the fermentation for the whole dough. As the mustard seed in spite of its small size, grows very big and becomes a huge tree. As St. Mark is one person who spread Christianity in all Egypt. As the Coptic women transfer empowerment from generation to generation by their strong faith” (Fragrances of Saints). Also, “This is done by the mothers at home by teaching their children the Christian principles and the need for prayer. Also, the parents should act wisely in front of their children and they have to be a good model, so the children act like them” (Coptic Women Leaders for the Future).
Third: Coptic Church and Society

The final part of the interviews focused on women’s perceptions of freedom, equality, and opportunity for Coptic women in the U.S., Egypt, and the Coptic church. Women were asked specifically about freedom and equality in these three arenas and how they viewed each arena as being supportive or not supportive of Coptic women. Finally, women were asked for their recommendations for the Coptic church going forward (though many included recommendations for the church in answer to other questions, which will also be included in this section).

Freedom and Equality in the U.S. versus Egypt. When participants were asked if they feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt, ten said no. Three said yes, and the rest of the responses were mixed with both positive and negative examples of how Egyptian society does or does not facilitate free worship. Those who said no usually mentioned discrimination in public or discriminatory laws in their responses. However, many whose answers were positive or mixed gave a sense of optimism at how things have recently changed or are currently changing in Egyptian society. Several explicitly mentioned improvements since 2011. For example, “It was hard for a Coptic woman to wear her cross but eventually the Coptic woman convinced Egyptian society to accept her with her cross around her neck. When ignorance increases, freedom decreases. When the Arab conquerors entered Egypt, their concept of woman was strange and they looked at her as a submissive partner to the man and she had to stay at home and she could not leave the house without her husband’s permission, and she had to wear long clothing and cover her hair. But these days, after the revolution, we can see the beginning of women’s freedom” (Eve in the Shape of Adam).

Participants were then asked whether Egyptian society supported Coptic women. Only one woman provided a positive assessment; two gave no response. The rest were negative, due to harassment and discrimination. For example, “Egyptian society does not support women at all.
Being Coptic women in Egyptian society means being on the lower level of the pyramid of society” (What You Can Learn from Women). Those who gave mixed responses seemed to think some progress had been made, but not enough: “They let them work and some have high positions. The only thing that it is not supported by Egyptian society is that Coptic women do not wear the veil (Hijab) at all, and it is kind of required in most of Egyptian governmental jobs. So Coptic women are prevented from applying for these kinds of jobs” (Act Like a Man and Think Like a Woman).

When asked if they feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and worship freely in the United States, most declined to answer. One woman said no, answering that there were not enough Coptic churches and/or communities in the U.S. to support worship. The rest said yes.

When asked to provide examples of how they saw American society supporting and/or not supporting Coptic women, 13 women declined to answer due to lack of knowledge or experience in the U.S. Those who answered all agreed that Coptic women had more freedom in the United States but did not have strong opinions on this. Two women characterized this increase in freedom in a somewhat negative light. For example, “Americans support all women and because of this the men are afraid to marry them because the woman can get divorced any time and leave the man if she is treated badly by him” (The Egyptian Saints Between the Past and Present). In addition, “American Society gives women freedom which was being abused by women” (The Christian Dialogue).

**Gender Equality in the Coptic Church.** Participants were asked the same question about the Coptic community and how it supports or does not support Coptic women. Of the 21 women, nine gave only positive examples of support; two gave only negative examples; and ten gave both positive and negative examples. Regarding the ways in which the Coptic church does support women, most of the examples related to opportunities for service in the church or services offered
to women. Those women who gave positive examples expressed optimism in the changing attitudes toward women in the church. For example, “The Coptic churches are very supportive of women, the women become leaders in the church, and they can help in coordination and services inside the church. Their opinion is heard these days, not like before” (Act Like a Man and Think Like a Woman).

Those who gave negative examples talked overwhelmingly about the lack of leadership positions, with six women specifically mentioning the role of deaconess being available to American Copts but not to Egyptian Copts. Other complains related to lack of value given to women’s opinions or relative lack of authority or ability to contribute as compared to men. For example, “The Coptic community does not support women. It does not give them the freedom of speech and the freedom to make their own vital decisions in life” (Don’t Worry and Be Happy).

Others complained about the lack of stories about women told in church: “The Coptic community is not supporting the Coptic women enough and this can be seen because of the fact that most of the women’s stories are still unknown” (How to Be a Saint).

However, as stated before, the most common complaint was not having a deaconess position available for women like the one available in the U.S.: “I see that the Coptic Community does not support women in Egypt, but it supports women outside of Egypt like the Coptic community in the U.S., which is supporting Coptic women strongly because the church has deaconesses…The Coptic church in the U.S. added that as a way of encouraging girls and young ladies to participate in the church hymns and come early to attend the mass. But in Egypt we do not have deaconesses yet. Hopefully this will apply soon in the Coptic church in Egypt” (Honoring Female Coptic Saints).

When participants were asked whether they see Coptic women being given fair rights in the Coptic church, the answers were mixed, with 11 answering “yes,” seven answering “no” and three
giving both positive and negative assessments. Among those who gave negative answers was the tendency to place blame on Egyptian culture for a lack of women’s rights. For example, “Since Coptic women are a minority in Egypt, the church is dealing with Coptic women as the Egyptian society is dealing with them. The church is influenced by Egyptian society which sees women as weak” (Don’t Worry and Be Happy).

Other complaints related to leadership and authority, just as in the responses about equality in the church. For example, “Coptic women can teach the children in Sunday schools but not teach the adult men and women. She cannot give a sermon or be a speaker in a meeting of men and women in the church” (Good Scent of Saints). Also, “Not really, because women are not priests nor deacons although they have the same mind as men” (Bouncing Stuff Off my Chest).

Those who gave positive answers often mentioned specific church practices: “Yes, for example during Children Baptism both the father (Male) and mother (Female) play equal roles during the baptism prayers. Also, in many parts of the liturgy on Sundays, some parts of the prayer’s response are dedicated to "people" which includes both males and females with no separation by sex” (The Golden Gate to the Coptic Church). Some also compared Coptic Orthodoxy to other religions as a way to shine positive light: “Yes, by letting her take communion and pray at the church which is not done by some other religions that do not respect women” (The Christian Dialogue).

**Recommendations for the Church.** Two questions prompted a wide variety of detailed recommendations for the church. Participants were asked how equality can be achieved in the Coptic church, and if they had any other recommendations for the church. Responses will be addressed question by question in this section.

When asked how equality can be achieved in the Coptic Church, most women had specific ideas. Suggestions were similar to those in the U.S. responses in that they related largely to
leadership roles and education, or “teaching equality.” For example, “Through education and by embedding the concept of equality in our sermons” (Women in Christianity). Also, “To increase the awareness between people; as the man can lead, woman also can lead too. They both have the same brain and the same organs” (Coptic Women Leaders for the Future). Suggestions about leadership also compared men and women’s roles in the church: “Giving women more opportunities for service like men have. Give women a chance to do what men do” (Good Scent of Saints). Other specific examples related more to church norms or rules that some saw as discriminatory. For example, one woman mentioned the rule barring menstruating women from taking communion: “Let them take communion depending on their faith not their own body” (Bouncing Stuff Off my Chest). Only one answered in a way that tended to deny the lack of equality to begin with: “Both women and men are equal in Coptic church because this is the teaching of Christianity. Both of them have the same faith and the same relationship with God” (The Christian Dialogue).

Lastly, women were asked for their recommendations for the Coptic Church, which produced a wide variety of answers related to how the church can better serve women. Some of these suggestions were related to roles in the church. For example, “Give the women significant roles in the church and let the women carry the responsibilities inside the church” (Intercessions of the Saints). Also, “Focus more on women. Give them more roles in the church. Teach about the equality between men and women” (What You Can Learn from Women). Several participants specifically mentioned implementing the deaconess role in Egyptian Coptic churches.

The emphasis on listening to and respecting women’s opinions was also common: “Give the women the freedom to speak and express their opinions. Make meetings for them; listen to women’s suggestions and accept new ideas from them” (Gold in a Haystack). Or simply, “Listen to women’s voices” (Women in Christianity).
Others asked for more education about female saints or issues that relate to women. For example, “Include more courses in Sunday School about the Coptic Christian women saints. Include more courses about premarital relationship to help achieve equality which will lead to successful marriage” (The Golden Gate to the Coptic Church). Or, “Teach us more about the saints and their stories” (Know More About Your Beloved Saint). Some other suggestions were more specific: “The church can build more monasteries for the nuns. We have a lot of monasteries for men and just a few for women” (Good Scent of Saints).

Several women suggestions not specifically related to women or women’s issues. For example, “Keep the Coptic tradition and do not change it to adapt to the world; this is what makes the Coptic church unique — its history” (Eve in the Shape of Adam). Also, “Teach the kids in Sunday Schools more stories about the Saints and teach them to use their intercession” (The Connection Between Heaven and Earth).
Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary

The results of this study indicate that female saints constitute a very important part of Coptic women’s religion and personal sense of spirituality. Female saints function as role models, intercessors, and friends to Coptic women. During times of the patriarchal notions of womanhood adopted by women living in patriarchal cultures, they serve as examples/role models of femininity; and at other times as examples of equality, assertiveness, and progressive leadership roles in the Christian faith. Regardless of whether women adopted or rejected patriarchal notions of femininity, female saints fulfill a fundamental role in empowering women, connecting them to their faith and heritage, and providing a source of strength and inspiration. Female saints also play a special role in each woman’s experience with, and evaluation of, her own femininity and womanhood in general, along with its roles and significance within the Coptic tradition and faith.

Findings confirmed each hypothesis at various points and lined up with some literature regarding Coptic religion and women, while challenging others. Considering the two groups of women living in different parts of the world, it is difficult to generalize the relationships Coptic women have with their female saints and their church; yet this study found many important parallels among participants that shed light on Coptic female experience, Coptic female saints, and point to the need for further research on these topics. The following is a summary of findings from these interviews as they relate directly to the three research questions outlined in the beginning of this study:

1. How do Coptic women in Egypt and the U.S., specifically California, relate to and understand the female saints in their tradition?

Coptic Egyptian women living in Southern California and Egypt hold the female saints in their tradition in extremely high regard, considering them key to practicing their faith due to their
function as intercessors, role models, and even friends. Female saints hold a special significance for Coptic women that is largely absent in current literature about Coptic saints and their significance for the church.

While all participants acknowledged/recognized this strong sense of importance in relation to saints in general and female saints specifically, they expressed varying levels of knowledge about these saints. Many participants in both groups relied almost exclusively on their church (Sunday school, Bible study, Synaxarium readings, etc.) for their knowledge of female saints. Those who expressed very high levels of knowledge about saints usually relied on outside sources in order to learn, including books and movies, yet those who relied on church often rated themselves quite low in terms of knowledge. The mean rating of self-knowledge on a scale from 1-10 for California-based participants was 4.85, while Egypt-based women was 5.14.

2. How do Coptic women’s knowledge of, and relationship with, female saints shed light on Coptic female experience within the church, especially as it relates to gender roles and equality?

Female participants experienced the female saints in a special way as it relates to womanhood and femininity. Consistent with prior research, female saints were role models for ideal Christians, and ideal Copts, but also as ideal “women.” Female saints provided a source of feminine empowerment and inspiration for participants, regardless of their views on the church’s treatment of women or their desire for change or lack thereof.

However, interview responses suggest that Coptic women’s understanding of their female saints do not line up with their experience as Coptic women. Lessons Coptic women learn from female saints include the values of strength, assertiveness, equality, and participation in the furthering of the gospel in the world, yet Coptic women observe a disparity in their own positions in the church, which limit their roles and fail to encourage equality between women and men.
While participants overwhelmingly expressed dedication to their faith, their saints, and their church, they also expressed widespread frustration at unequal roles, and a strong desire for more opportunities to contribute to the growth of their faith.

3. What are Coptic women’s perceptions regarding the church’s teaching about Coptic female saints and women in general?

Participants expressed varying levels of knowledge about female saints. In fact, most rated themselves quite low in terms of knowledge and expressed a strong desire to learn more about female saints. Many women acknowledged the greater emphasis given to male saints over female saints and expressed the need for change. The vast majority of women expressed a desire to learn more about their female saints, and many specifically desired for this knowledge to be gained through their churches. Yet, many women also said that the main source of their information concerning female saints was from Synaxarium readings, indicating a need for more in-church education about these saints outside of feast days or Synaxarium readings.

In addition, many women acknowledged problems with inequality and gender discrimination in the Coptic church and called for change; however, these emphases were greater in U.S. participants, who showed a greater willingness to criticize the Coptic church’s teaching about or treatment of women and call for more equality. This points to a stronger tendency to express feminist principles or complain about patriarchal structures when women were living in societies that were less overtly patriarchal, or more accommodating of feminist values. Those who lived within the very patriarchal society of Egypt were less explicit about their desire for equality or their frustration with inequality unless directly asked about these issues. Many connected inequalities in the church directly to an Egyptian, male-dominated culture. Despite the varying emphases within each group, both groups of women generally expressed a desire for greater participation and
representation in church, especially in the form of the deaconess position, as well as a strong desire to learn more about Coptic female saints through their churches.

Analysis

This study began with three hypotheses, each of which found some confirmation through the data uncovered in the interviews. Overall, women expressed a wide diversity of opinions and experiences, yet some commonalities were clear. Each hypothesis will be discussed in turn here.

1. **Female respondents will express beliefs, opinions, or knowledge that diverged from the official Coptic teaching about female saints or the female gender.**

Information about Coptic female saints shared in the interviews placed greater emphasis on certain female saints that are largely absent in male-dominated literature about Coptic religion. For instance, the following female saints were commonly referenced in participants’ answers as being important, influential, or relatable to participants individually, and appeared in participants’ responses from both groups frequently: Demiana, Marina, Verena, Mary of Egypt, Tamav Irini, Mohrail, and Rebecca. The particular importance of these saints for Coptic women is absent from the literature reviewed for this study. These are only a few of the many dozens of female saints that had importance to the Coptic women, many of whom are treated simply as footnotes in literature published about Coptic religion. Yet, these were mentioned most often, and they (especially Demiana) constituted common themes in responses about the importance of particular female saints, female saint role models, or female saints with whom participants especially related.

In addition, Coptic women demonstrated a tendency to desire more efforts at equality and representation from the Coptic church. In fact, many women recognized an explicit divergence from Christian values or scripture in the ways the Coptic Church teaches about women and female saints (their roles and treatment). This was more so the case in the U.S. group, many of whom expressed very strong feelings and opinions about inequality or sexism in the church, showing a
tendency to reflect cultural norms in participants’ view of their church’s outlook on and/or approach to women and gender. However, many among the Egypt-based group also expressed a desire for more participation and representation, especially as it relates to the position of deaconess. Egypt-based women, like their U.S. counterparts, recognized the disparity between their roles and those of men, and many (not all) expressed a desire for more opportunities to be heard or to participate in their church.

2. *Female respondents will express beliefs, opinions, or knowledge that was consistent with official Coptic teaching about female saints or the female gender.*

Coptic women expressed many sentiments about female saints that are consistent with literature. For example, women in both groups more often referenced female saints from the martyr or ascetic category than any other, consistent with the emphasis on these two groups in literature published about and by the Coptic church about their saints. In addition, the strong emphasis on Mary as the most important or honored saint is consistent with the church’s view on Mary’s centrality as *Theotokos.* The participants’ general description of the importance and function of saints also lined up with dominant teachings. Lastly, the acceptance of patriarchal gender roles and norms exhibited in the Coptic church was experienced among some participants, especially those in the Egypt-based group, who were more likely to frame disparate gender roles as a positive or neutral phenomenon rather than a negative one. The acceptance of patriarchal structures and teachings more prevalent in the Egypt-based group again shows a tendency for women to reflect their culture’s dominant norms and ideals when describing their church’s outlook on and/or approach to women and gender.

3. *Female respondents will express beliefs, opinions, or knowledge that reflects the importance of feminism as an increasingly influential ideology in Egypt and in the Coptic diaspora.*
This was confirmed in both groups to varying extents. U.S. participants demonstrated a much stronger acceptance of feminist ideals and a great desire to see these ideals reflected more in their church’s teachings and practices. Egypt-based participants showed awareness and acceptance of feminist ideals to a lesser extent, yet a common sense of optimism at changing norms in Egyptian society that allow greater freedom and equality for women was observed, as well as a strong desire among many of the women for more equal participation in their faith and liturgy. For U.S. participants, women were not only more likely to offer opinions in line with feminist ideology without being asked, but they were also more likely to use strong language to characterize their views of sexism in the church, at times comparing the treatment of women to slavery or abuse. Those in the Egypt-based group used less strong language when discussing their observations of inequality or lack of representation. This confirms the importance of feminism as an influential ideology in both Egypt and the U.S. diaspora, albeit to differing extents.

**Implications**

This study uncovered some important connections to previous literature, especially literature concerning Coptic women or women and religion in general. It also uncovered information that is largely absent from much of the literature on Coptic saints and the Coptic church, including the unique relationship of Coptic women with their female saints and the importance of various female saints to Coptic women’s spirituality.

One important thinker used in this study in order to understand the history of the Coptic church and the role of saints in the Coptic Church was Otto Meinardus, whose prolific writing about the Coptic church constitutes one of the few bodies of works in English that take an in-depth look at Coptic Orthodoxy. Meinardus wrote to some extent about female saints and their importance or veneration, referencing the veneration of Mary as one of the few saints actively venerated in Egypt with at least 32 feasts in her honor. The data from these interviews confirmed
Mary’s importance. However, absent from Meinardus and other popular works about Coptic saints is the importance of other female saints for Coptic women’s personal spirituality. For instance, the degree of importance given to Demiana among participants was not emphasized in other literature.

Meinardus’ theory about the growing importance of saints in the Coptic diaspora was also used in formulating this study. He argued that Copts who leave Egypt see a need to cling to familiar things like saints and their icons as a “religious defense mechanism,” or a way to hold on to their history and the norms of their culture in new surroundings.170 The tendency to express love, intimacy, and friendship with saints among the participants was certainly present, and the tendency to describe saints as friends or to express a desire to aspire to sainthood oneself was more common in the U.S. interviews. There was also some sense of resistance toward a changing world. Some participants were frustrated by the relative moral relativism of Americans; while others considered the equal rights granted to women in the U.S. was “dangerous” or unnecessary. Some also used female saints as examples of the ideal Coptic woman, in line with traditional patriarchal gender norms seen within the Coptic church. However, this was not the most common expression of participants.

Overall, participants in both groups expressed a greater willingness to embrace the changing world. Most saw no problem with embracing change and equality and also maintaining their unique belief system. Overall, every participant expressed a strong devotion and commitment to Coptic faith, yet many of the same women who expressed this devotion also called for the church to “keep up” with changing norms concerning gender. For many of these women, intimacy with female saints actually inspired a sense of confidence in their strength and equality. Female saints often functioned as a way of legitimizing women’s desire for equality or change; with one participant characterized them as some of Christianity’s earliest feminists. While Meinardus’
characterization of the saints as a religious defense mechanism may hold true in some respects, this assessment did not accurately characterize participants’ responses about their own religious experiences or relationships with the saints.

Taken together, literature about Coptic religion, history, and saints in general is missing the uniqueness of Coptic female experience. Coptic women expressed a wealth of knowledge about their religion and their female saints that is absent in male scholarship about Copts. The deep sense of reverence and importance women ascribed to saints other than Mary is absent as well.

One important resource in formulating this study was Morcos’ qualitative study about Coptic women living in Southern California. Many of her findings were echoed in this study. For instance, Morcos reported that emigrating to Southern California generally opened up new opportunities for church participation and leadership for Coptic women. The emphasis on the deaconess position, with U.S. participants often citing it as a positive aspect of the church’s support of women, and Egypt-based women often citing it as something lacking in their own churches, is evidence of this.

Morcos also found mixed responses from women about their views of the Coptic church’s teaching on and treatment of women that were similar to those found in this study. When her participants were asked if the Coptic church promotes a healthy view of women, 35% said yes, 34% said maybe, and 30% said no. When asked if they would change anything about the Coptic Church’s view or treatment of women, 47% said yes. The specific changes women wanted to see in their church related largely to the implementation of women’s empowerment programs, more leadership roles for women, and greater education for women and girls concerning hymns and church history. These were very similar to the results of this study. Women from both groups
showed mixed responses concerning gender equality and representation in the church. While they cannot be compared in a parallel fashion to Morcos because of the difference in research designs, the wide range she found was similar to that found in this study, with most women finding both positive and negative examples of how the church supports women and gender equality. Yet when asked for specific recommendations, they were similar to those Morcos found. Overall, they desired opportunities for leadership and participation for women, more education about female saints, more preaching and teaching about gender equality in church, and more respect in general for the opinions and voices of Coptic women.

Morcos’ findings about the knowledge of Coptic women in Southern California in regard to Coptic church history were similar to assessments of my own participants’ knowledge of female saints. In Morcos’ study, 10% of respondents were very knowledgeable about church history, while 71% were somewhat or fairly knowledgeable, and 19% said they were not very knowledgeable or did not know anything about church history at all. In response to other questions, 80% had a desire to learn more about church history; 75% knew about various female saints and their stories. However, 58% knew more about male saints than female saints. Only 4% knew more about female saints than male saints. These results are similar to my own, yet again cannot be compared directly because of differences in research design. My own participants rated themselves in various ways in terms of knowledge of female saints, but the overall data showed a much lower knowledge about female saints compared to male saints, and a desire to know more about female saints among all participants.

Morcos’ finding that Coptic women did not feel equal to men in general and had a desire to see issues disproportionately affecting women (like purity rituals) to be changed was also echoed in

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my results. This study confirms Morcos’ analysis of Coptic women’s understanding of gender disparities in church practices and teachings. However, this study expands on this knowledge by way of comparison between Egypt-based and California-based Egyptian Coptic women. This comparison reveals that the extent to which Coptic women identify sexist teachings or practices and/or call for change in line with feminist ideals, is at least partially dependent on cultural context.

Sorbera’s 2014 examination of the revolution in Egypt and its impact on and benefit from Egyptian feminism was also echoed in Egypt-based participants’ responses. Sorbera’s argument that feminism is growing and taking root in more areas in Egypt could be observed to an extent, with some women crediting the revolution for positive changes like a greater ability to gain employment as a woman or a greater sense of respect for women’s rights in general.

Yount’s 2009 argument about the influence of male domination and the acceptance of patriarchal constructs was also echoed in this study. Yount tied the greater acceptance of domestic violence to a greater degree of male power in society, including religious life. I used this argument to theorize that women living and worshiping in societies and churches who defer to male authority (especially religion that espouses devotion to a male deity) would show a greater acceptance of patriarchal norms. Based on the responses of Egypt-based and U.S.-based participants, the impact of patriarchal surroundings was indeed seen to lead to a greater acceptance of patriarchal norms in religion.

Largely related to this is the work of Cassese and Holman (2016) who investigated a negative correlation between religious involvement and political participation among women that was absent among men. Cassese and Holman found that gendered religious beliefs, associated with more traditional or restrictive gender roles, were likely to influence women to subscribe to a literal interpretation of the Bible, even more so than their male counterparts. Even when this barred them from equal participation, these women opted for a conservative interpretation of Scripture in order
to demonstrate their commitment to their social group (i.e. their church). In the absence of any other real source of power (i.e. leadership positions), women gained power through acceptance and conformity to their religious communities. Therefore, traditional gender roles became an avenue toward group acceptance and social power.172

This theory can find confirmation in this study, which found that women who lived in a more overtly patriarchal culture and worshipped in patriarchal churches with traditional Biblical views of gender were more likely to accept or espouse these same conventions of gender, even when they recognized that these conventions would bar them from various forms of participation and/or power. In contrast, women who had the legitimization of a less overtly patriarchal society were more likely to challenge these restrictive gender roles. While the U.S. can also be characterized as patriarchal, the male dominated religious political influence found in Egypt is not seen in the U.S. to the same extent. Moreover, freedom of opportunity for social power, and the acceptance of radical feminist ideals are more commonly encountered in the U.S. than in Egypt. Cassesse and Holman’s explanation of this phenomenon is one possible explanation for the results of this study.

Armanios (2013) also examined the common gender prescriptions in the Coptic church in terms of the “ideal” Coptic woman. Her analysis asserts that the ideal Coptic wife, mother, or daughter is the main keeper of the family’s spiritual well-being or growth. Her main domain exists inside the home as a keeper of the family’s purity and a teacher of spiritual values to the next generation. As a consequence, obedience and submission to male authority figures, namely Christ and one’s husband, are highly valued in Coptic women. This expectation of women to care for the family’s purity or spiritual discipline was observed many times in interviews with both groups. At

numerous points, women pointed to the mother of a family as having the sole or primary responsibility for transferring her faith to the next generation and ensuring her family’s spiritual purity. Most women saw this role with a sense of reverence and honor, and at the very least, a sense of importance. More women in the U.S.-based interviews criticized this role for various reasons. While some admired the role but felt frustrated with the corresponding lack of power in the church, others felt the pressure taking on this role at all was a form of control not imposed upon men.\textsuperscript{173}

Armanios tied this role of women to the existence of the Coptic Church in a Muslim-dominated society. Because evangelizing to the predominantly Muslim population is illegal in Egypt, the avenues for growth in the Coptic Church are largely limited to procreation. Therefore, instead of focusing on growing the Coptic church via evangelism, the focus is on maintaining the faithfulness and commitment of those who are already there or being born into it. Throughout the interviews, women were clear about the dangers of sharing their faith in public in Egypt, and the ever-present dangers of persecution in general. This may contribute to the sense of importance and honor given to the position of mother. In addition, the centrality of Mary as the mother of Jesus contributed to many women’s sense of honor in having the responsibility of transferring faith to the next generation.

Lastly, the work of Henrion which shows that women struggle to enter fields in which they do not see representation of women is relevant to this study. Women more often choose alternative trajectories for themselves because of social stereotypes about women, as well as a lack of female role models to help young women envision the possibilities of the future. This is relevant in terms

of Coptic women because of the common complaint among participants of this study is that they do not see female representation either in their churches or in the teachings of their churches.

Lack of female leadership, as well as relative lack of focus on female saints at the same frequency of male saints, are problematic for women who struggle to find role models for themselves. This study shows that Coptic women easily find role models in the female saints, who empower and inspire them in numerous ways. Moving forward this is important for the church to understand. Since Coptic women seek lessons from female saints, teaching more about them will provide Coptic women with more sources of inspiration, motivation, empowerment. Such means of education will provide necessary models of what it means to be a Coptic, Christian woman in today’s world.

**Limitations**

This study was largely exploratory due to the lack of prior qualitative research on this topic, both as it relates to Coptic female saints and Coptic women and their experience within their religion. The limitations of this study therefore are many, while opportunities for further research are also many. One limitation that does not make this study generalizable is its small scope. Participants from the U.S. were living only in Southern California, and Egypt-based participants (while living in various areas in Egypt), were largely referred through a single source. The limited age ranges, geographical locations, and homogeneity of educational levels prevent this study from being generalizable. In addition, this qualitative study explored many different aspects of Coptic female experience as it relates to the saints, rather than going in-depth about one or two specific areas of this broad topic. Therefore, this study constitutes a broad look at the topic under question.

**Recommendations**

Further study of this topic is needed in order to better understand the nuances and trends in Coptic female experience as it relates to the female saints. Several specific areas of study would be
valuable. First, more information about the educational experiences of Coptic women in their churches is warranted. While this study revealed that many of the participants relied on their churches to discover the lives of female saints, the exact nature of this teaching and the disparity between male and female saints cannot be fully characterized in this study. Many more aspects of female experience within the Coptic church are missing. Participant observation in Coptic churches as a supplement to quantitative or qualitative studies about Coptic women’s experiences would be valuable in better understanding how the actual nature of church services contributes to the lack of education of Coptic women about female saints, as well as other topics.

In addition, further research about the influence of culture on women’s perceptions of their own religion’s gendered teachings and practices, specifically as it relates to Coptic Orthodox Christianity, would further an understanding of how Coptic women negotiate their religious beliefs with wider cultural values. Further cross-cultural studies and studies with greater sample sizes are necessary to explore this issue. In addition, strict survey studies using Likert scales or their equivalent would allow researchers to examine a greater number of women’s opinions regarding the Coptic church and its teachings and practices about gender and female saints. Such studies would also give a better idea about the knowledge that Coptic women have about various male and female saints. Comparative studies of this nature between men and women could show if there is a disparity between male and female education or knowledge concerning saints or other church teachings.

As a qualitative study using in-depth interviews, this study was able to look deeply at Coptic female experience, opinion, and knowledge about female saints and their relation to their own gendered experiences. However, the nature of this study does not allow strict comparison with other data. Rather, this study can be a springboard from which to explore at greater depth some of the findings from this study, including the influence of culture on the acceptance of patriarchal
norms in religion, the relationship between women and their religion’s saints, and the changing nature of attitudes concerning gender in the Egyptian Coptic church versus the Coptic diaspora in the U.S. and other countries. Considering the small amount of research on the Coptic church in general, there are many avenues yet to be explored that would help scholars better understand the interplay between gender, power, and concrete expressions of faith such as the devotion to or veneration of saints in religions such as Coptic Orthodoxy.
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Appendix A

Part 1: Demographic Information (US Interviews)

Chart 1.1 Ages of Participants (N=21)
Chart 1.2. Primary Language (N=21)
Chart 1.3 Level of Education (N=21)
Chart 1.4 Birthplace (N=21)
Part 2: Demographic Information (Egypt Interviews)

Chart 2.1 Ages of Participants (N=21)
Chart 2.1 Primary Language Spoken (N=21)
Chart 2.3 Level of Education (N=21)
Chart 2.4 Birthplace (N=21)
Part 3: Most Common Female Saints Mentioned by the US Participants

Table 1: Common Names of Female Saints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saint Name</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Damiana</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verena</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary of Egypt</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary <em>Theotokos</em></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youstina</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina the Monk</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamav Irini</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohrail</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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Part 4: Importance of Saints According to Egypt Participants

Table 2: The Importance of Saints

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Exceedingly Important”</td>
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Appendix B

Part 1: Interview Questions:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:

1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:

1. You said that the female Coptic saint(s) you relate to most is/are ______, can you tell me why?
2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life including the effect of this saint?

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:

1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
4. You said that ______ is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:

138
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?

E. Reacting to the story:
   • I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation: (Insert hagiography of saint)

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?

H. Coptic women in the future:

1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?

6. Recommendations for the Coptic church:

7. Name our conversation:
Part 2: Consent Form

Claremont Graduate University

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SPIRITUAL POWER OF THE COPTIC WOMEN SAINTS (IRB # 3461)

You are invited to participate in a research project. While volunteering will probably not benefit you directly, you will be helping to the investigators to conduct the research. If you decide to volunteer, you will agree to participate in the research, which would require about an hour of your time. Volunteering for this study does not involve risk beyond what a typical person would experience on an ordinary day. Since your involvement is entirely voluntary, you may withdraw at any time for any reason. Please continue reading for more information about the study.

STUDY LEADERSHIP: This research project is led by Trevena Hanna, scholar at the Claremont Graduate University, who is being supervised by Karen Torjesen, professor of religious studies and women’s studies in religion at Claremont Graduate University.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research project is to understand how Egyptian Coptic women living in Southern California relate to Coptic female saints, and how the teachings of the Coptic church facilitate their understanding of female saints. The knowledge and spiritual or emotional connections of the participants will be explored via interviews. Your participation in this study will contribute to a greater understanding of the experiences of Coptic women saints are taught and talked about in the Coptic church, and how this affects women’s experiences and knowledge.

ELIGIBILITY: The research subject will be women who live in the United States either born here or immigrated from Egypt to the United States. The women have to be over eighteen years old. I’ll be speaking only to subjects that are fluent in the English language.

PARTICIPATION: During the study, you will mark and answer the questions for the demographic part in the paper and after that you will be asked to respond to the questions for the interview and it will be recorded via digital voice recorder. This will take about an hour.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: The risks that you run by taking part in this study are no more than minimal risks. These risks include feelings of discomfort, anxiety, or embarrassment due to the personal nature of the interview questions.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: I do not expect the study to benefit you personally. This study will benefit the researcher by including the results of the research into the final written paper.

142
**COMPENSATION:** You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from the study at any time without it being held against you. Your decision whether or not to participate will have no effect on your current or future connection with anyone at CGU.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your individual privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study. We will not use the data we collect for future research, nor share it with others. I will record the interview by the digital voice recorder, and in order to protect the confidentiality of your responses, all the recordings will be kept in a secure place and will be erased and destroyed after transcribing it.

**SPONSORSHIP** This study isn't being paid for by any sponsoring agencies or funding sources.

---

**FURTHER INFORMATION:** If you have any questions or would like additional information about this study, please contact Trevena Hanna at phone number (909) 933-0669 and email address trevena.hanna@cgu.edu You may also contact Karen Jo Torjesen at phone number (909) 607-9587 and email address karen.torjesen@cgu.edu. The CGU Institutional Review Board has certified this project as exempt. If you have any ethical concerns about this project or about your rights as a human subject in research, you may contact the CGU IRB at (909) 607-9406 or at irb@cgu.edu. A copy of this form will be given to you if you wish to keep it.

**CONSENT:** Your signature below means that you understand the information on this form, that someone has answered any and all questions you may have about this study, and you voluntarily agree to participate in it.

Signature of Participant __________________________ Date __________

Printed Name of Participant __________________________

---

8345e37f-5198-4056-a844-49e6035bb2a1.docx CGU IRB # 3461
The undersigned researcher has reviewed the information in this consent form with the participant and answered any of his or her questions about the study.

Signature of Researcher _____________________ Date ____________

Printed Name of Researcher _____________________

CGU Adult Consent Form Template

Last updated: 09/20/19
Part 3: IRB Exemption

Claremont Graduate University
Institutional Review Board

Dear Trevena,

Thank you for submitting your research protocol to the IRB at Claremont Graduate University for review. On 10/02/2019, based on the information provided for Protocol #3461, we have certified it as exempt from IRB supervision under CGU policy and federal regulations at 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

Exempt status means that so long as the study does not vary significantly from the description you have given us, further review in the form of filing annual Renewal or project Closure forms is not necessary. You may specify in relevant study documents, such as consent forms, that CGU human subject’s protection staff members have reviewed the study and determined it to be exempt from IRB supervision. The IRB does not “approve” (or disapprove) studies that are exempt, so kindly avoid use of this verb.

Please note carefully that maintaining exempt status requires that (a) the risks of the study remain minimal, that is, as described in the application; (b) that anonymity or confidentiality of participants, or protection of participants against any higher level of risk due to the internal knowledge or disclosure of identity by the researcher, is maintained as described in the application; (c) that no deception is introduced, such as reducing the accuracy or specificity of information about the research protocol that is given to prospective participants; (d) the research purpose, sponsor, and recruited study population remain as described; and (e) the principal investigator (PI) continues and is not replaced.

Changes in any such features of the study as described may affect one or more of the conditions of exemption and would very likely warrant a reclassification of the research protocol from exempt status and require additional IRB review. If any such changes are contemplated, please notify the IRB as soon as possible and before the study is begun or changes are implemented. If any events occur during the course of research, such as unexpected adverse consequences to participants, that call into question the features that permitted a determination of exempt status, you must notify the IRB as soon as possible.

Please note that a series of suggestions may also be attached to this email. These are suggestions to develop or improve your research protocol. These suggestions are highly recommended but not required. You do not need to send anything back to the IRB.
If Applicable: Most listservs, websites, and bulletin boards have policies regulating the types of advertisements or solicitations that may be posted, including from whom prior approval must be obtained. Many institutions and even classroom instructors have policies regarding who can solicit potential research participants from among their students, employees, etc., what information must be included in solicitations, and how recruitment notices are distributed or posted. You should familiarize yourself with the policies and approval procedures required of you to recruit for or conduct your study by listservs, websites, institutions, and/or instructors. Approval or exemption by the CGU IRB does not substitute for these approvals or release you from assuring that you have gained appropriate approvals before advertising or conducting your study in such venues.

The IRB may be reached at (909) 607-9406 or via email to irb@cgu.edu. KGI personnel with questions about their exempt status should contact KGI’s Office of Research and Sponsored Projects at (909) 607-9313 or irb@kgi.edu. The IRB wishes you well in the conduct of your research project.

Sincerely,
Andrew Conway, IRB Chair
andrew.conway@cgu.edu

James Griffith, IRB Manager
james.griffith2@cg.edu

Attachments:
• Consent Form 9/23/2019.pdf
150 East Tenth Street ● Claremont, California 91711-6160
tel: 909.607.9406
Dear Trevena,

The amendment to protocol #3461 The Spiritual Power of the Coptic Women Saints was acknowledged on 02/05/2020. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Carrie Herr
Office of Research, Sponsored Programs and Grants Administrative Assistant
carrie.herr@cgu.edu

150 East Tenth Street ● Claremont, California 91711-6160
Tel: 909.607.9406
Part 5: Interview Transcripts (U.S. Participants)

1- Fight the Good Fight
Thank you for participating in the interviews “The power of the Coptic Female Saints”.

Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   • 18-24
   • 25-34
   • 35-44
   • 45-54
   • 55-64
   • 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   • America
   • Egypt
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

3. What is your gender?
   • Female
   • Male
   • Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   • American
   • Egyptian
   • African
   • White
   • American/ Egyptian
   • Multiple ethnicity
   • Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   • English
   • Arabic
   • French
   • Italian
   • Coptic
   • Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:

1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Saints are very important to me because they are the ultimate examples of what it is like to “Fight the good fight” and to struggle on Earth for the Love of Christ in order to inherit His heavenly kingdom. Saints give us a practical application of what Jesus Christ Himself taught us to do.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   I can only count a handful, but that is because I am not as well-versed in our church heritage as I should/could be.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   Saint Helena.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:

1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Saint Helena, can you tell me why?
   Saint Helena was a strong woman who knew what her beliefs were and did not let the scrutiny of others or fear waiver her faith.
2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**

Saint Helena is most recognized for her discovery of the Cross that Jesus Christ was crucified on. The discovery of the cross came after she ordered a temple to be destroyed and after excavation began, three crosses were found, which she believed one to be the cross Jesus was crucified on. Helena brought in a very ill woman and had her touch two of the three crosses with no changes in her condition. After the woman touched the third cross, she was immediately healed. Saint Helena found relics of the rope Christ was tied with and the nails as well and she has played an important role in the history of our church.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**

Saint Susanna was a woman of strong faith and innocence, but quickly became a victim after two men observed her bathing and threatened to tell a lie about her that would result in her death if she did not sleep with them. After refusing, the two men testified against her and lied about what had happened. Daniel was wise and asked each man individually to tell the story and ultimately determined they were both lying and set Susanna free from the hands of death.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**

No, Not yet.

**C. The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**

   Asking the saints to intercede on our behalf to help us communicate with God and hear His voice. Also, acknowledging the saints and respecting them for fighting the good fight and keeping their faith even through the most difficult trials and tribulations, sometimes leading to martyrdom.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**

   Saint Mary (Theotokos), Saint Anthony, Saint Mina, Saint Gregory the Wonder Worker, Saint Gregory the Armenian, Saint Gregory the Theologian, Saint Cyril, Saint Basil.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**

   Saint Mary Theotokos.

4. **You said that Saint Mary Theotokos is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**

   She was chosen and trusted by God to give birth to His Son, this means that she was the holiest of the holiest (out of all the women and the men saints). Her heart was pure, and she was so wise in everything she did. She is the mother of us all and we call her
whenever we have special requests to Jesus Christ as He historically listened to her at the wedding of Cana of Galilee when she told Him they had no more wine even though it wasn’t necessarily time for His first miracle.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Often times it is heard during the reading of the Synaxarium. Other times it is taught or mentioned to us in Sunday school or Bible studies helping us relate older saints to newer age saints.

**D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   I learned that women saints are not under the same stigma as in today’s world where women are looked down upon or not respected like men are. Coptic female saints are under the radar and sometimes undervalued by youth today, and honestly by myself as well because we do not hear about them as much as we do the big-name saints like Saint Mark, Saint Maurice, or Saint John. The Coptic female saints are very poised, feminine, filled with grace and demonstrate a great beauty exteriorly and interiorly, ultimately having a great influence on political leaders.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   Saint Maurice, because with his confidence in his faith, he encouraged his entire army to fight, despite not having enough people to fight and despite witnessing thousands of deaths before them. Saint Maurice encouraged his fellow soldiers to fight the good fight and not be afraid because they would be dying for Christ and ultimately attain Heaven. This is relatable for me because I am trying to live a life without fear of what could happen to me because of my faith. Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion give me comfort in standing for what I believe in and seeing the fruits of my labor by being rewarded in heaven, which is eternal, versus here on earth which is temporary.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   My knowledge is not the best, I recognize the names of saints but do not often remember the stories connected to them. I have to research their stories and often I am amazed by their strong faith.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   4

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
Whenever I have the desire to learn about saints, I am lucky to have resources on the
internet to read the lives of the saints and how to spiritually benefit from their examples.
Unfortunately, I do not do this as often as I want.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I'd like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me
  your observation:

Reading the story...

St. Demiana:
“On the 13th of Toba, St. Demiana was martyred. This chaste and fighter virgin was the daughter of Mark, Governor of El-Borollus, El-Zaafaran, and Wadi Al-Saysaban in the Northern delta of the valley of the Nile. She was the only daughter to her parents. When she was one year old, her father took her to the church of the monastery of Al-Maymah. He offered alms, candles and oblations so that God might bless her and keep her in His care. When she was fifteen years old, her father wanted her to be wed. She refused and told him that she had vowed herself as a bride to the Lord Christ. When she saw that her father was pleased with her intention, she asked him to build her a place where she could worship God in seclusion with her virgin friends. He fulfilled her wish and built her the house that she wanted. She lived in it with forty other virgins. They spent their time reading the holy scripture and in worship. Shortly after, Emperor Diocletian sent for Mark, St. Demiana's father, and ordered him to worship the idols. He refused at first, but after the Emperor appeased him, he obeyed his order and worshipped the idols and forsook the Creator of the Universe. When Mark returned to his official seat, and St. Demiana knew what had transpired, she rushed to meet him. She did not greet him, but said, "What is it that I heard about you? I would have preferred to hear about your death rather than to hear that you have renounced your faith and forsaken the God Who created you from non-existence into being, to worship gods made by hands. Take note that if you do not return to your first faith and renounce the worship of stones, you are not my father and I am not your daughter," and she left him. Her father was greatly moved by the words of his daughter, and he wept bitterly. In haste, he went to Diocletian and confessed the Lord Christ. When the Emperor could not convince him with threats and promises, he ordered him beheaded. When Diocletian learned that the one who turned Mark from worshipping the idols was St. Demiana, his daughter, he sent her a prince to try- at first gently- to convince her to worship idols, and if she disobeyed him to behead her. The prince went to her with two hundred soldiers and the instruments of torture. When he arrived at her palace, he said to her, "I am a messenger sent from Emperor Diocletian. I came to call upon you according to the Emperor's orders, to worship his gods, so that he can grant you all that you want." The saint shouted in his face saying, "May God denounce the messenger and the one by whom he was sent. Don't you have any shame at all to call stones and wood gods which are inhabited by devils? There is no god in heaven or on earth except one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Eternal Creator, the Everlasting, who is everywhere, who knows all the secrets, and who can throw you in hell where is the everlasting torment. As for me, I am the maidservant of my Master and my Savior Jesus Christ, and His Good Father and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity. Him I confess and upon Him I depend, and in His Name, I die, and by Him I live forever." The prince became exceedingly angry and ordered her to be placed in the Hinbazeen (the squeezing press), until her blood poured out of her body on the ground. The virgins were standing weeping over her. When they put her in prison, the angel of the Lord
appeared to her, touched her body with his illumined wings, and she was healed of all her wounds. The prince used all his evil imagination to torture St. Demiana, once by tearing her flesh and another time by placing her in boiling oil. Through it all the Lord raised her up safely. When the prince saw that all his attempts were in vain, before the steadfastness of this pure virgin he ordered her beheaded, and all the other virgins with her. Thus, they all received the crowns of martyrdom. Their prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?  
   Yes.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?  
   Through church.

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?  

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story  
   Just like the story of Saint Maurice, Saint Demiana gave her virgin companions courage to withstand the temptation to give up their faith in God in order to live. It is a very powerful message and it takes someone with great faith and love of God to follow through with all of this torture while keeping the ultimate goal in mind.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?  
   When we are placed in situations at work where we are tempted to be dishonest or to fit in out of fear of being persecuted, it is easy to abandon God in these moments. This is the testing of your faith and these opportunities are for you to show your love for God and to point out your own weaknesses and lack of love if you do choose to leave him. It is a way to wake you up from your slumber.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?  
   Absolutely.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?  
   Any method would be great.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?  
   I think this is a valuable saint to learn about in any stage of life, it is easy to apply it to many situations.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   If it was me who potentially found the cross Jesus Christ was crucified on, I think I would be skeptical, and I think my lack of faith would have prevent the ill woman from being healed. Saint Helena’s faith was so strong, and she believed so much that this was Christ’s cross that she enabled the woman to be healed.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   I think it is important to establish your faith first and foremost and build a relationship with God to solidify that faith. Once that is achieved, you should encourage others to grow in their faith with you. It is a wholistic ideal to be able not only to increase your faith but to help increase the faith and loyalty to Christ of others.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, because their faith never wavered and it didn’t matter what gender they were, they still had power over the enemy through Christ.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   I think Coptic women are strong because we come from a background where they had to be strong to pass down the faith to their children. An example I could give was of my mom when she defended me after my classmate’s mom yelled at me for assuming that I did not help her daughter with a class project. It was during a time where there was a wildfire not too far from where I lived. My mom was fearless, but wise and with a calm voice said, “This is a matter for our daughters to work out together, let’s give them that opportunity.” She was fearless and courageous to speak to this woman who had a lot of anger and rage toward me. Thankfully, my classmate’s mom calmly let me go into her house to talk to her daughter and work things out. From that day on I admired my mom for her strength, humility, and grace.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The Coptic community supports Coptic women and vice versa through the service that they give to the children. Whenever a problem arises, the priests of the church are there to listen to the problem and give advice on how to resolve it, with respect and dignity toward the woman, knowing that they are teaching and helping shape the Coptic community of the future. It is a team and community effort to maintain the integrity of the Church and the future of our children.
The Coptic society does not support women when it comes to the liturgy. Women do not have any leadership roles during the liturgy but are incorporated into an ecclesiastical choir during liturgy and to have roles in leading within their designated services.

4. **In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   American society supports Coptic women by allowing them the freedom to practice their faith. In college, there is a Coptic club and any club can be created freely. Today, I have not heard of any Coptic Women’s Clubs. I cannot think of any way that American society does not support Coptic women.

5. **In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   Egyptian society supports Coptic women by allowing them to practice in their own church. Outside of that, from what I hear and understand, being a woman, let alone a Coptic woman is not supported. Walking in the streets wearing a cross could actually provoke threats from the Islamic community.

6. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?**
   I do feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice in the USA, but I also believe that those in the USA have the freedom to call you weird or judge you based on your beliefs, which makes it more difficult to feel the freedom to practice your beliefs.

7. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?**
   In certain areas of Egypt, yes, but Copts in general do not flaunt their worship and are peaceful and keep to themselves about it, so as not to stir up violence or persecution for any reason.

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.**
   In God’s eyes, yes and He even reveres some of the Coptic women saints more than the men saints. However, as human beings and as a cultural influence, women tend to get the short end of the stick and are not given praise as they deserve.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   Prepare our children with more stories of women saints and emphasize their significance and importance in how they shaped our church today.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    I do not know much. I know that they have an Egyptian background.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
The role of Coptic women in the church is to raise their children to love the Lord and to be the ultimate example in marriage. The symbolism used by the church to depict marriage presents the husband’s role as emulating Christ and the wife’s role as representing His Church. Both very important roles and crucial for the growth of the orthodox church.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**
1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
   Education is very important. Educating women of their importance and roles in the church.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**
   My dad always had us pray together as a family growing up and continues to pray and read the Bible (with my mom) in front of us daily as a reminder that we need to pray and maintain a relationship with God. I plan to do the same for my children, God willing. My mom was willing to talk about anything, no matter how uncomfortable or awkward it was, she always had an open mind and wanted to hear about the problems my sister and I were going through and gave us advice accordingly. I plan to be open minded and to listen to the future generations to understand their problems and fight the enemy through different strategies with the same goal in mind, heaven.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving the women’s rights to the Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   Yes, by developing opportunities for us to serve within the church and our community and develop leadership roles for mission trips and service trips.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   Through iconography, which tells the story of every saint and through synaxarium.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   Both.

6. **Recommendations for church or families:**

7. **Name our conversation:** Fight the good fight.

**2- Eventful**

Demographics: Please highlight the answers of the demographics part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others
7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      Coptic Christian saints are very important to me. I grew up listening to their stories and loving them. Saints are an inspiration to me. Their stories give me hope and often they light the way for me when I feel lost. I value the relationship I have with the saints whom I consider my friends.

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      I know there are a lot, but I am familiar with about eight.

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      St. Marina, St. Barbara, St. Mary, St. Justina, St. Demean, Mary Magdalene, Tamav Irene, St. Marina the monk.

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      St. Marina.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Marina. Can you tell me why?
      My baptism name is Marina named after St. Marina. Growing up my mom told me this saint is my best friend and that I should talk to her every day. My mom prayed to St. Marina to give her a child and that child was me.

   2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
      The story I remember is that St. Marina defeated the devil. She was born to non-Christian parents and her mother passed away when she was a child. She had a nanny who taught her who God was and the Christian faith. The governor admired St. Marina and wanted to marry her. He made his soldiers bring her to him and asked her to worship idols, but she refused. He bribed her and tortured but she refused and insisted that she was Christian.
The governor imprisoned her and in prison a huge serpent almost swallowed her, but she prayed to the Lord and he saved her. St. Marina was brought forth to the governor the next day and he was shocked that she was alive. He attempted to make her worship idols again, but she proclaimed her faith to the Lord. Then the governor ordered her to be hanged on a squeezing wheel then thrown into prison. However, the Lord healed her. The devil visited her in prison and tempted her. She made the sign of the cross and he left her. The governor then ordered her to be beheaded. She was beheaded and the executioner who performed this act immediately converted to Christianity and sacrificed himself as well.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   Yes, St. Marina’s story of conquering the devil and the story of another St. Marina the monk who went disguised herself as a man and entered the monastery.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   Yes, indirectly when my mom prayed to St. Marina to have a child. They always listen to my prayers.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   Sainthood is path of those that are genuinely pursuing the Lord. It is a path I personally hope to reach. All of the saints sacrificed their earthly desires to fill their heart with God. In all of the stories of the Saints, they were continuously tempted; however, they kept their eyes on God no matter what.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   I believe all the Saints are equally important, but some are recognized more than others. When I enter most Coptic orthodox churches, I see images of St. Pope Kyrillos, St. Mina, and St. Mark.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary.

4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   St. Mary is the Mother of Jesus. Her role in the Coptic culture is very important because she gave birth to Jesus. Her story is extremely special because she conceived a son with the power of the Holy Spirit. She was humble and faithful in her relationship with God. Her story shows us that with God nothing is impossible and today she is highly honored in the Coptic culture.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
Once in a while I hear stories from the synaxarium but not all female saints are Egyptian.
I don’t hear female Egyptian saint stories as much.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and
   lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have
   learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   The Coptic female saints were very courageous, resilient, and completely devout in their
   relationship with God. They all served with love and compassion.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for
   yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   St. Marina is one of my role models because she was courageous, brave, and resilient no
   matter what temptation came to her. She focused on what is above and continuously used
   the sign of the cross as a weapon.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   I am not knowledgeable about Coptic female saints. There is a lot to discover and learn
   about. I know some stories, but I do not know them all.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate
   your knowledge?
   I would rate my knowledge a 2 out of 10.

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your
   understanding of Coptic saints?
   Reading the synaxarium, spiritual books, and the bible. Starting conversations with others
   especially the elders.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your
  observation:
  Reading the story...

St. Sarah, the sister of St. Moises:
“After the death of his father, St. Moises wanted to join a community of ascetics, but before
doing so, he meant to have his sister Sarah married. When she knew of his plan, she told him that
she would not get married unless he did so. He said to her: “I have committed many sins and
want to repent by dedicating my life to God. I cannot get married and work out my salvation at
the same time.”

Her reply was: “Your plan and desire are the same as mine.” When he saw how resolute she
was, he distributed all their money among the poor. He first placed her in a community of virgins
outside Alexandria and then went away and joined a group of ascetics.

They did not see each other for ten years. When Emperor Decius started persecuting the
Christians (249-250) during the time of Pope Demetrius I, who was the twelfth pope of
Alexandria, St. Moises sent word to his sister informing her of his intention to win the crown of...
martyrdom. Immediately, she took leave of her mother superior, asked for the blessing and prayers of her sisters and joined her brother on the way to Alexandria. Both of them confessed their faith in Christ before the prefect, who severely tortured them and gave his orders that they would be beheaded. The Coptic Church commemorates their martyrdom on the twenty-sixth of Misra.”  

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?  
Yes.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?  
Yes, through readings with my family.

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?  

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story.  
I love this story. St. Sarah was courageous, brave, and determined to be the Lord. She loved the Lord so much, she chased him by winning the crown of martyrdom. She devoted her life to the Lord and focused on heavenly things rather than earthly things.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?  
Yes, I can. I can practice being courageous in my faith and confess it in the world that we live in.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?  
Yes, of course. There are many lessons to learn from the lives of the saints.

7. Through what type of resources would you like to learn more about the story; via church or reading or other methods?  
Synaxarium, holy/spiritual readings, talking to the elders.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?  
Yes, in all ages.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:  
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?  
I think it would be a difficult thing to experience. My reaction would most probably be fear or anxiety. I would hope to rise against all fears and temptations just like St. Marina

and use the weapons that the Lord gave me like calling on him through the sign of the cross. I would handle it by praying to my Lord. Nothing is impossible through him.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? I think the most important thing is to have conversations about female Coptic saints. The stories are in many books, but they only live through our voices. We must give these stories a place in today’s Coptic culture. We can only apply the virtues when we fill ourselves with knowledge. We must think of ourselves in their position and see how they would react. Most of all, to have the same virtues we must have the same goal of uniting with our Creator.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that? Coptic Women Saints are strong enough, especially in the era in which they lived. They spoke their beliefs and rebelled against temptation.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life. No, in fact I believe the Women Saints were stronger than us back then. It easy for all of us to be distracted and not focus on our heavenly goals. Today women are different than they were back then. Coptic women lack passion in their relationship with the Lord. Yes, we all go to church; yes, some of us serve; but there is so much more to do like these Coptic female saints did.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women? The Coptic community supports Coptic women in their faith but does not support them socially. We have meetings such as bible study and conferences that are dedicated to women. Our Egyptian culture refrains from having conversations that are sensitive, but conversations like these must address issues and help our Coptic women and guide them spiritually, especially in the liberal society that we live in today. These sensitive topics must be addressed, and our young girls must be guided in the right direction without being strict but rather informing our girls and empowering them in the right direction willingly and faithfully. The Coptic Community should be a platform that empowers one another but instead it is rather a platform where many people are judged. This needs to change as we already live in a society that is critical of our beliefs. We must strengthen one another and have a united community.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women? The American society is extremely liberal and supports all kinds of women doing whatever they please; however, the American society does not support Coptic women in
being Coptic. Our religious faith is called too conservative and our views are not respected. America has changed over the years and each year becomes more critical and more conservative in its Christian beliefs. Our views need to be respected and we must be able to stand up and put an end to these attackers.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Although I live in the US, based on international news, the Egyptian society in Egypt does not seem to support Coptic women. Males are seen as superior to females as advertised throughout the media. In the pharaonic era, women and men were once viewed equally and women were given many positions of power. These days it is the reverse. Although the roles of women in Egypt have gotten better there is still so much that needs to be changed. One good thing that is seen is that Coptic Women’s education is supported in Egyptian society.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes, we have the freedom to practice our beliefs; however, the USA is becoming extremely liberal and our views are not always respected and often attacked.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   Not really, Egypt is predominantly a Muslim and patriarchal society and religious freedom is barely tolerated. There is a division in the Egyptian society based on religion and gender. Copts in Egypt are often attacked and persecuted for their religious beliefs. I can only imagine what women experience in Egypt today.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Explain it. I don’t believe Coptic Female Saints have equality compared to Coptic Male Saints. Growing up I was always educated on Coptic Male Saints more as they are more prominent in Coptic culture and most churches.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   We can apply equality between men and women in the Coptic church by valuing both genders equally. Another way is to converse about female saints equally as male saints. This will lessen the superior view of males especially since male Coptic saints are more popular than female saints.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Coptic Women?
    They are faithful, courageous, determined, passionate, kind and loving.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
The role of Coptic women in the church is dedicated to caring for the children, cleaning and cooking for the church. Females often have a role as Sunday school teachers. I would describe the majority of Coptic women in the church especially the elders as nurturing. They nurture everyone around them.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women in faith from generation to generation?
   I can start educating my Sunday school class on female saints. I can stop the discrepancy between males and females at an early age because I teach kindergarten. I believe the most important thing is practicing love and showing love to everyone. Everyone wants to be loved and cared for and if that is shown that will empower Coptic women on faith from generation to generation.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   I inherited my strong faith from my mother because she always did everything in love. She was never strict and let me do everything willingly. I didn’t grow up in a traditional strict Egyptian household. My mother never restricted me from doing anything. She always explained what was right or wrong to me and allowed me to make my own decisions. She trusted me and respected me. I am going to do the same thing to the next generation. I will trust them, and I will shower them in love and educate them. Love and freedom are the secret to strong faith.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   It is getting better but there is still a long way to go. Women do have more rights such as they are able to be deaconesses in the church. They are able to enter the altar to take communion.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   Through icons in the church.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   It is important to honor the female saints those who were martyred and those today. They exemplify the Lord.

6. Recommendations:

7. Name our conversation: Eventful

3- Reflections of Christ
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others
7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Saints are very important to me as a Coptic Christian because they serve as role models to heaven.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   I am aware of many female Coptic Saints.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Marina, St. Verena, St. Irini, St. Mohrail, St. Mary, St. Susana, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Demiana, St. Filomina, ...etc.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you are relate to the most?
   I relate the most to St. Mohrail.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Mohrail. Can you tell me why?
   I learned about the story of St. Mohrail when I was around her age when she got martyred. Also, I connected with her the most because I learned about her during a time of severe persecution of the church (the martyrdom of the 21 in Libya and the bombing of multiple churches). Her eagerness to die for the name of Christ despite her young age and her sole focus on God and His children was an awakening to me. It taught me that you can never be too young to experience God to the fullest and serve Him in all ways possible.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
   St. Mohrail, she used to teach the even younger children the psalms of David. She prayed to God and He healed a woman who was having trouble with her pregnancy.
St. Mary came to her parents and told them that she wanted Mohrail as a bride for her Son, and promising that her body would return to her city. She insisted on getting into the boat that was taking some priests to be martyred. She bravely denounced the king’s idols and refused to worship them. She was tortured and placed in a box with snakes inside, but the soldiers kept hearing her praising God and they got scared. She received the crown of martyrdom and the box arrived at her city. The people from her city took her and built a place for her body so people can come and take her blessings.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   When St. Mary went St. Elizabeth to help her with her pregnancy and when St. Mary praised God as a response to St. Elizabeth’s praise to her. Also, my favorite story is St. Mohrail teaching her younger brother and other kids the psalms.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   If I had any, I am not aware of them, but I always ask for their intercession and am certain that they intercede for me in front of the throne of God.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
   1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
      To me, sainthood means being as close to God’s image as possible. Saints are, as Jesus commanded, the light of the world.

   2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
      St. Mary is the most important female saint to the Coptic church and saints like St. Mark, St. George, St. Mina, and St. Philopateer Markorious are the most prominent male saints.

   3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
      St. Mary is the most important saint to me.

   4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
      She was worthy enough for God to choose her to carry Christ in her womb and entrusted to be His mother. This mystery is manifested in so many aspects of her life and her character.

   5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
      I hear stories of female saints in the synaxarium in liturgy and in the movies on the Coptic channels.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   Although I never really reflect upon saints’ stories in such a way, I would say that one lesson that their stories taught me without me actually being aware is that men and women are equal in God’s eyes and that we can all be saints.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   Yes, I take St. Mary, St. Mohrail, and Tamav Irini (not canonized a saint) as role models for myself. I can relate the most to them.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   I feel like there are a lot more saints whose stories I do not know.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   4

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   I could read the synaxarium more often on my own.

E. Reacting to the story:
   • I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story…

St. Dorothea, the Virgin:
“St. Dorothea belonged to a noble and rich family from Alexandria and she decided to devote her entire life to her Savior: She enjoyed spiritual talents, physical beauty, and a fine education. These gifts earned her a prominent position in her society. Fearing the consequences of her tremendous worldly success, she decided to flee the world and consecrate her spiritual and mental gifts to the Lord.

Before she could carry out her plan, she received an invitation from the Emperor urging her to come to his palace. When she stood before Emperor Maximinus, he fell in love with her sweet talk and exceeding beauty. He was surprised when she refused his gifts and promises. He was then told that she was a Christian. He sent her some people from his court with two choices: either to live with him, enjoying the pleasure and luxury he could offer her, or to undergo terrible torture and death.

Her reply was: “My body is a sacred temple of the Lord and it is not to be defiled by worshipping the idols or sinking in any evil pleasures. I would rather die a hundred times. Go and tell your Emperor that whoever talks about shedding the blood of Christians ought not to speak about happiness.”

The Emperor was furious when he heard her answer and gave his orders to kill whoever objected to him. The chaste virgin put all her confidence in the Lord and preferred a life in the

168
desert to one of shame and humiliation. In the middle of the night, she headed towards the desert accompanied by her loyal maids. When Maximinus heard of what she had done, he ordered the arrest of all the virgins remaining in the city. They were to sacrifice to the idols or else be slaughtered. They all chose death and won the crown of martyrdom.

But Dorothea stayed in the desert for many years, living in a severely ascetic life of prayer and fasting. A great number of virgins lived with her taking her as their example. She departed this world peacefully in 320 AD and the Church commemorates her departure on the eighth of February.” 176

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No, I have not.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   I can learn that when you’re satisfied with God’s love everything else seems worthless. I can learn that you need to reflect and make sure that you are not carried away with the worldly vanishing pleasures. Run away from pride and false glory, stand your ground, be brave, and do not be easily flattered. Surround yourself with people who love God and who will not hinder you from doing what is pleasing to God.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   Really like it and feel like it could relate in many ways to modern society.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   Lessons above.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Mainly via church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   I feel like it is a good way to learn about this saint as adolescents or young adults.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of

this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?

I do not imagine that I would have reacted in the same way because I am not close to being as saintly as she is although I would really hope to be able to show my love to God as bravely as she did.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?

We can learn from the faith, courage, love, and dedication to God.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?

Yes, I feel like they have true strength which is illustrated in their virtues. This kind of strength is not the same type that people nowadays would define as strong. They have humility, love, and forgiveness. They draw their strength from God.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
Give me an example from real life.

It depends because some can be strong in faith and others not. I saw in my life some mothers whose children were martyred or died at a young age while they demonstrate great faith.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?

Men and women are equal in the Coptic society. There is nothing that I see in the Coptic society that does not support women.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

In the United States, Coptic women receive more equality in society than in Egypt.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?

In general, women in Egypt are perceived as lower in status than men and therefore, they do not get as many rights and opportunities for advancements in careers and society.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

Yes, they do.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?

170
According to the media, Coptic women do not get a fair chance of practicing their beliefs due to persecutions and discriminations in day-to-day life.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.

When I was reading the synaxarium and it seems like there are more male saints stories than female saints and that could be due to the presence to more male saints with significant contributions to the religion or also it could be related to the culture that generally preferred men over women.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?

I think that there already is equality between men and women in our Coptic church although the church could teach girls and boys more about the female Coptic saints.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?

Forgiving, patient, loving, strong.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?

Hymns, Sunday school, cleaning, spiritual competition, cooking.

H. Coptic women in the future:

1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women in faith from generation to generation?

Through spreading the stories of the female Coptic saints so they can be taken as examples.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?

They would always encourage me to go to church, to hymns classes and to Sunday school. My grandmother would sit with me and watch movies about the Coptic saints and my brother would sit with me and teach me psalms and songs. I would transfer this to the next generation through incorporating the tradition and stories into their daily lives.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?

The rights of women are guarded within the realm of the church although the church might not have complete authority to intervene with aspects outside.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?

They honor them through songs, movies, praises, and through passing down the stories to the next generations.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?

They are still honored until today and an example of a modern saint is Tamav Irini.
6. **Recommendations:**
Teaching the congregation more about the saints.
Contemplating more about the story in church and in Sunday schools.

7. **Name our conversation:**
Reflections of Christ.

**4- My Identity is Christ.**

**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. **Which race/ethnicity best describes you?**
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. **What is the primary language you speak?**
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where are you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Very important. They are a reminder of how to live a life of faith.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   About 5-6.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Justina, St. Marina, St. Catrina.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Marina.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Marina. Can you tell me why?
Other than having the same name, I relate to St. Marina because I was a tomboy growing up and she too had to dress as a man to be part of the monastery. She will do whatever it takes to do what she believes is right.

2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**
   St. Marina dressed as a man to be part of the monastery. Accused of getting a woman pregnant; she kept quiet and raised the child herself, until she was found not guilty at her death.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   Well, I truly admire St. Susanna for choosing to do what is right in front of God vs what is right in front of people.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   St. Mary has always been close to my heart. Her purity and patient and motherhood envelop me.

**C. The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   Stories of fighters. Friends with a lesson to teach you. They lived the cross; now we can learn from them.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   The most important thing is learning from the Godly life they lived.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary the mother of God.

4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   I think in Christianity in general. St. Mary was worthy to carry God Himself. Though other denominations may not give her as much credit as she deserves.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Not as often as male saint, since they are not as common. Typically, we hear their stories in their yearly commemoration on Sunday.
D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   A woman is not weak but courageous. She stands up for her people. She stands up for what is right.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   Of course, St. Mary in her purity. I also admire St. Anthony’s determination and wisdom.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   I would like to learn about more Coptic saints. There are only a few that I know about.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   3/10

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Read and watch more of their stories. Also learn about them through sermons.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

St. Basillisse:
"St. Basilissa grew up in a pious Christian family that enjoyed fame, material affluence, and spiritual richness in Antione (at present Mallawi in Upper Egypt). Her parents made it their concern to educate her in the best possible way and to sow in her the seeds of loving Christ and His saints. Consequently, she had a strong desire to live only for her Saviour. She was her parents’ only daughter, and they married her to a pious and noble young man called Julian. After the wedding, the couple decided to consecrate their lives to God for they had the same spiritual desires. They were kneeling down and praying when the house began to shake and very strong light, stronger than the sun, shone over the whole place. The beheld our Lord Jesus Christ with multitudes of angels. To His right stood the Holy Virgins, St. Mary accompanied by a group of virgins. The Lord blessed the young couple who spent their first night praising and glorifying Him in a state of ecstasy and joy. They decided to divide their house into two separate wings. St. Basillisse lived in one part taking care of the sick, the widows and orphans of her sex. Soon a great number of virgins lived with
her and took her life of continence and purity as their model. As for Julian, he used to serve the strange people and was known as “the host of the strangers”.

St. Basillisse’s spiritual daughters continued living under her guidance until a decree of persecution, issued by Emperor Diocletian, reached Egypt. It caused much horror among the Christians everywhere. The saint was worried lest any of her daughters should be devoured by the wolf or the lion. (Jn 10:12, 1 Pt 5:8) She prayed and fasted for a very long time until one night in a vision the Lord informed her that He would call this choir of virgins to His presence very soon and they would not be harmed by the coming persecution. However, Julian was to continue his spiritual struggle on earth.

St. Basillisse thanked the Lord for His care. Then she stood up and gathered the virgins telling them:

“Let us give thanks to the Lord who informed us in advance of some hidden secrets. Soon our life on earth will come to an end and the time of enjoying everlasting life is near. Let us forgive one another and purify our hearts of any anger and envy. For purity of body alone is not enough to inherit the eternal glory.”

The foundations of the room, where they were praying, started shaking and they all saw a column inscribed with the following words:

“Here is what He says the first and the last, all these virgins are sacred vessels in My eyes. Come to me to inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.”

As soon as they read these words, the column disappeared, and they were overwhelmed by indescribable joy. In a short time, St. Basillisse’s daughters departed from the world, one after the other. Having been consoled by a heavenly vision in which she saw all her daughters enjoying the glory of paradise, the saint’s soul ascended to heaven to share in this eternal joy.”177

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No, I have not.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   How to be a leader for other young women.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   I admire how she was a role model to other women.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   To spread the comfort and joy that God gives to us.

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176
6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Absolutely!

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Yes, via podcasts.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Of course, especially as a young woman looking for good role models.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   I have to be honest; I don’t think my faith is as strong. Fear and anxiety follow me.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   To always be the light of those around me. To spread hope, and words of joy and comfort.

**G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:**
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Very strong especially in a male dominated culture.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   Unfortunately, culture plays a big role. Coptic women today are strong, but I don’t think they know the extent of their strength.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   There is a Coptic Woman’s day in southern California which I enjoy going to with my sister and mom. The Coptic community can perhaps put more emphasis on women learning the hymns and church traditions.
4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women? I think the American society helps more women in general than Copts. In their career, motivation, and even motherhood.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women? Women are oppressed in the Middle East. There needs to be more awareness on (rational) gender differences and equality.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA? Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt? Yes, at a higher risk.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain. No, we don’t hear about them (Coptic Women Saints) as much at Church.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church? Share more encouraging female saint stories.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women? We are strong but confused at times. Society tells us there is a limit to where we can go and what we can do. In reality the limits and decisions are ours to make.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church? Childbearing and sitting. The behind the scenes work.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation? Be a good example to where you can reach and what you can do. Reach higher. Do more.
2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation? 
   I inherit it from God. God is my strength and He has always shown me grace.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how? 
   Slowly getting better. The Ecclesiastical Choir for example.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints? 
   Commemoration on Sunday.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups? 
   I believe we should honor all female saints of all ages.

6. Recommendations: 
   Emphasis on the woman’s role in the Church as well as learning the church tradition and hymns. The ecclesiastical Choir is a great example.

7. Name our conversation: 
   My identity is Christ.

**5- Female Saints and Their Relevance in the Coptic Church Today**

Demographics: Please highlight the answers of the demographics part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age? 
   - 18- 24 
   - 25-34 
   - 35-44 
   - 45- 54 
   - 55-64 
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live? 
   - America 
   - Egypt 
   - Canada 
   - Europe 
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - **Egyptian**
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - **Master’s degree**
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - **Egypt**
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:

1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   I grew up in a society in which saints are normally around, whether in church or at home. I can say that they were important in my tradition and religious upbringing.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   Growing up, I was not aware of the distinction between Coptic and non-Coptic women saints. Some of my favorite female saints are the Virgin Mary, St Monica and St Rita, none of whom are actually Coptic in origin! However, the Virgin Mary is very highly revered in the Coptic church, so she transcends all church differences and ethnicities.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   For me the Coptic female saints par excellence are St. Demiana the martyr and St. Mary of Egypt. In our age and time, also, Tamav Irene, the reposed abbess of Abu Sefein Convent.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St Mary of Egypt.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:

1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Mary of Egypt. Can you tell me why?
   She symbolizes the realistic journey of the soul to repentance and total life change.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
   St. Mary of Egypt, living as a harlot, she journeyed to Jerusalem but in the Church of the Resurrection she could not enter. She prayed before the Virgin’s icon and promised to repent if allowed to enter. She entered and later left for the desert where she lived for decades as a hermit and became one of the church’s saints; not only the Coptic church but also the Eastern Orthodox Church, who celebrates her feast on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   St Mary’s repentance story.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   Female saints in general: I used to ask for the intercession of St Monica and St Rita at many points of my life.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:

1. What does sainthood mean to you?
   Sainthood is the ultimate expression of Christian life; it is the person who has strived more towards the ‘holiness without which no one shall see God.’ It is what we as
Christians are called to be. As such, the saints are not a separate category of human beings, but are very relatable, down-to-earth persons whose main focus was on God, through whom they related to the whole world, during their mortal lives and beyond.

2. **In general, what are the most important Coptic male and female saints to the Coptic tradition?**
   This is a very broad question! The Coptic church groups saints into various categories like church fathers (or doctors), martyrs, confessors, monastics and lay saints, to name a few. Each category speaks to a different experience of God and the church. As such, I don’t see that the church considers some saints more important than others. In terms of popularity and popular piety, though, some saints are definitely more well-known like the Virgin Mary, St George, St Mark the Evangelist, Pope Kyrillos VI, St Demiana, St Abanoub, etc.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   I would say that the Virgin Mary is the only one to fit this category.

4. **You said that Virgin Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   Other than all the other saints, the Virgin Mary is theologically and doctrinally crucial for the church’s understanding of Christology and the whole economy of salvation. After the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, Mariology became doubly important as the measure of Orthodox faith.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Mostly during the Synaxarium reading during the Divine Liturgy. Women saints are frequently mentioned, although only in certain categories. They are usually martyrs, and nuns less frequently. According to the conservative Orthodox tradition, women very rarely feature as teachers or doctors of the church, if at all. It is also important to remember that the stories of most female saints, with only a few notable exceptions, come from Late Antiquity (i.e. usually before the Islamic conquest of Egypt in the seventh century CE).

**D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   I have learnt from them about strength and endurance (martyrs) and long-term commitment to a decision (Mary of Egypt).

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   Not a particular saint for all time, but according to my stage in life.
3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Good.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   7

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Reading their lives.

E. Reacting to the story:
   • I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story...

St. Piamon the Virgin:
“A city that has a pious consecrated virgin is protected by the Lord because of that virgin.” St. Athanasius.

The hagiography of this pious virgin is recorded in The Lausiac History by Palladius who visited Egypt in 388 AD and wrote about the Egyptian monks and ascetics. He did not name this saint’s hometown but simply recorded that she was from one of the villages in Upper Egypt. The dates of her birth and departure are not mentioned but it could be easily inferred that she lived during the fourth century.

St. Piamon spent all her life at home with her mother near a small village on the banks of the Upper Nile. She led a life of simplicity and austerity as she spent her nights in vigils, praying and reading the Holy Books. She ate once a day, in the evening and labored at the weaving of linen.

She was renowned for the gift of prophecy and the powers of intercessory prayer. This gift was clear when a fight occurred among some villages in Upper Egypt over the division of the water of the river Nile for irrigation. They fought so violently that many people were killed, and others were beaten to death. Then it happened that one village, which was stronger than the virgin’s native village, rose up against it in fierce wrath, and a group of violent and boastful men came carrying staves and spears to kill the people of her village. The angel of the Lord revealed to St. Piamon how their enemies were secretly planning to fall upon the helpless inhabitants of her village. Immediately, she called for the elders and priests of the village and told them what she had learned and advised them to make peace with the other village.

The priests believed Piamon; for they were fully aware of her piety and virtue. Afraid to confront their enemy, the elders asked her to settle the dispute saying: “We do not dare to go forth to meet these people and talk to them, for we know how hard-hearted they are. If you wish to save us all, go forth and meet them so that they will leave us in peace.”

However, it was difficult for the blessed virgin to do so, as she did not want to go out of her house and her solitary life. She spent the whole night praying to the Lord in strong faith saying:
“My Lord Jesus Christ, you are the judge of the whole earth and you do not accept any sort of injustice. Hear my prayer and give ear to my supplications, with your mighty hand and unlimited power make those who are coming to kill us stand still as stone.”

At dawn, when she was finished with her prayer, the enemy was three miles away from her village. All of a sudden, they stopped and were unable to move. Everyone knew that such a miracle took place through the prayers of Christ’s handmaiden. The threat was averted, and the enemy asked for peace saying:

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He has answered the prayers of Piamon the virgin and prevented us from hurting you.”

The Church commemorates her feast on the third of Tubah.”178

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   Courage.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   Very interesting.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   Belief in the power of prayer.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   It would be valuable to learn about her prayer life and sayings.

7. **Through what type of resources would you like to learn more about the story; via church or reading or other methods?**
   I do not think there is any other information about her available except in the Lausiac History, which makes more access to her life very difficult. However, if available, I guess reading would be the only available resource.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   As the story of an influential female monastic whose help was sought by the community, I would have liked to know about her as a younger adolescent, serving as an image of a strong, charismatic, praying woman of significant standing in her community.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

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1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?

   One has thought repeatedly of such situations due to the persecutions of Christians that have happened in our homeland, Egypt, over the past decades. One would hope to have their courage to testify and face death rather than succumb to fear.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?

   Their lives demonstrate various virtues, most of which are timeless and integrated into the church tradition like prayer, love, and humility which are applicable in any context. Others include courage, charisma and the defiance of power structures: whether the patriarchy, societal expectations (like marriage) or even governmental authority.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?

   I do not think it is possible to group them all into one stereotype, but I do believe that over history they have displayed significant strength, tolerance, ability to bear hardship and stay true to their faith, i.e. their identity and their very selves.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?

   Give me an example from real life.

   Again, Coptic women are not groupable into one single category. Many are strong women in their various capacities: mothers, housewives, main breadwinners, career women, academic women, etc. Others aren’t.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?

   It is difficult to separate the Coptic community from the church, so I will use both interchangeably here. Support for women comes from informal channels, sometimes in the form of assistance within the power structures, within the church, etc. Women are usually strongly involved in the church life and ministerial activities. Yet in the formal church hierarchy itself, women are excluded.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

   I see that Coptic women in America are afforded the same privileges, rights and opportunities as other women, especially women of the diaspora. Coptic women have become professors, career women and most recently, a Coptic female judge (Judge Sherrie Miday) was appointed in Ohio.
5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Egyptian society values men more than women. Being a woman and a Copt in Egypt signifies less power, more patriarchal constraints and glass ceilings. Yet at the same time, due to bureaucratic governmental quotas and the like, some women some of whom are Copts do get certain positions, but not as much as Muslim women and definitely not as Muslim men.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   They are in the same boat as Coptic men, which varies according to governorate, district and village.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   In terms of numerical representation and theological contribution, no but that reflects the whole tradition and not just the modern age; a bias found in all traditions, not just the Coptic one! In terms of popular piety, I would say yes, if not more. The Virgin Mary alone exceeds all male saints.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   One action in this direction in the United States Coptic churches has been the appointment of female choirs in the church, similar to the male choir. This is an attempt at female visibility which was problematic before and continues to raise questions. On the communal parish level, equality is more or less achieved simply because the women tend to be more involved in church affairs, more willing to be present at services and activities. As such, their voices tend to be heard. The level of hierarchy and priesthood is quite a controversial issue, and in this context the main question would be: does this really contribute to equality? At what cost would it come and would women themselves be willing to pay that price? Or is it just another attempt to import western protestant practices instead of finding grassroots solutions?

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Coptic Women?
    General traits would include generosity, self-sacrifice, passivity.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    Church Services, Deaconesses.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women in faith from generation to generation?
   By passing on the stories and attitudes of influential Coptic women, not just the saints, and also of Egyptian women as a whole. They need to feel connected to their homeland and its powerful women from history and into the present.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   Faith is built step by step from childhood, through a process of socialization into the church. Scripture stories, faith tradition and sacramental life. I would hope to give that to my children, along with a critical mind, without which a faith is always incomplete.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   What is meant by women’s rights? The church is not a legal entity and hence cannot give or withhold rights.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   Through reading their lives in church, celebrating their feast days, and establishing churches and shrines in their names. Copts also tend to name their children after saints, another way of honoring their legacy.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   From our current times, someone like Tamav Irene is honored.

6. Recommendations:
   Churches: the teaching should include the lives of the saints in terms of how relevant their lives are and how we can learn from them today. Not just stories about miracles that are irrelevant to the people! They have to get in touch with these saints’ humanity in order to learn from them and becomes saints themselves, as the Bible teaches. The church cannot do this alone, and here comes the role of the family. Families: I would say that they can teach their kids about the church saints, but make sure that the children learn to think about the lives of these saints and learn from them. Learn about faith, God, commitment, love, sacrifice, justice and empowerment. The tradition has to come alive for the kids.

7. Name our conversation:
   Female saints and their relevance in the Coptic church today.

6- It is Time for a Change Towards Equality in the Coptic World/ In God’s Eyes, Everyone is Equal.
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
• 18-24
• 25-34
• 35-44
• 45-54
• 55-64
• 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   • America
   • Egypt
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

3. What is your gender?
   • Female
   • Male
   • Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   • American
   • Egyptian
   • African
   • White
   • American/Egyptian
   • Multiple ethnicity
   • Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   • English
   • Arabic
   • French
   • Italian
   • Coptic
   • Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   • High school
   • College
   • Bachelor’s degree
   • Master’s degree
   • Doctoral degree
   • Others
7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      I believe saints are extremely important in my life because they are the connection between me and God. They intercede on my behalf.

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      Very few.

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      St. Verena/ St. Regula/ St. Marina/ St. Demiana / St. Mohrael/ St. Mary Magdalene/ St. Mary of Egypt/ St. Mary Mother of God.

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      St. Mary the Mother of God. I truly feel she's a mother to all.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Mary. Can you tell me why?
      St Mary the Mother of God because she’s a great representation of what a female should be like. I look up to her as a role model and hope one day I can be half of the person she was.

   2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
      St. Mary, I know a lot of stories about St. Mary. She was taken to the altar as a very young age to serve where she met Joseph who was much older than she was. She was engaged to him and Angel Gabriel appeared to her and told her that she will be the mother of God. From there we see her purity, her love of services, and a lot of other great virtues that I try to learn for myself.
3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   One of my favorite stories about St. Mary is at the wedding at Galilee when she went to her Son and told Him that the people ran out of wine and then commanded the servants to follow what He would say. It just teaches me to be patient and hand things to God as she did in this case.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   No, but I always feel their presence.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:

1. **What does sainthood mean to you?**
   Sainthood meaning living a saintly life which to me means a person must follow the commandments of God and try to gain as many virtues as possible.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. George/ St. Mina/ Pope Kyrollo/ St. Abu Sofien/ St. Abram/ St. Mary/ St. Verena/ St. Maurice/ St. Regula/ Anba Wanes.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary.

4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?  
   St. Mary because she is the greatest representative of how the church should be like and how an individual should be like.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Unfortunately, very rarely.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   They are as strong as male saints. They confessed their faith in front of everyone and were not afraid of death.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   Yes, St. Mary because of her many great virtues that I try to learn from.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
I know for a fact; I do not know that many female saints and part of that is the church since it is purely focused on male servants.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   About a 4.

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Read more.

E. Reacting to the story:
   - I'd like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story...

St. Potamiaena:
“Potamiaena was born in Alexandria to pious parents who nurtured her with the true faith from an early age and brought her up in the love and fear of Christ. Taking her example from the Lord and His Holy Mother, St. Mary, she decided to consecrate her life to her Savior. The pious virgin was a handmaiden of a rich man who was given over to a life of pleasure. Since she was young, accomplished and exceedingly beautiful, her master tried to induce her to purchase her freedom at the expense of her chastity. However, she rejected his proposal with contempt. Unable to submit her to his will, he became furious and handed her over to the prefect of the city. He claimed that she was a Christian who mocked the emperors and the gods of the Empire by uttering blasphemies against them. He asked the prefect not to hurt her if she agreed to marry him. If she abstained, she should be punished with every kind of torture and sentenced to death. Potamiaena was led to the forum but did not tremble or show any sign of fear when seeing the instruments of torture or hearing the threats of death. When asked to deny her Lord, she sealed her soul and said: “Thou judgest with iniquity, O judge, for thou commandest me to become subject unto fornication. I am the handmaiden of Christ, and I should stand before His throne without blemish.” As a result of her determination, she was to be stripped and cast into a cauldron of boiling pitch. Upon hearing her sentence, the virgin, who was mainly concerned with her chastity, said to the magistrate:
   “I beg of you, by the life of the emperor whom you honor, not to oblige me to appear unclothed; rather suffer me to be slowly lowered into the cauldron fully dressed, that you may see the patience which Jesus Christ, whom you know not, bestows upon those who trust Him.”
   Her request was granted and Basilides, one of the guards, was ordered to lead her to execution. He treated her with respect, protecting her from the insults of the crowd. She thanked him for his courtesy and told him that after her death she would pray for his salvation. The cruel sentence was carried out and the chaste virgin delivered her soul unto God to be crowned with a good martyrdom. Her mother Marcella was martyred with her in 202 AD during the age of Septimius Severus (194-211).

After her martyrdom, St. Potamiaena appeared to many people in Alexandria and guided them to the true faith. Among them was Basilides who refused to take an oath when asked to do so. He said that he was a Christian and therefore could not swear by false gods. He informed those who
visited him that St. Potamiaena had appeared to him and “placed on his head a crown which she said she had won for him by her prayers.” He received baptism in prison and, having confessed the true faith before the magistrate, he was beheaded. The Coptic Orthodox Church commemorates the martyrdom of St. Potamiaena on the twenty-seventh of Amshir.\textsuperscript{179}

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   The virtue of chastity and holding on to the faith even when it might seem impossible.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   I love the story! It really shows like I have mentioned earlier how strong these female saints are.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   Work further on my faith and try to strengthen it that way if I am ever put in her shoes, I can act the same way.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Definitely.

7. **Through what type of resources would you like to learn more about the story; via church or reading or other methods?**
   The church! We spend a lot of time in Sunday School learning or teaching the kids the same stories they have been hearing ever since they were still little kids, so a change like this would be great!

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   I think adolescence would be the best age to learn about such a saint.

F. **Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?

\textsuperscript{179} The Convent of Saint Philopater Mercurius for Nuns, *The Angelic Life: The Virgin Mary and other Virgins in Different Ages*, (Old Cairo, Egypt: The Convent of Saint Philopater Mercurius for Nuns, 2004), P.120-122
I am unsure how I would act, and this is why I said it is important for me to strengthen my faith.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? By practicing of course. It could be really hard now, but it is important to always remember that we are here on earth to bear fruits.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Extremely strong as I have mentioned before. These women were under a lot of stress and pressure, some of which they had to face from their own parents.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.
   Not as strong as the women in the past. Now women are taught to be fragile and vulnerable which causes a lot of issues. Women now are faced with a lot of pressure from social media and their families to present a certain image or form and sometimes it is really hard for them to do so. I believe this is one of the main reasons why women struggle so much to have both the Coptic orthodox life as well as a normal life.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   A lot of times I feel that the Coptic Community looks at Coptic Women as slaves to their men and it is very unfortunate.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The American society really respects women in every shape and form, and this is why even the phrase “women first” is so common in this society. Women in the American Society are in ownership of their bodies, lives and everything else while in the Coptic Society it is always believes that men are the head of women.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   I do not see that the Egyptian society in Egypt is supporting Coptic women at all; if anything, it is disgracing them in every way. Like I have mentioned before, I feel that women get looked down on and they are always being disregarded compared to men.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes, they definitely do.
7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
No, they do not, and most women are afraid to leave their houses without being escorted by a man.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
No and I am speaking based on experience. During all my Sunday school days when I was a student, I found opportunities very rare to learn about Coptic Women Saints, and this remained until today even though the roles switched, and I am now a teacher. Unfortunately, the curriculum and the mindset of the committees that are full of men making these decisions never change.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
First, we have to begin by teaching that there is equality between men and women. Just because someone is born a male does not mean this individual should have any more advantages compared to another one who happens to be born a woman. From there we can begin applying what was learned. Maybe give women the opportunity to do certain things at church besides sit and serve the kids.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Coptic Women?
Definitely strong, loving, caring, kindhearted.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
Very little role that revolves around cleaning the church and teaching the kids.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women in faith from generation to generation?
Be more Americanized and start teaching about the equality of both genders.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
I was always taken to church as a young child and this is why I am so attached to the Coptic Church and I hope I can do the same thing for my kids one day.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
No! There are a lot of things that get taken away from women and most of them are opinion based. For instance, there is always a huge discussion about whether or not a woman should take communion during a menstrual period or even praying when they are unclean, but we never hear anything about men and their limitations inside of the Coptic Church.
4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   I feel like Coptic Women Saints only get honored if they are well known.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   It should be for both! especially the ones of now’s age!

6. Recommendation for the church
   Stop limiting women’s roles.

7. Name our conversation
   It’s time for a change towards equality in the Coptic World.
   In God’s eyes, everyone is equal.

7- : Female Saints Need More Exposure.
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   • 18-24
   • 25-34
   • 35-44
   • 45-54
   • 55-64
   • 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   • America
   • Egypt
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

3. What is your gender?
   • Female
   • Male
   • Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   • American
   • Egyptian
   • African
   • White
   • American/Egyptian
   • Multiple ethnicity
5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      Very important, I generally pray to saints every day.

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      10 to 15 saints.

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      St. Mary, Verena, Hilaria, Marina…

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      Probably Saint Marina.
B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Saint Marina. Can you tell me why?
   St. Marina, she is persistent, and so am I. I tend to be persistent to the things I truly want. If I put my mind to it, I will do it.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
   She decided that she wanted to devote her life to God, even though she was tortured and threatened by a governor that told her to bow to his Idols.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   My favorite story is the one of her praying and the devil appeared to her, hoping to stop or tempt her. She grabbed his head and beat him, then held the cross over him till he confessed that he was the devil of worldly desires. She then expelled him right way.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   She probably takes care of me, without my knowledge.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   It is when someone is so close to God that they experience his glory through their vision and their hearing. The saints are the ultimate goal in terms of getting closer to God.

2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary the mother of God/ St. Mark the Evangelist/ St. Mercurius (with the two swords)/ Pope Kyrillos/ Tamav Irini.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary the mother of God.

4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   She is literally my mother; I tend to ask for her help all the time.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   Probably every other week during Liturgy.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
I learned that femininity is not just a bunch of dresses and makeup. Femininity has no real value, and God does not differentiate between men and women when it comes to his love. These saints taught me that I can be as powerful as any man.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
I tend to celebrate St. Mercurius all the time. I look up to him because of his bravery and persistence to follow God. He was a strong warrior that gave it all up to follow God.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
I am more knowledgeable when it comes to male saints.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
For female saints, it’s probably a 5.

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
I tend to watch videos about their stories and how they lived. I also pay attention to when we are talking about them at church, and during liturgy.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

St. Alexandra:
“Alexandria in Egypt was a major port established where the Nile meets the Mediterranean Sea. There was a major Christian community there, and it was a growing intellectual center. One of the earliest schools of theology was located in this city. Alexandra was a beautiful young woman of the fourth century who fled the unwanted advances of a young man, left the city of Alexandria, and shut herself up in a mausoleum. She received food and supplies through a window from a woman friend. Alexandra maintained strict privacy through the remaining ten or twelve years of her life, keeping a curtain at her window so that no one ever saw her face to face again.
Melania the Elder sought a visit with Alexandra. When Melania asked Alexandra how she persevered through the harsh conditions and the difficult inner journey, she replied, 
From early dawn to the ninth hour I weave linen, and recite the Psalms and pray; and during the rest of the day I commemorate in my heart the holy fathers, and I revolve in my thoughts the histories of all the Prophets and Apostles, and Martyrs; and during the remaining hours I work with my hands and eat my bread, and by means of these things I am comforted whilst I await the end of my life in good hope.
Despite her strict privacy, Alexandra developed a reputation among Christians for her wise advice and spiritual direction.\textsuperscript{180}

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   This story made me truly think that God’s presence is all we need. We can be around friends and family, but at the end we need to be with God the most.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   She is such a holy person; I could never imagine locking myself away in a tomb for so long. It shows her dedication and joy, being only exposed to God.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   She obviously felt happy being with God and wanting to preserve herself to him. I would also want to preserve myself for God, to fight sin a little harder so I can give myself to him as pure as he had originally made me.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   I believe so, she had an interesting life. It would be helpful to know how she battled against sin and won, because there is no way the devil left her alone.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   I would like someone to either tell me the story, or I would watch a video about it.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   As a child, I would have been more pure and keep that purity better.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

1. **Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?**
   Knowing myself, I would have never been able to fight against the governor the way she did. I would have been weak.

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2. From the perspective of women saint’s lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? 
Just be an example of those saints, do your best to become a saint yourself.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today: 
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that? 
   They are, because they kept their eyes on God and never gave up for a second. Women are strong, and they have proven that fact.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? 
   Give me an example from real life. 
   I don’t think they are as strong as they were in the past, because women had it tougher in the past.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women? 
   The Coptic community generally respect and support their women, yet sometimes they belittle them because they think of the old-fashioned way. Some just think that Coptic women are less than Coptic men.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women? 
   I see a lot of Americans not accepting the idea of religion in general, but they tend to respect the beliefs of others. They don’t make fun of their beliefs and do their best not to be offensive.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women? 
   Since Egypt is mostly Islamic, you see the people not accepting the Copts more. Being a woman is already hard in Middle Eastern countries, so being a Coptic woman is harder.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA? 
   Yes, they do.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt? 
   Not as freely as the USA, sometimes they are persecuted.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
To God, of course. To the people, no. I am a woman, yet I still do not see the church talking about female saints as much as male saints. They can name the churches after them, but that’s about it.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   People just need to understand that both sexes are capable of the same things. Just because we have different physical features, it doesn’t mean that we are spiritually or mentally different.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    They are generally very strong and persistent; they don’t stay quiet when they see something wrong happening.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
    Just like any man, help the community grow and serve others.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**

1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
   By letting women know their worth, that they are nothing less than that of a man. Treat her like a human, not like a ‘female’.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**
   From my parents, I learned how to be loud and show those around me that I am somebody worthy of being heard. I would inspire the next generation to be confident, and not worry about society’s view of you.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   It actually depends on the church you go to. Some churches empower women and give them the credibility they deserve. Other churches, however, try to preserve how things are and they don’t like ‘change’ because they are worried about any conflicts that might happen. Some fathers just treat the women of their church as if they were gentle things, and do not accept the fact that they could actually be powerful.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   It shows that the church is doing its job, teaching both men and women about their faith and bringing them closer to God.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   The honor should be given to all saints, old and young.

6. **Recommendations for church or families:**

201
Celebrate the feasts of the female saints more and teach more about them in Sunday school.

7. **Name our conversation:**
   Female saints need more exposure.

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**8- Female Egyptian Saints Light**

**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. **Which race/ethnicity best describes you?**
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. **What is the primary language you speak?**
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      As a Coptic Christian, saints are very important to us and are a part of our daily lives.

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      I would say I am aware of approximately 50 female Coptic saints.

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      Saint Mary, Tamav Irini, Saint Mariam the Egyptian, Saint Anasimon, saint Marina, saint Marina the monk, Saint Philomina, Saint Verina, Saint Demiana and Saint Julitta.

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      The female Coptic nun that I relate to the most is Tamav Irini.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Tamav Irini. Can you tell me why?
      Tamav Irini is the female saint that I can relate to most because she was still alive during my childhood years. Also, my mother always told me about her before her death in 2006.
2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**
   Tamav Irini was born in Girga, Egypt on February 9th, 1936. She lived a miraculous life since her childhood and grew up in a well-developed Coptic Orthodox family. Tamav Irini became a nun at St. Philopatyr Mercurius’s monastery in Egypt on October 6th, 1954 and was ordained as Abbess of the monastery on October 15th, 1962. Her life was focused on prayer, struggle, vigil, purity, fasting, solitude, poverty and stillness. During her years the monastery went through a lot of renovations and various stage of growth; even the number of nuns increased.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   My mother always told me about the one time she sent Tamav Irini a letter because she was worried about something personal; Tamav responded back with another letter and included a cotton with saint Philopatyr Mercurius’s blessed oil and everything was fine just like Tamav said it would be. My mother kept the letter with Tamav’s handwriting and the oil, until this day the cotton is not dry.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   Recently my doctor found a nodule in my thyroid gland and was worried it was cancer. I had to get a biopsy after doing an ultrasound and finding out the size of the nodule. I prayed a lot and asked for the intercession of Saint Mary. Thank God I recently got the results and it is benign, I might still need surgery considering the nodule’s size, but I am sure that Saint Mary and God will be by my side and everything will be okay.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   Tradition of sainthood is the remembrance of the saint’s death date. On that day we remember this saint, read more about them and ask for their intersessions.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   Saint Mary, Pope Kirollos the sixth, Pope Shenoda the third, saint Tadros, saint Philopatyr Mercurius, saint Mina, saint George, Tamav Irini and saint Feltaos.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important in you in the Coptic tradition?**
   Theotokos Holy Virgin Saint Mary.

4. **You said that Theotokos Holy Virgin Saint Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   She is the mother of Christ, had a lot of appearances and miracles.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Often, in the synaxarium readings during liturgies.
D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:

1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   Female saints’ lives are full of strength in faith, purity, fasting and prayer. They stayed very still in their faith no matter what they went through from temptations to persecutions.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   I do not have a particular saint as my role model, but I try to learn from different saints according to which part of their life I can relate to.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   My knowledge about female Coptic saints is fair, it is not that strong, but it is not weak.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   7

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Through research and by reading the daily synaxarium.

E. Reacting to the story:
   • I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story...

St. Verena:
“St. Verena is an Egyptian virgin who travelled through Europe. She settled in a cave in the Swiss mountains and was known as the mother of maidens.
   Her unwavering faith, long life of charity, and the many miracles she performed “contributed to the spread of Christianity among the Alemanni in what is now known as Canton Argau, Switzerland.”

St. Verena was the only daughter of a distinguished Christian family living near Thebes (Luxor). Their village belonged to the city of Koss in the South of Kena province in Upper Egypt. The name “Verena” means “a good seed of fruit”. At an early age, she dedicated her life to the Lord Jesus Christ. While still living with her family, she led a highly ascetic life of constant prayers and fasting. She would also regularly attend the liturgical services at church.

During the reign of Diocletian (284-305 AD), two legions of soldiers were assigned to Thebes to protect the borders of the Roman Empire. However, the Theban Legion, headed by St. Maurice (Mauritius), was so famous that Emperor Diocletian ordered it to depart to Europe to help Maximian, his co-ruler, to subdue a revolution that had broken out in southeast France. “In keeping with an old Coptic custom whereby women followed their legionnaire men folk to give
them spiritual support and relief,” Verena and another virgin, St. Rigola, accompanied their soldier relatives, St. Victor and St. Felix, who were members of this famous Legion.

The Legion arrived in Rome, where it was divided into smaller regiments, each containing 550 officers and men. They were dispersed among the most important Roman camps stretching from the northern Alps all along the Rivers Aar and Rhine, to East Germany. While each regiment headed towards its camp, St. Verena stayed in Milan with some devout Christians.

Having fulfilled their mission and achieved a great victory, the soldiers received orders from the Emperor to worship and sacrifice to the idols in gratitude. However, St. Maurice refused to obey. All the soldiers and their officers, about 500 men, did the same. Consequently, they were tortured and finally martyred in the city of Agaunum, at present St. Maurice en Valais, in Switzerland. That was how their Coptic blood watered Switzerland. Meanwhile, St. Verena kept moving from one place to another following the footsteps of the legion, to help the wounded. On hearing of the martyrdom of St. Victor and his Theban brethren, she crossed the Alps to Agaunum and went to Solothurn, a place beyond the Aar in north Switzerland, to visit their site of martyrdom.

Afterwards, the Holy Spirit guided St. Verena to retire to a cave nearby. There she led an ascetic and austere life to torture the body so as to save the soul. She became a lamp stand to the whole area and attracted many virgins around her. Thus, she came to be regarded as “the mother of maidens”; for she guided those virgins into the paths of Christian virtue and piety. They used to spend their time praying and glorifying the Lord while singing the Psalms and reading the Holy Books.

St. Verena supported herself and the rest of the virgins by means of handiwork, mainly sewing and embroidering clothes. She would also give some of their income to help the poor and needy. There was a woman who used to sell their products and buy them their necessities. God was also supporting them in a miraculous way. It happened one day that they ran out of food; so, the saint prayed to the merciful Lord who gives food in due season (Mt 24:45). She had hardly finished her prayers when forty sacks of flour were put at the door of their cave. They never knew who sent them. Moreover, the flour miraculously increased. So, they thanked their Lord for His blessings.

Verena became well known to the local people for her knowledge of nursing and hygiene. She used to help the sick and cure them through her fervent prayers and her use of herbs. God bestowed on her the gift of performing many miracles, such as healing the sick and casting out demons. She also evangelized many of the pagans from the Germanic tribes in that area.

Then, when the governor heard of her preaching the word of God, he imprisoned her. St. Maurice appeared to her in the prison; and she was afterwards released when the governor was miraculously cured of his illness through her prayers. As her fame spread, she dreaded being honored by people lest she should lose the fruits of her ascetic labor. She decided to flee from Solothurn and seek seclusion on a tiny island, dwelling in a small hut built by some believers who knew and loved her. There she spent her days constantly worshiping the Lord, who performed many miracles through her prayers, which once more made the inhabitants love and honor her.

However, her growing fame forced her again to move to an even more remote island, which lay at the confluence of the Rivers Aar and Rhine. It had so many snakes and scorpions
which made her unable to get any physical rest. She prayed to God Almighty, the pantocrator, who can subjugate all creatures. Then a voice from heaven told her to make the sign of the cross on those poisonous reptiles and to order them to go in the name of The Holy Trinity. The saint did as she was told, and immediately they crawled into the water and never returned. Many of the sick who used to come to her were healed because of her prayers.

When Emperor Constantine the Great ascended the throne of the Roman Empire and the Church enjoyed peace, St. Verena decided to stay in Tenedo (present-day Zurzach on the River Rhine at the Swiss-German border) for the rest of her life. She founded a church dedicated to our Lady, St. Mary, and she lived in a house nearby. St. Verena used to serve in the church; she looked after the sick, fed them and cleansed them. In the meantime, she kept to her ascetic life and used to spend the nights in vigils.

The saint then spent the last eleven years of her life as a recluse in an isolated cave. When her time had come and God wanted to relieve her of the burden of this world, the Mother of God told her the date of her departure. In 344 AD, her soul departed in the presence of St. Mary and other virgins who came to her cell. St. Verena was spiritually strengthened by this visit saying, “Why should this great thing happen to me? How should I deserve that the Mother of my Lord and God come to me, His servant?”

The Mother of Light replied, “Because you have served the Lord, your God, I came to reward you. So, follow me with those virgins to earn everlasting joy.”

The Cell was filled with a sweet aroma. The virgins buried her in Zurzach and her remains were enshrined in the crypt built on the place of her death. This then became one of the most frequented pilgrimage centers in the region. It acquired its fame from the miracles performed for whomever asked for the saint’s prayers. A great church was built dedicated to her in the same city in the province of Argoni, and a second one, in the city of Solaire (another Swiss city on the river Aar). Besides, many religious foundations, churches and chapels were consecrated in her name throughout Europe.

The Coptic Church commemorates her departure on the fourth of Tut. Her whole life was thus a fulfilment of her name: she was the good seed that bore ripened fruit.” 181

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   Yes.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**
   Family.

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   Helping people. Have courage.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**

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207
St. Verena lived a very pure life that was full of humbleness. She served God with all her heart and helped everyone through her hygiene and nursing knowledge. God bestowed St. Verena different gifts and she spread her faith through performing miracles.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   I can look after the sick people, feed the homeless and keep my religious life besides Servings.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes, I would like to know more about her and about her services in the past and her religious life and her prayers.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   Via church or sermons.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   Elder women so I’ll have more time to dig into women saints’ stories.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   I believe that “as it was and shall be from generation to generation.” There are saints that are living around us and with us every day. I cannot put myself in this saint’s situation. I am nothing compared to her and nowhere near her holiness. I wish I could live her pure and simple life.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   We can definitely learn a lot from female saints. Especially when it comes to their humbleness and pure hearts. We should learn from their decisions and their strong relationships with God. The thing that I myself suffer from the most in my personal relationship with God is consistency. If we remember these saints on daily basis and always have them in front of our eyes as our role models we would act differently and have a less stressful life because they always put their problems and struggles on God and He always helped them. He is the all in all and is able to do the impossible. We just need to have enough faith in His choices because he will never do anything that would harm his children.

**G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:**
1. **Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?**
   Of course, female Coptic Saints are strong. Religious strength is not measured physically but through their faith. There are a lot of female Coptic Orthodox martyrs that stayed very strong in their faith, lived through persecution until beheaded. There are others who lived through the devil’s temptations and only allowed that to bring them closer to God.

2. **Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?**
   **Give me an example from real life.**
   Female Copts are strong nowadays. We suffer from a lot of temptations especially in the society we live in right now. We live in a very judgmental world where we are sometimes looked at as crazy because we believe in God. There are also a lot of women that suffer from different types of health problems and still believe that everything happens for a good reason. There are a lot of nuns and female Copts that are saints and living a truly Coptic Orthodox life around us.

3. **In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   The Coptic Community supports females by providing them with spiritual meetings and trainings through professionals to help them raise their children and youth.

4. **In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   The American society supports Coptic women by providing them the freedom of choice and not giving them a hard time about their faith. But it does not support them by providing youth with the same amount of freedom because this makes it tougher for women to raise their children in the Coptic faith. It is like the church’s word against the society’s freedom.

5. **In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   The Egyptian society supports Coptic females by understanding the mother's role in the lives of youths and creating the ultimate respect between youths and their parents. On the other hand, it does not because they make it hard for Copts to practice their faith. There are also a lot of terrorist attacks on Coptic Orthodox Christians in Egypt. So, every time a woman sends her children to church, she is risking their lives but believes in God and trusts in Him.

6. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?**
   Yes.

7. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?**
8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
Yes, because they are commemorated in the same way. There are churches built in honor of both female and male saints and martyrs. There are a lot of saints that were mothers and had their children beheaded in front of them, they led their families to Christ.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
Equality between males and females already exists in the Coptic church.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
Strong, generous, pure, still, lovable, servants, honorable, trustworthy and faithful.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
Coptic women in the church lead their families and children to God through their strong faith, prayers and teachings. They are role models to young women and children.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
Through more movies about Coptic female saints’ lives.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
I inherited the faith from my parents and will give it to the next generation. I learned it by listening to saints’ miracles every night as a child before going to sleep, hearing their lifetime stories during liturgies and watching their movies whenever I was able to.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
Yes, women play a big role in Coptic churches. They are servants in Sunday school and are able to worship God the same way Coptic Orthodox male worshipers do.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
The church honors their Coptic female saints the same way they commemorate the Coptic male saints.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
It is for the old and recent female Coptic martyrs and saints.

6. Recommendations for church or families:
Always remind your congregation and families of the power of prayer and God. Trust in Him. Stay still in your faith. Remember saints and martyrs on daily basis, put them as your role models and ask for their intersessions.

7. Name our conversation:
Female Egyptian Saints Light.

9- Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
- 18- 24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45- 54
- 55-64
- 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
- America
- Egypt
- Canada
- Europe
- Others

3. What is your gender?
- Female
- Male
- Others

4. Which race/ ethnicity best describes you?
- American
- Egyptian
- African
- White
- American/ Egyptian
- Multiple ethnicity
- Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
- English
- Arabic
- French
- Italian
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Other
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   The saints are important, they give us an example of struggle and how to live a holy life in services to God.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   Many, but I am sure there are just as many that I am not aware of

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   Saint Demiana/ Saint Verena/ St. Mary of Egypt/ St. Catherine of Egypt/ St. Mohrail
   These are the popular ones that come to mind, I am sure there are many more.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   Since I was a child I have always been fascinated by and drawn to the story of St. Demiana.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Demiana. Can you tell me why?
St. Demiana, her story fascinates me. She was the daughter of a wealthy governor and not only she did leave her wealth and prestige to serve the Lord, she was able to convince 40 of her friends to join her. She must have had great conviction in order to do this.

2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**
   She was the daughter of an Egyptian governor named Mark. She grew up in the church and always felt called to be different and to lead a different life. She begged her father to allow her to go to a convent, but he refused and instead built her own convent near his palace. There she lived with her 40 friends worshipping and serving the Lord until the persecution by Diocletian started in Egypt. She was tortured but did not give up her faith. Finally, she, along with her 40 friends were martyred.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   To me the stories and miracles are not important, for some it increases their conviction and their faith, but for me, I would rather learn from their story rather than their miracles.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   No.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   The tradition of sainthood is alive in all the sacramental churches. It gives us a connection to the victorious church and to those who came before us in a way that Biblical teaching on its own cannot. It helps us to identify with a people who came before us and reached the ultimate goal. This is especially important in the Coptic heritage since we have lost so much of our identity through various conquests, the tradition serves as a connection between us and our ancestors.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   In general, the Coptic church holds the martyrs in very high regard, which is understandable, but we shouldn’t forget that there is a continuing tradition after the age of martyrdom ended and this is the monastic age. The fathers and mothers of the Coptic church should be held in the same high regard as the martyrs because they continued the tradition of suffering and dying to the world.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   I cannot point out one, they are all important in different ways because each of their stories touches a different part of our lives.

4. **You said that _____ is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
Unfortunately, we do not give as much attention to the female saints as we do the male saints. Perhaps this is because history was written by men and they did not bother to offer a complete history of female saints. Unless I seek it out, I do not hear about Coptic women saints unless it is in the Synaxarium on Sunday morning.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
These women were feminists before feminism was a popular thing. They were strong willed and, on many occasions, defied their fathers or husbands in order to obey the Lord. Many of them led people to Christ in a way that men were not able. St. Demiana for example, defied her father, who wanted her to marry, in order to obey God’s call on her life to live for Him, and she led 40 others to do the same.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
I can’t name a specific saint, but often times when faced with a challenge, I will think of the story of any particular saint who went through a similar situation and try to take him or her as a role model in my own life.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
I don’t know enough about them and wish that I, and other women in the church, could learn more about these female saints so that we can take them as an example of faith in our lives.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
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5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
I feel that extensive research is the best way to do this. If these stories are not readily available, we need to seek them out.

E. Reacting to the story:
• I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...
  
  St. Apollonia, Virgin and Martyr:
“This blessed saint belonged to a noble rich family from Alexandria. She decided to live as a virgin and served as a deaconess in the church. After the death of her parents, she lived in a cave outside Alexandria.

When Decius began to persecute the Christians between 249-250 AD, she left her cave, entered the city and confessed her faith. She was severely tortured; her persecutors whipped her and struck her so hard on the jaw that they broke all her teeth. Then they led her outside the city, lit a great fire, and threatened to throw her alive into it unless she agreed to repeat certain words, “to her the equivalent of apostasy.” However, she was given a short time for reflection. She feigned acceptance, took advantage of the inattention of the persecutors, and threw herself into the fire, an act that was impelled by the Holy Spirit. She was immediately consumed by the flames and won the crown of martyrdom.

Since she lost her teeth while being persecuted, she is often “invoked against toothache and all dental diseases;” and is known as the patron saint of dentists and of those with toothaches. She is often portrayed carrying “a pair of pincers holding a tooth, or else a golden tooth suspended on her necklace.” 182

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   I do not feel that there are enough lessons to be learned here. It baffles me why she would feign acceptance and throw herself in the fire, if the soldiers were going to throw her in anyway. The story of her martyrdom seems drawn out and over exaggerated, while we don’t know enough about her history.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   My observation is that there is more emphasis on this story of the graphic details of her martyrdom rather than the story of how she came to love God so much as to give Him her life.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   I don’t feel there is much practicality in the way this story is narrated. The only thing I can think of is to always hold fast to your faith no matter what befalls you.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes, I would love to hear about her parents and her childhood and what led her to live in this cave. What were her experiences with the Lord prior to her martyrdom?

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7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Reading other methods. In my experience, the church writings focus on specific things like martyrdom, rather than actual history.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   I would like to know about her at my age right now.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
      I cannot imagine facing death and staring it in the face like these martyrs did, so I am not sure what my reaction would have been. I am stubborn and strong willed, but I don’t know whether I would have had more fear in the face of this persecution.

   2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
      I feel that being strong, faithful, and stubborn is important when it comes to obeying God. These are the things I always take away from these stories.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
   1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
      They are definitely strong enough, though we do not give them enough attention in our society.

   2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.
      I do believe that Coptic women are strong, not just now, but throughout history. The Coptic mother for example is almost single-handedly responsible for instilling faith in her children and ingraining in them a love for the church. It is the mother, the woman, not the father who takes on the role of teacher and spiritual guide in the lives of her children.

   3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
      Unfortunately, I do not see the Coptic community supporting Coptic women. We are not encouraged to be knowledgeable in church affairs, though we are still required to teach the faith to our children. We are not encouraged to question male authority (the priesthood), yet we are required to be 100% faithful so that we may impart this faith to the coming generations. I feel that this is absolutely unfair.
4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women? I don’t think that American society supports Coptic women in particular, or even doesn’t support them. I do feel that American society supports women in general more than the Coptic community or perhaps Egyptian society.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women? I don’t feel that I am familiar enough with Egyptian society outside of the Coptic community to be able to comment on this question.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA? Most definitely. I don’t ever feel that there is a time that society or government, or any force outside of myself has prevented me from practicing my faith and freely worshipping in the United States.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt? I have never lived in Egypt, so I feel that I cannot accurately respond to this question.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain. I feel that they are equal in God’s eyes, but there is bias against women saints in the Coptic church, since there is not enough written about the few that we know of. There is not enough taught about them in the Church, even when you walk into a Coptic church, there are very few icons of Coptic women saints.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church? More research should be done to discover more of these Coptic women saints and there needs to be much more effort to teach their stories in the same way we teach about St. Mina and St. George (neither of whom is Coptic). Coptic girls need to grow up seeing an abundance of good examples and role models in front of them.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women? I believe that Coptic women are strong and sometimes stubborn. They are good at holding up their families even through hardship.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church? From when we are children, we are told that our role in the church is to teach the coming generations. I do not agree with this. Women should have a bigger role in the church, a bigger role in religious services, as well as a bigger teaching role. We also need to be supported and equipped better by the Church, we need to be encouraged to pursue knowledge for the sake of preserving and teaching the faith for future generations.
H. Coptic women in the future:

1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
Coptic women need to feel empowered by the society that we are in, namely the Coptic community. I am not quite sure how this can be done, except to reiterate the previous, that the Church needs to encourage women more than it does currently.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
I did not quite inherit my faith or my attachment to the church from my parents, rather I inherited it from an open-minded priest whom I loved as I love my own father. I was fortunate enough to have a member of the clergy encourage me to ask questions and seek out knowledge and empower me in every way a woman can be empowered in the church. I plan to teach my children to question everything, and not rest until they have an answer that satisfies them.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
I do not think the Coptic Church has the power or authority to grant or deny women’s rights.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
I don’t feel that there is a special honor for the Coptic women saints in the church, I still feel that they are honored less than the male saints.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
I have not heard of many modern women who are considered Saints in and official way in the church. The closest I can come is Tamav Ereeny, whom I believe is honored because of her intercession during her life and for her relationship with Saint Philopateer.

6. Recommendations for the church and families:
In order for the faith and traditions of the Coptic church to survive, our women must feel empowered in the Church and by the Church. Allow women who are qualified to stand at the pulpit and speak and teach more than young children. We have been reduced to taking the word of an unqualified man in matters of faith because he is a deacon in the Church, rather than learning from a woman who has studied her faith with intensity. Allow the women to chant loudly in the church without being looked down upon for being too loud. It is much more acceptable these days for a young man who cannot read or understand Coptic, to chant in an incorrect tune, rather than allow a woman to lead liturgical responses or praises in proper Coptic and a correct tune. Why must we continue to treat women as second-class citizens in the church? Are we forgetting that the saint above all saints is a woman? Are we forgetting that the Lord found a woman to be the only vessel on earth and in all time worthy for him to dwell in for nine months? What man in the
history of the Coptic church or any other church can say the same? If preserving the Coptic faith and traditions concerns you, please empower your daughters to ask questions and seek out the answers. Allow them to question the church’s authority if something doesn’t make sense. Seeking these answers will not push them away from the church, it will increase their conviction 100-fold!

7. **Name our conversation:**
Empower Your Daughters to Ensure the Survival of Your Faith.

**10- Love.**

**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18- 24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45- 54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. **Which race/ ethnicity best describes you?**
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/ Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. **What is the primary language you speak?**
   - English
   - Arabic
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      The saints are the most important part of my life, after God! Because many saints appeared to me!

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      A lot.

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      St. Mary of Egypt/ St. Demiana/ St. Marina.

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      St. Demiana.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Demiana. Can you tell me why?
Because I am a virgin, so basically, like her, I have dedicated my life to Christ; Also St. Demiana had 40 friends who were influenced by her.

2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**
   She was a daughter of a very rich ruler and she dedicated her life to Christ, after her father bought her a palace, although later king Diocletian killed her and her 40 virgin friends for not worshipping the idols.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   No.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   The Virgin Mary appeared to me as dove in the Barstow monastery and, St. Mary Magdalene, appeared to me in dreams as well as St. Mary of Egypt.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**
   1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
      It means you follow Christ and lived a life of Christianity.

   2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**

   3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
      St. Demiana.

   4. **You said that St. Demiana is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
      St. Demiana because she has a monastery dedicated to her in Egypt and every year, they take out her hand and show to the public.

   5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
      Rarely and only on their feast days.

D. **Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**
   1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
      Neither. I learned from my Mom.

   2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
St. Abanaoub when I was a kid, because he was a young saint about 12 years old when he got martyred.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Lacking.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   Male Coptic Saints: 10
   Female Coptic Saints: 5

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Reading the Synaxarium.

**E. Reacting to the story:**
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

**Amma Syncletica of Egypt:**
“For just as those who wish to gaze at the sun damage their vision, so also those who try to mirror the radiance of her life fall victim to confusion of mind, dazzled, overcome, and unstrung by the magnitude of her achievements.

   We know of Amma Syncletica from the Sayings as well as from the Life and Regimen of the Blessed and Holy Teacher Syncletica, a fifth-century work by Pseudo-Athanasius. The early church thought her so important that her Life survives to this day. An early theologian of mysticism, Evagrius Ponticus, influenced her teachings.

   Amma Syncletica was born in Alexandria into a well-respected Christian family of Macedonian heritage. Her two brothers died at relatively young ages and her sister was blind. Syncletica began her ascetical practice in her parents’ home. She was well educated and had a reputation for her beauty.

   At the death of her parents, Amma Syncletica sold all her possessions and distributed the family wealth among the poor. She then cut her hair as a sign of consecration and moved with her blind sister to the family tomb outside Alexandria. Here she began her life as a desert ascetic.

   As women began to gather around her, Amma Syncletica reluctantly agreed to serve as their spiritual mentor, training them in the disciplines of the inner life. She trained her followers to cultivate such qualities as gentleness, patience, and endurance – each grounded in love and vitally needed for a fruitful spiritual journey.

   For Syncletica, this discipline meant emptying oneself of all stumbling blocks: attitudes, motives, addictions, emotions not united with Christ, as well as any ignorance that hindered the inner journey. Amma Syncletica sought to relinquish anger, vindictiveness, envy, and ambition, and challenged her followers to do the same. Through her Life and Sayings, she encourages us to grow in self-awareness, to understand our passions and desires, and to purify them, always directing us toward God.
Amma Syncletica lived into her eighties and died after three and a half years of intense physical suffering, most likely from cancer. Her feast day is January 5.¹⁸³

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?  
No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?  
No.

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?  
Dedicate some of my time to God for praying and going to church.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story  
Beautiful story of a woman who truly loved Christ and gave her life to Him.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?  
I am not sure because I am not planning on cutting my hair and becoming a hermit.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?  
Precisely. The story doesn’t share much or give me any miracles she has done.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?  
Yes, with all methods specifically in sermons at church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?  
I think as an adult because there was more emphasis on me getting married than going to a convent.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:  
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?  
I would be confident and also die for Christ.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?  
Stay pure as a virgin.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   I think they are very strong, but not mentioned enough.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   No, they are not strong enough. I am a strong woman, that is because I have seen the modern saints. I feel like Coptic women are religious, but not bold enough.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   I feel like when a woman takes any stand, even in righteous things, she is ridiculed.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Supporting by freedom and being bold. Not supporting in the fact that American culture is more liberal.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Egyptian society supporting by being conservative like the Coptic society. Not supporting, because Egyptian society is mainly Muslim.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Not really because the Coptic male saints outnumber the female ones who are less talked about.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   You cannot.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    They are a bit judgmental and abrasive. They are not open-minded. They do not want women to stand out.
11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
   To be quiet and submissive.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   Well, I have a huge following on social media in which I do just that. I go against the status quo and I talk about being a role model for Coptic women. And, I believe I am one (not to sound arrogant).

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   They took me to Egypt every year and allowed me to stay in convents and monasteries and they took me to church all the time. And, I will give this to the next generation by my page, through social media. I sing hymns and I talk about virginity and I am bold.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   Not really. I had to fight to attend hymn class because women were not allowed to. I feel like men can do so much more in the church.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   Just Saint Demiana and I never hear of her miracles, sadly.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   I think it is for the old. But we need to instill the idea that modern Coptic Female Saints exists....

6. Recommendations for church or families:
   Raising More awareness of female saints in Sunday School.

7. Name our conversation:
   Love.

11- Saving Our Faith Upon All Generations
Demographics: Please highlight the answer to the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
• 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   • America
   • Egypt
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

3. What is your gender?
   • Female
   • Male
   • Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   • American
   • Egyptian
   • African
   • White
   • American/Egyptian
   • Multiple ethnicities
   • Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   • English
   • Arabic
   • French
   • Italian
   • Coptic
   • Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   • High school
   • College
   • Bachelor’s degree
   • Master’s degree
   • Doctoral degree
   • Others

7. Where are you born?
   • America
   • Egypt
   • Canada
8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Very important.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   Many.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Marina, St. Demiana, St. Catherine, St. Baeesa, St. Mary of Egypt, St, Theodora, St. Justina, St. Verena, St Monica.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Monica and St. Mary of Egypt.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saints you relate to most are St. Monica and St. Mary of Egypt. Can you tell me why?
   I love the life of consistent prayer of St. Monica especially because her prayers were focused on the repentance of her son and her return back to God. St Mary of Egypt is a very good role model of repentance and being serious in her way back to God.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
   St Monica: She did not give up praying for 20 years for St. Augustine and had great faith in his return.
   St Mary of Egypt: once she spoke to Fr. Zosimas, she had a quick decision of repentance.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of the female Coptic saints?
   There was an old lady who wanted the bread to eat dinner and figured out that she ran out of bread and was embarrassed to ask anyone late night to bring her any so she spoke with St. Mary saying: will you leave me alone? I am hungry so St. Mary came and left her bread under her pillow and told her to go and eat.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
I always used to ask a specific saint for each class I am taking to help me to study and pass its exams.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   They are the great cloud of witnesses that we are surrounded by.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. George and St. Demiana.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Demiana.

4. **You said that St. Demiana is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   St. Demiana was so brave through all her tortures by the emperors. She has great influence on other girls and had 40 virgins that follow her saintly life. Their lives together were considered the start of monasticism for girls in Egypt.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Not too frequently. But usually, we hear their stories in the Synaxarium.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   The power of prayers as in St. Justina’s story. Satan used to disappear when he hears her name because her prayers were so powerful.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   St. Peter because he had faith and hope of God’s forgiveness regardless of his sins. His regret was great, so God forgave him.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Average.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   2

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
Reading more stories and trying to learn from their virtues.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation.
  Reading the story...

**Eugenia of Alexandria:**
“The story of Eugenia evolved into a fantastic martyr legend. However, the mosaic was formed from historical pieces of an earlier woman.

Eugenia was the daughter of Philip, proconsul of Egypt under Commodus from 180 to 192 C.E. She was raised in a pagan Roman family but privately began to follow the Christian way. Eugenia rejected an arranged marriage to Aquilinus, a man of high standing but not a follower of the Way. Before another suitable marriage could be arranged, Eugenia and two of her fellow students met a monastic community of men and decided to join.

Disguised as a man, Eugenia entered the community and quietly began to live the monastic life. Eventually elected abbot, she reluctantly accepted the office and made a little cell for herself by the side door of the monastery that she might remain in it continually. She protected her desire for silence and solitude while serving as spiritual elder for the brethren.

It is recorded that Eugenia was martyred in Rome around 257 C.E., during the reign of Valerian and Gallienus.”

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   Be silent to hear the voice of God / Reject arranged marriage/ She was a successful woman and became the abbot/ Determined.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   Being alone in the desert or monastery to serve God is easier to be in the world and serve God.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   Be successful about what I am doing and be honest and have a fear of God in my behaviors.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes, I am interested to know more. Her story is short here.

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7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   I would like to hear about her story from nuns who have a lot of information about her life and about her teachings.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Adolescent

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   If I were in St. Monica’s situation, I would pray for my son and would ask everyone around me to pray for him too because I believe in the power of prayers.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   I would keep telling everyone their stories because they are true stories that show how God can do impossible things through prayers.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, they were very strong to encourage their children to face all emperors who were tortured Christians.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   No, because nowadays people do not have the same strong faith as before.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The Coptic community supporting Coptic women through all activities like services and preaching.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
   American society supports them by giving them the freedom for what they believe in, but it does not support them because not all society believes in the Coptic faith.
5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Inside the Egyptian church society, they support Coptic women, but because of Egyptian culture, they don’t support women that much.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes, they have freedom.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No, they can’t practice it publicly, there is discrimination in Egyptian society, but they can only practice their religion in the churches.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Yes, they have the same equality. Both of them in Synaxarium the lives of saints’ book.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   By making women and men involved in all services.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    They have a strong faith and raise their kids in a faithful spiritual life.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    Serving in Sunday school/ Organize all activity in the church/ Leading some women meeting/ Visit and serve the sick people.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   Through Sunday school by teaching and giving opportunities for women to speak up more and teach.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   My Mom was reading the bible for us every night before sleeping and telling us the stories of saints. For next-generation, I’ll encourage them to go to the church to learn more about spiritual life and practice religious information via apps to increase their knowledge of the bible and saints.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
Yes, we can see that they honor St. Mary, she is a woman and they rank her above the angels, prophets, and martyrs.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   By including their stories in the synaxarium, and Sunday school curriculum.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   Both.

6. **Recommendations for church or families:**
   Teach equality in the church. Men should respect women and vice versa. Make a day to achieve equality ‘Coptic Equality Day.’ Include more women in services and believe in women’s power. More scholarships for Coptic women to support their education.

7. **Name our conversation:**
   Saving our faith upon all generations.

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**12- The Women Can Be the Mothers of the Future Saints**

**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer to the demographic part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - **35-44**
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - **America**
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - **Female**
   - Male
   - Others

4. **Which race/ethnicity best describes you?**
   - American
   - Egyptian
• African
• White
• American/ Egyptian
• Multiple ethnicities
• Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
• English
• Arabic
• French
• Italian
• Coptic
• Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where are you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   It’s very important to us, because we have a strong believe in the intercessions of the saints.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   A lot. Maybe around 30 or more.
3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Marina, St. Damiana, St. Helana, St. Theodora, Tamav Erine, St. Rafka, St. Mary the
   Coptic, St. Mohraeel, St. Emilia, St. Verena, St. Maria of Alexandria, St. Theodosia, St.
   Barbara, St. Youstina......

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Verena.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Verena. Can you tell
      me why?
      I love her strong and patient personality.

   2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell
      me her story?
      She is the main one who taught the people in Switzerland during this time, how to be
      clean and to take care of themselves.

   3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
      Tamav Erine, one of our female Coptic saints, performed a miracle for my uncle while he
      was traveling overseas.

   4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through
      something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
      Yes, St. Damiana in my pregnancy.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
   1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
      It is meant a lot. Because for me, they are our valuable example, I love to copy it or at
      least gain a great lesson from their life.

   2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic
      tradition?
      Male, I think St. Mark because he is the 1st ne who spread the Christianity in Egypt.
      Female, I think St. Verena because she is the one who spread Christianity outside Egypt
      keeping the Egyptian tradition inside her.

   3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic
      tradition?
      St. Verena.

   4. You said that St. Verena is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the
      Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
      Because she has a strong and patient personality.
5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   Maybe once a month during the liturgy reading.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
   1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and
      lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have
      learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
      I learned how to have strong faith, strong personality and patience.

   2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for
      yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
      Yes, St. Verena because she had a strong faith, personality and was willing to teach the
      peoples who are round her what she believes in.

   3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
      Very good as far as I know, but I'm always keep willing to learn more about more female
      saints.

   4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate
      your knowledge?
      7.5

   5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your
      understanding of Coptic saints?
      By reading more about them, if I heard about new female saint, I can look for her until I
      get her story and read it.

E. Reacting to the story:
   - I'd like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your
     observation:
     Reading the story...

St. Anastasia:
“The Departure of St. Anastasia: On the 26th of Toba, St. Anastasia departed. She was from a
noble family in the city of Constantinople. She was very beautiful and had a great moral
character. 201 Emperor Justin, who was married, wanted to marry her. She refused and went and
told his wife. The Empress sent her to Alexandria on a private ship. She built her a convent
outside the city of Alexandria and named it after her. When the Emperor knew where she was, he
sent for her, but Anastasia escaped and hid herself in the wilderness of Sheheat (Scetis),
disguised as a prince. She met with Anba Daniel, the archpriest of the wilderness, and revealed
her story to him. He brought her to a cave and asked one of the elders to fill a water pot for her
once every week, and to place the pot at the door of the cave and leave. She remained in this
place for 28 years, without anyone knowing that she was a woman. She used to write her
thoughts on pieces of pottery and leave them at the door of her cave. The elder who brought her
the water used to take the pieces of pottery without knowing what was written on them and give
them to St. Daniel. One day he brought a piece of pottery to St. Daniel who wept when he read it,
and said to his disciple, "Come with me now to bury the body of the saint in that cave." When they entered her cave, they received blessings from each other. St. Anastasia said to Anba Daniel, "For the sake of God, bury me with what I have on my body." Then she prayed and bade them farewell and departed in peace. They wept and buried her. When the disciple was caring for her burial, he found out that she was a woman, and he marveled in silence. After they buried her, and they returned to their place, the disciple knelt before St. Daniel and said, "For the sake of God, tell me her story, for I have seen that she was a woman." The elder told him her story, that she was from one of the noble families of Constantinople, and how she surrendered herself to Christ, forsaking the vain glory of this world. Her prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen.”

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   Yes.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**
   Family and church (Sunday school).

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   I love her strong faith and her humble heart.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   To be humble with all the people who are around us even if we know that there is something in our lives that puts us in a higher position than other.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   Church.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   Child.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

1. **Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?**

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236
I feel that the 1st thing I should have is a strong faith in God, that he will help me and give me a blessing in the eyes of the people whom I deal with. I also should be in a deep relationship with God.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? To have a strong personality to say what you are believing in, if you have to, always be proud of your faith.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, because some of them have to spread God’s word outside their country. Which means they should have a strong faith that God will help them. And will make them like a light for the people around them.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.
   Yes, because they are raising their kids in the same faith which they were raised in.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   It is supporting women 100%.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Coptic women are not famous in American society yet.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   Yes.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
Yes, because our church always respects the woman. And the female saint can be a mom too, so she is the one who teach their kids, who will become a male saint in the future, with their strong faith.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   By respecting the women, taking by her opinion, trying to let her get involved in more activity and meetings inside the church and giving her more responsibilities by letting her represent the church in outside meeting.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    Strong, patient.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
    Teaching kids during Sunday School, visiting other peoples, taking care of the food for the needy people.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**
1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
   By always respecting her and letting her feel that she is an effective one.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**
   They were always supporting us as a kid, teaching us the right thing asking us to do it no matter what. Never forcing us to hide our cross necklace but they asked us to wear it. We should do the same thing with our kids by supporting them always during their different life stages. Making them strong enough (by always answering their questions, having open discussions with them to see how they are thinking) talk about their beliefs if they need to.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   Yes, she can serve in many services in the churches.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   The Coptic church respecting the female saint a lot, because they maybe a mom for a male saint.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   Both groups.

6. **Recommendations for church or families:**
   Always respect and appreciate the role of the female inside our church, our families, also in our society.
7. **Name our conversation:**
   The women can be the mother of the future saints.

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**13- The Effect of Coptic Female Saints in Our Lives Today**

**Demographics:** Please highlight the answers to the demographics part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. **Which race/ethnicity best describes you?**
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicities
   - Others

5. **What is the primary language you speak?**
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      We glorify them, they remind us that the Church is holy, being holy
      and is called to show the holiness of God by living the life of Christ.

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      25

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      St. Demiana - St. Mohrael - St. Mary the Coptic - St. Marina the monk.

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      St. Demiana and St. Mary the Coptic and Tamav Ireny.

B. The Coptic Saints you are relate to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Mary of Egypt. Can you tell me why?
      Yes, because she had a good Christian childhood, she was forced to make a mistake and she returned back to her Christianity life. Her life showed us that we always need to have hope.
2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**

   St. Mary of Egypt, she was a great example of repentance. She was a woman saint from the 4th century. She was committing adultery and went on the road of sexual desires when she was young after her parents died. She lived in sin for a long time. One day she went to Jerusalem by ship in order to satisfy her sexual desires with the passengers. When she arrived at the church in Jerusalem, she could not enter the church. She tried several times to enter the church, but her legs remained fixed in the ground, and she could not get into the church. Finally, she looked at St. Mary Mother of God and promised her that she would give up the sinful life. She tried again after her promising to leave the sinful life; then she could enter the church at that time. She prayed a lot with repentant tears. After she finished, she felt that there was an inner voice that told her to go to the desert. She crossed the Jordan river seeking for the ascetic life. Her clothing was torn; she faced the hot weather of the desert and the cold of the desert. One day Fr. Zosima went to the desert to spend the forty days of lent as the monks usually do. Then he saw a ghost from far away. He tried to get closer, and then he figured it out that this is a human being. St. Mary of Egypt, called him by his name and mentioned that he is a priest and he was astonished from that. She hid herself and told him that she is a naked woman and asked him to throw his robe so she can cover herself to talk to him. They started the conversation, and she told him about her story, and she had lived in the desert for 45 years, she didn’t see anyone. She asked Zosimas if he can come next year and give her communion, and It was as she asked. He brought her the communion next year. Year after, at the same time, he went to see her, but he found her lying on the ground with no breath and saw a lion beside her body as a keeper. This lion helped Fr. Zosima to dig a hole and bury Mary’s body with honor.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**

   There are a lot of miracle stories about saints. They performed miracles and our church confesses that they are saints too.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of any female saints?**

   Yes.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**

   It means that we learn from their life to glorify God and ask them to pray for us.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**

   Tamav Irieny and St. Mina.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**

   Holy virgin Mary and St. Dimiana and Tamav Irieny.
4. You said that St. Demiana is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   St. Demiana, because she suffered a lot to keep her faith and to glorify our lord and savior Jesus Christ.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   A lot on their celebration day.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   I learned that God always with me and with my family, protecting and saving us.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   I like to be like them and teaching my kids to pray, to be like them too.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Excellent and very good.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   9

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Read more.

E. Reacting to the story:
   - I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story...

St. Theodora of Alexandria:
“St. Theodora was born in Alexandria at the end of the third century. This virgin belonged to a rich and noble family. Her Christian parents were keen to bring her up to be devout. From an early age, she consecrated herself to God through the practice of an ascetic life. She would not leave the house except when going to church to receive Holy Communion or to listen to sermons. She spent the rest of her time at home praying, reading the Bible, or doing work. In 303 during the reigns of the joint Emperors Diocletian and Maximianus, the prefect of Alexandria, Eustratius, issued an edict of persecution. Consequently, he filled the prison cells with many Christians who were later martyred. Meanwhile, someone reported that Theodora did not worship the idols; nor did she sacrifice to them. She was taken to the governor who was impressed by her beauty and refinement. When asked about her religion, she confessed being a
Christian who owed her freedom to Christ. When the governor realized that she belonged to a noble and rich family, he tried to shake her fortitude with sweet temptations. However, the blessed virgin said:

“I have vowed to be betrothed to no one but my Lord Jesus Christ who, for our salvation, became man. He saved us with his life-giving death and granted us eternal life if we remain steadfast in our faith.”

Despite a long conversation, the governor failed to make Theodora change her mind. So, he started to threaten her with the severest kinds of torture. He sentenced her to exposure in a house of ill-fame. Still, the saint’s faith was unshakable, and she kept praying to the Lord to preserve her chastity.

Didymus, a Christian young man who dressed up as a soldier, rescued her from the brothel. He changed clothes with her, and she left the place while wearing his big hat and lowering her head so as not to be discovered. Didymus was soon detected and tried. When asked about the reason behind his deed, he confessed his Christian faith and made it clear that he was sent by God to save her. He was sentenced to death and the news spread throughout the whole city.

As he was taken to his execution, Theodora ran after him saying: “Brother, do not steal my crown; I have to get mine before you.” They were both decapitated in 304 AD. In this way, to quote St. Ambrose: “The two contended, and both gained the victory, and the crown was not divided, but became two.” The Coptic Church commemorates their martyrdom on the first of Ba’unah.”186

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   Always defending our faith.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   The story shows us that if we died for our faith, we would get a crown in our God's kingdom.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   I will do my best to always defend my faith not hide it.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes.

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7. Through what type of resources would you like to learn more about the story; via church or reading or other methods?
   Church and reading.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   In all my life stages.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   I will pray a lot to God to show me what I must do.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   By reading about them and trying to practice their good behavior and prayer in my life.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, they are strong because of God's hand always protects them.

2. Do you believe that Coptic women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   Yes, I believe so, that is why we always have saints who are now alive.
   Because they know how to face today’s behavior and never change.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The Coptic community supports Coptic women by having Christian activities for us and our kids to protect us from stranger cultures that are against our faith.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
   American society tried to give us our freedom to follow our faith in our churches.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Egyptian society tried to give us our freedom to follow our faith in churches.
6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?  
Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?  
Kind of yes.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.  
Yes, even men glorify the Coptic women saints and they believe in miracles that were performed by the Coptic women saints.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?  
By helping men and women in the same way, no difference between genders. Ask and answer all of the men’s and women’s questions related to gender equality.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Coptic Women?  
They are strong, generous, always help others, and always pray for their families to God to protect them and help them in their lives.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?  
Serve the elders and youths. Talk to the people about how our generous God. Study the Holy Bible in groups to help us to understand. Help others to follow the right faith for our Coptic church.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?  
By reading and studying the old generation’s faith and life.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?  
By reading the bible, studying it and practice the faith in our church and take communion. Also, through the practice of prayer to keep communicate with God.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?  
Yes, by taking good care of their education and by helping us always in our thinking and curiosity to know more.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?  
In our prayers during saint’s day celebrations.
5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups? Both groups.

6. Recommendations for church or families:
Taking care of our church history and our saints for both genders. Keep reading the saints’ stories because the old saints and the present saints, both faced a lot of problems and by reading about all saints from past and present, we can face almost the same problems today.

7. Name our conversation:
The effect of Coptic female saints in our lives today.

14- The Power of Women in the Coptic Church
Demographics: Please highlight the answers to the demographics part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicities
   - Others
5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   The saints are very important to the Coptic Church because they are essential to our faith.
   The saints intercede for us before God and are an example for us to live by.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   I know around 10-15 female Coptic saints.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Marina the Martyr/ St. Marina the Monk/ St. Verena/ St. Demiana/ St. Barbara/ St.
   Mary of Egypt/ St. Philomena/ St. Youstina/ St. Julietta.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
St. Marina the Martyr.

**B. The Coptic Saints you are relate to:**

1. **You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Marina the Martyr. Can you tell me why?**
   I chose St. Marina the Martyr because she helps me overcome my fears when I am scared because she defeated Satan.

2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**
   The king wanted her for her beauty, but she said no. The king then threw her in prison and tortured her. While she was in prison, the devil appeared to her to scare her, but she defeated him and destroyed him.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of the female Coptic saints?**
   One of my favorite stories is the story of St. Julietta. She and her 3-year-old son were martyred together, and she was strong for him to make sure he went to heaven.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of any female saints?**
   Nothing specific has happened to me. I pray to some of these female saints because they will intercede for me before God.

**C. The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does sainthood mean to you?**
   Sainthood to me is devoting my life to God. To be an official saint, the church must recognize the person as a saint.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. George/ St. Mina/ St. Demiana/ St. Mark.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Demiana.

4. **You said that St. Demiana is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   Her story is the most well-known story in the Coptic Church. St. Demiana also helped 40 others become martyrs.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   I heard about female Egyptian saints in Sunday school when I was a child and I hear about them today during the Synaxarium.
D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:

1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories? 
   From saints' stories, I have learned that women are strong and are capable of having a strong faith to stand up for their beliefs. Many of the female saints have stories that include an emperor desiring the girl's beauty; this has taught me not to give into materialistic desires.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint? 
   I chose St. Demiana because she was very young when she was martyred, and this has taught me how much power I have despite my youth.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints? 
   I know mostly the well-known female saints, but I don't really know the less popular ones.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge? 
   4

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints? 
   I think the best way to raise my understanding of Coptic Saints would be by studying the Synaxarium and the saints in the Commemoration of the Saints in the Midnight Praises (Tasbehah).

E. Reacting to the story:
   ● I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation: 
     Reading the story...

St. Theodora of Alexandria:
“St. Theodora was born in Alexandria at the end of the third century. This virgin belonged to a rich and noble family. Her Christian parents were keen to bring her up to be devout. From an early age, she consecrated herself to God through the practice of an ascetic life. She would not leave the house except when going to church to receive Holy Communion or to listen to sermons. She spent the rest of her time at home praying, reading the Bible, or doing work. In 303 during the reigns of the joint Emperors Diocletian and Maximianus, the prefect of Alexandria, Eustratius, issued an edict of persecution. Consequently, he filled the prison cells with many Christians who were later martyred. Meanwhile, someone reported that Theodora did not worship the idols; nor did she sacrifice to them. She was taken to the governor who was impressed by her beauty and refinement. When asked about her religion, she confessed being a Christian who owed her freedom to Christ. When the governor realized that she belonged to a
noble and rich family, he tried to shake her fortitude with sweet temptations. However, the blessed virgin said:

“I have vowed to be betrothed to no one but my Lord Jesus Christ who, for our salvation, became man. He saved us with his life-giving death and granted us eternal life if we remain steadfast in our faith.”

Despite a long conversation, the governor failed to make Theodora change her mind. So, he started to threaten her with the severest kinds of torture. He sentenced her to exposure in a house of ill-fame. Still, the saint’s faith was unshakable, and she kept praying to the Lord to preserve her chastity.

Didymus, a Christian young man who dressed up as a soldier, rescued her from the brothel. He changed clothes with her, and she left the place while wearing his big hat and lowering her head so as not to be discovered. Didymus was soon detected and tried. When asked about the reason behind his deed, he confessed his Christian faith and made it clear that he was sent by God to save her. He was sentenced to death and the news spread throughout the whole city.

As he was taken to his execution, Theodora ran after him saying: “Brother, do not steal my crown; I have to get mine before you.” They were both decapitated in 304 AD. In this way, to quote St. Ambrose: “The two contended, and both gained the victory, and the crown was not divided, but became two.” The Coptic Church commemorates their martyrdom on the first of Ba‘unah.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   I learn from this story to not let my faith waiver no matter the tribulations that come my way.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   Despite the sinful lifestyle that was forced upon her, she still managed to keep her faith which is impressive. I like how at the end of the story she ran to receive her crown of martyrdom.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   I can apply this story by knowing that beauty is not an important measure of who we are and to stay confident in my faith no matter what temptations approach me in my daily life.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?

Yes, because she is a good role model for young Christian girls.

7. Through what type of resources would you like to learn more about the story; via church or reading or other methods?
   Church books, sermons, Sunday school from a young age

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Adolescent.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   St. Marina the Martyr was strong when the devil appeared to her, but I don't think I would have the same strength she had.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   The female saints teach females nowadays how to be role models in their community.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Coptic Women Saints are strong enough. Anyone, whether male or female, within God is strong because God is on their side.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   I do believe that Coptic Women nowadays women are strong. Women are harassed in the world, but Christ helps women remain strong. Mothers who lose their children to persecution, victims of kidnap and rape are just some examples of women who are strong.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The Coptic Community supports Coptic women through nunneries, opportunities to serve (like Sunday School), and participation in church activities. Coptic society prohibits such things such as abortion, divorce, participation in altar services, receiving communion when menstruating. However, the church justly does things and is not sexist towards women.
4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women? The American society, for the most part, gives women to do as they please. Women in American society are not as restricted.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women? Egyptian society places more pressure on women. While women are respected in the church, in the Egyptian society, women have less of a voice and must obey to society’s rules (such as things she wears, says, and does for a living).

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA? Yes, in the USA Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt? In Egypt, women have the freedom to practice their religion, but sometimes they face persecution for their faith.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain. Coptic Women Saints are respected and acknowledged like Coptic Men Saints, but they are less known compared to Coptic Men Saints.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church? I believe the Coptic Church already applies as much equality as it can. The church respects women, but there are just some things that cannot be changed based on biblical reasons.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women? Faithful, holy, pure, gentle.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church? The role of Coptic women in the church is to be an example to others, participate in services, and nurse the children.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women in faith from generation to generation? I can help transfer the empowerment by being an example to others and teaching others about the Coptic Women Saints in the church.
2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
I inherited the faith of my parents by watching my parents from my youth. Seeing my parents pray, go to church, serve, and love God showed me how to have faith for myself. I am going to teach my children by being an example, teaching them the importance of prayer, and taking them to church regularly so they can grow up in the church environment and love it.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
I think the church is giving women rights as much as it can. There are just some things that cannot let women do because it goes against the bible. The church does not deprive women of doing something for no reason.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
The church honors Coptic Women Saints by naming churches are them, teaching people about them, and putting their icons inside the church.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
The recent Coptic martyrs are also saints, but their names are not as well-known and recognized in the Coptic community.

6. Recommendations for church or families:
Spread more awareness of the stories of Coptic Women Saints.

7. Name our conversation:
The Power of women in the Coptic Church.

15- The Spiritual Wheel
Demographics: Please highlight the answer to the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicities
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are very important to me. I carry their pictures everywhere I go.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   Not that many. Maybe 10.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   Mariam el Masrya, Tamav irini, Om el ghalaba, Mohareil.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Mohariel.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint(s) you relate to most is/are ____. Can you tell me why?
   The first time I learned about her, I was the same age as she was and we connected. I consider her to be more of a friend.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
   Yeah, she is from upper Egypt, her parents were unable to have children, so her dad (a priest) and mom were always praying for a child. One day her mom had a vision while sleeping that God blessed her with two kids and these kids will be God’s. Mohraiel and her brother were born and grew up in God’s blessings. At the age of 12, Mohraiel saw a lady in labor who was about to die delivering a baby. Mohraiel prayed for her and the woman was able to deliver a healthy baby. Later on, St Mary with Alisabet visited Mohraiel in her home and invited her to be a martyr.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of the female Coptic saints?
   Not really.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life including the effect of this saint?
   Upon learning about St. Mohraiel, I grew attached to her and prayed for God to see her. I believe that I saw her as a kid.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   It means that I have friends in Heaven. I don’t need to wait for heaven to meet them, but I can know them and befriend them here on earth even if I can’t see them, I can feel their support and love.

255
2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?  
I would say Pope Kiralos for a male saint but not sure about women.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?  
St. Demiana.

4. You said that St. Demiana is the female Coptic saint that is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?  
St. Demiana because she was able to lead forty virgins to get martyrs.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?  
Rarely, when I go to the church, in the mass and Sunday school but I am not familiar with many of them.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:

1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you've heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?  
Courage, purity, meekness (wda3a).

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?  
Mary of Egypt for her sincere repentance.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?  
It could be better. I don’t know that much.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?  
I would say a three.

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?  
I would read the synaxarium and pay better attention to Coptic martyr’s stories.

E. Reacting to the story:

- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:  
Reading the story...

The Martyrdom of Sts. Benjamin and his Sister Eudexia:  
“On 27th of Mesra, St. Benjamin and his sister St. Eudexia, were martyred. Their parents were pious Christians who loved sojourners. They brought them up in a Christian manner. When
Benjamin grew up, he longed to be martyred for the sake of the Name of Christ. He went to "Shatanouf" and confessed the Lord Christ before the governor. The governor tortured him much then cast him in prison. When his parents and sister knew about this, they came to him weeping, but he comforted them and told them about the vanity of the world and the life of the coming age which has no end. When his sister heard that, she told him, "God lives, I shall not separate from you until we die together." The governor cast them in a dark place for twenty days. Then he took them out and hung heavy stones on their necks and threw them in the river. The Angel of the Lord came and loosened the stones. They swam until they arrived at the town of Petra. A virgin found them and rescued them. They then returned to the governor and again they confessed the Lord Christ before him. The governor gave the order to have their heads cut off and they received the crown of martyrdom. The faithful built a church in their names in their town "Shanshour." May their prayers be with us. Amen."¹⁸⁸

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   Even the saints have their fears of torture and death, they are like us anyway, but it is their decisions in moments of fear that set them apart.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   While I have not heard of them nor that city before, the story does not seem strange to me. The saint went with her brother and followed God’s word. she gave up her life for Heaven.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   Being a part of the church will ensure that my fears and insecurities do not hold me away from God and his blessings

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes! I would want to know her entire life.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Through church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Child.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
I am not sure how I would react to a situation like that. I know that I would not live in fear, but I am not sure which side I will take. I would love to believe that I will make the right choice.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
Not stand for cruelty and injustice, speak up and make sure that my family is following God too.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
Yes! even if they are not martyrs, life is hard, being able to finish the journey as a saint without losing God’s image is a strength.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
Give me an example from real life.
Yes! people are getting meaner and more barbaric; women have to endure much more from society than before. They are stronger than ever!

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
I feel like there are some common misleading ideas and taboos about women and the church is not addressing them. The church also hurts women by forcing them to stay in harmful marriages because “what God combined cannot be torn by a human”. This led to a woman being killed by her husband in Canada.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
American society doesn’t distinguish nor care about religious affiliations. Coptic women have the same rights as any other woman.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
Egyptian society forces women to be in a relationship even if they are not ready and forces women to be stuck in harmful relationships and endure abuse because divorced women are looked down on.
6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No, they cut the hair of women and girls who are not wearing the hijab, churches are burned down, they are subjected to sexual harassment.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Men saints endured more torture and were soldiers in the army, they are thought of as strong. Therefore, people ask for their help more than women saints. The saints have equality, but they do not have the same ‘physical strength’.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   informing people that all saints are equally powerful and physical strength has no meaning after saints reach heaven.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
   Patient, enduring, pure.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
   Be a role model for younger women to look up to.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**

1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   Teach kids to serve and love God, not fear him.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   My mom taught me through constantly taking me to church and taking me to Sunday school.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   Yes! even though the focus on them is not clear.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   Teaching their stories, building churches on their names, making their movies.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
6. **Recommendations for church or families:**
   Try to create more cell phone applications that help the kids to know more about the Coptic church and its saints.

7. **Name our conversation:**
   The Spiritual Wheel.

16- **Coptic Saint, Past, Present and Future**

Demographics: *Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.*

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18- 24
   - 25-34
   - **35-44**
   - 45- 54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - **America**
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - **Female**
   - Male
   - Others

4. **Which race/ ethnicity best describes you?**
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - **American/ Egyptian**
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. **What is the primary language you speak?**
   - English
   - **Arabic**
• French
• Italian
• Coptic
• Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where are you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Very important, as I believe in learning from them, I believe in intercession, and in the heavenly church.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   A lot have not counted them before.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Mary, St. Verena, St. Marina, St. Matronoshka, St. Demiana, St. Dolagy.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Verena.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Verena. Can you tell me why?
St. Verena, I love her life and how she committed herself to serve poor people and teach them about Jesus.

2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**
   St. Verena, she was from a noble family. She was from upper Egypt. She was the cousin of St. Maurice; she traveled to Europe as a nurse taking care of the wounds of the soldiers. When St. Maurice and his legion were martyred, she stayed in Switzerland, taking care of the sick and teaching the people cleanliness. She was imprisoned during her service time, but after she got free, she continued her service, and she lived in a cave. She was usually portrayed with a comb and jar of water as a symbol of her teachings about cleanliness. There are a lot of churches named after her in Europe.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   St. Dolagy, She was a mother for four sons; Shentas, Soris, Abonoufa, and Horman. She was from Upper Egypt. No one knows anything about her husband, but they thought she was a widow with four sons. When Arianos, the governor, came to visit the village, he saw the four sons were plowing the field and carrying watermelons. When Arianos asked them about their faith and asked them to worship idols, they refused to obey his command, and then he put them in prison. During that time, their mother visited them and supported them so they would keep their faith. Finally, Arianos ordered them to be beheaded on the knees of their mother. They were martyred and then their mother Dolagy.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   A lot, countless, most recently I was praying and asking for guidance for something and because of all my saint’s prayers on my behalf I got the help and guidance.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   It means a lot; it represents the heavenly life.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. George, St. Philopatier, St. Mary, St. Verena, St. Demiana.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Verena.

4. **You said that St. Verena is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   Because she left Egypt go to Switzerland to help the soldiers as a nurse and after that she helped poor and sick people.
5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
A lot, in liturgy, in Synaxarium.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
Purity, prayers can do miracles, worshiping God and love him heartily.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
Yes, St. Verena because I learnt from her to serve the people who are in needs.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
Good.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
5

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
From church, from Reading.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

The Martyrdom of St. Thecla and Mouji:
“The Martyrdom of Sts. Thecla and Mouji: This day 25th of Abib marks the martyrdom of Sts. Thecla and Mouji (Mugi). They were born in the city of Kerakus, and they were brought up by a God-fearing woman, who was a teacher. Once when they were crossing the river, they saw the governor torturing the Christians. They were appalled by his hard-heartedness. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and showed them the glory of the saints. They went to Alexandria, where they confessed the Lord Christ before the governor, who tortured them severely. Then, he cut off the head of St. Mouji. As for St. Thecla, he sent her to the city of Demtaw, where she was martyred, after much torture. Thus, they received the crown of martyrdom. May their prayers be with us. Amen.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
Yes.

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2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods? Church, and then reading.

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story? Nothing more important than loving God who loved us first.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story How far you can protect your beliefs in God, even if you get killed.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life? I stand for my faith as I can, I ask God’s help to provide me with his strength.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint? Yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods? Church and reading.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman? Child.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it? I wish to be with her, serving with her and help others.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? Live in purity, help others, and tell them about Jesus how much he loved us.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that? Yes, they raise our monks, nuns, priests, servants, good people who serve the country by honest ethics.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.
Yes, we have a lot of recent martyrs and their moms still stand strong and tell us how we love God and say that life doesn’t matter for us, we live our lives for God. Also, these women of faith teach us how to forgive people who hurt us and even pray for the bad people who caused a lot of pain in our lives, which is a very hard discipline to practice for non-believers.

3. **In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   Our Coptic community supports Coptic women a lot and respects them in their services and their activities.

4. **In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   American society is always supporting women in general, so it assists Coptic women as a group of women of color in the country.

5. **In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   Egyptian society is supporting women in getting an education like men, in getting a chance to work in government like men, but not supporting women in wages, there are not get the same salaries as men doing the same jobs. Also, the Egyptian society does not support women in getting their respect from men. Egyptian men always treat women as if they are less in value than men.

6. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?**
   Yes, they can practice their beliefs freely in the US.

7. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?**
   Yes, only inside the church not in the society. The Copts are persecuted in Egypt just because they are Christians.

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.**
   Yes, we respect both men and women saints, ask their intersessions.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   By everyone following his/her rule to apply equality. Also, by giving sermons about equality in the church or youth meetings.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    Strong, generous, humble, good servants, loving.
11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   By being a good example as all the Coptic saints were and we can learn from them.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   My parents taught me to know and to always remember that God sees me everywhere and he loves me to the extent that he sacrificed his only son to save me. I loved him back and this is what I will teach my kids, to love God, to know how he sacrificed his only son, and to always serve his holy name.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   Yes, by letting the women serve in the church, become a deaconess.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   We remember saints and we memorialize them. We have churches with their names.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   Both groups.

6. Recommendations for church or families:
   Raise the kids in the church. Teach the kids the Bible from early ages. Encourage the church committee from priests and leaders to involve in American society more to support Egyptian families and to understand American society around them instead of being closed-minded about Egyptian culture only.

7. Name our conversation:
   Coptic Saint, past, present and future.

17- Screaming of Woman
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older
2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Very important to me and to the Coptic Culture. I pray to them when I need anything, and they hear me and answer my prayers.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   Over 50.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Mary, St. Marina (x2), St Verena, St. Barbara, St. Yustina, St. Demiana, St. Mary of Egypt, St. Monica.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Mary.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Mary. Can you tell me why?
   St. Mary suffered much although she was Christ’s mother. She is a model for women on how to endure and overcome difficulties.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
   The life of St. Mary was replete with struggles, starting with being an unwed, pregnant woman, having to travel while very pregnant to be counted in the census, fleeing to Egypt to avoid the killing of Christ, the poverty she lived in, the suffering she witnessed that happened to her son and the victory she achieved by staying steadfast in the faith.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   How women who were far from Christ came back and lived austere and prayerful lives.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   Nothing specific.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   An individual leads an upright life, and because of that, the church recognizes them as saints.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary, St. George, St. Mina, St. Athanasius, St. Anthony.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary.

4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   As the mother of God, she is the most favored among the saints and her intercession with her son is the source of strength for many and for mankind.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   During the reading of the Synaxarium.

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**D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   That we have strength through their prayers; their faith, their endurance, their patience are all models for me.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   I think we have learnt different things from the trials and tribulations of the many saints and we still learn from those who are saints of today or this era.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Not as strong as I would like it to be and I am sure there are many women who are saints whose stories are not written and recorded. There are many mothers- saints who raised God-fearing children.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   4

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Reading the stories of the saints in the Synaxarium.
E. Reacting to the story:

- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

St. Sarah, the sister of St. Moises:
“After the death of his father, St. Moises wanted to join a community of ascetics, but before doing so, he meant to have his sister Sarah married. When she knew of his plan, she told him that she would not get married unless he did so. He said to her: “I have committed many sins and want to repent by dedicating my life to God. I cannot get married and work out my salvation at the same time.”

Her reply was: “Your plan and desire are the same as mine.” When he saw how resolute she was, he distributed all their money among the poor. He first placed her in a community of virgins outside Alexandria and then went away and joined a group of ascetics.

They did not see each other for ten years. When Emperor Decius started persecuting the Christians (249-250) during the time of Pope Demetrius I, who was the twelfth pope of Alexandria, St. Moises sent word to his sister informing her of his intention to win the crown of martyrdom. Immediately, she took leave of her mother superior, asked for the blessing and prayers of her sisters and joined her brother on the way to Alexandria. Both of them confessed their faith in Christ before the prefect, who severely tortured them and gave his orders that they would be beheaded. The Coptic Church commemorates their martyrdom on the twenty-sixth of Misra.” 190

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   To be strong. To have a strong relationship with siblings.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   She has a brave heart.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   To have meditation with God. Going to monasteries to have blessings.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes, I would like to know her life in the convent.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?

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Church reading, online, a compilation of female saints in the Coptic Church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?  
Yes, as an adolescent, that was the best time in my life for reading, learning and gaining information.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?  
Of course, I could have not handled St. Mary’s life as she handled it. She is the utmost model of patience, quietness, prayerfulness, sacrifice.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?  
Practicing patience, practicing their prayers and meditations, and asking God to increase their faith, love, devotion for Him.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?  
Yes, their depth of faith guides their actions.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?  
Give me an example from real life.  
Yes, we have the faith that guides us through our professional lives, our family life and in our service.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?  
I think the church does not fully appreciate how much the woman does in her life, juggling full time work, motherhood, wifehood, serving. There does need to be more support for all they do.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?  
One hundred percent that American society supports Coptic women, it does not differentiate between them and any other women, all are equal. American society gives the rights for all women.
5. **In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   I cannot comment since I did not grow up there or live there; the only thing is there is a lack of support in most 3rd world countries for women; they are looked down upon as 2nd class citizens.

6. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?**
   Yes, they have.

7. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?**
   No, they have not been given the freedom. You can differentiate between Coptic women and Muslim women in the Egyptian streets because Muslim women wear a veil which makes it easier to persecute and harass Coptic women.

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.**
   Maybe they are not mentioned as frequently as men because they are not often in the leadership of the church. But I do believe there are many, many women saints that God knows of. Both women and men saints are equal in God’s eyes.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   If there are stories of women saints that could be in the Synaxarium, then they should be added.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    They are strong, generous, faithful, family oriented and know that God can help them in every step of their lives.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
    To support our families, be the backbone of the faith, serve in traditional ways, to be models in our behavior, to serve out of the public eye and support others in actions and in our prayers.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**
1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
   Being an example and transferring the strong faith that our fathers and mothers shed their blood for.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**
   By them taking us to church weekly, being attentive to the fasts, different seasons of the
church and the terrific models of faith through our clergy and servants.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights the Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   Perhaps not how society is doing it, but as women, we have a duty to pass on the faith to our children, to live the virtues and be living examples of what it means to be a Christian in a secular society.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   The greatest honor is given to St. Mary and that she is above all other saints.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   Models of faith and virtue have been honored throughout the generations.

6. **Recommendations for church or families:**
   Take your children to church and attend as much of the services as possible, even for a short time to teach them that the church plays a central role in our lives, listen to liturgies and hymns recordings at home, read the Bible, share the stories of Saints’ lives and live a Christian life on a daily basis.

7. **Name our conversation:**
   Screaming of woman.

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**18- Women from Rocks.**

Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - Female
4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. **How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?**
The saints are a very important part of my faith as a Coptic Christian. I grew up listening to their stories and recognizing their icons in the church. They have been my role models growing up.

2. **How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?**
I am probably aware of 15-20 female Coptic saints.

3. **List some of the Coptic women saints?**
St. Mary, Demiana, Barbara, Regula, Verena, Marina (x2), Ana-simone, Julita, Justina, Mary of Egypt, etc.

4. **Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?**
I try to be like St. Verena.

**B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:**

1. **You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Verena. Can you tell me why?**
I said I relate to St. Verena because of her story with helping the people in Europe maintaining good health. I see this as her way of maintaining people’s health. In a similar way, I hope to be a doctor and a healer. In doing this, I can also help people maintain their health.

2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?**
She is the cousin of St. Maurice. She lived in Europe, helping people stay clean and maintain their hygiene.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
I appreciated when St. Marina and many others stood up to the kings.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
I believe that they help with the small accomplishments in my life, from getting good grades to having a good day.

**C. The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
I think it’s the way that the church keeps updating role models in our church, and for me, it helps me to keep sight of the image that I would like to one day attain.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints to the Coptic tradition?**
Male Saint: St. Mina, George, Abanoub, etc.
Female Saints: St. Mary, Demiana, etc.
3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary, Mother of God.

4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   St. Mary is the most important because through her, the plan of salvation was accomplished. She carried the most important person to walk on Earth.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   Not as much as the male Saints. I hear of them in the Synaxarium during the liturgies and in the Tasbeha during the commemoration of the saints.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   In general, I have learned about the importance of assertiveness in the Christian faith. Many of the saints were faced with temptations and disagreements from opposing parties, but the saints were able to overcome by remaining assertive. For this reason, I learned that womanhood is not equated with silence, but rather, the voice of the woman can hold true value.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   I have chosen St. Demiana as my role model due to her living a chaste life, which is something that I hold as a model for myself. Also, her leadership over 40 other virgins is very admirable as I strive to also lead my peers. Furthermore, she was not afraid to speak out against things that were wrong. I aspire to have her assertiveness.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   I think I have a fair amount of knowledge on the saints, but I know that there are so many saints that I have only heard about and do not know their stories. There are also saints that I do not know anything about.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   6

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Tasbeha, liturgy, Coptic movies on saints, and online resources.

E. Reacting to the story:
• I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story…

**Alexandra:**
“Alexandria in Egypt was a major port established where the Nile meets the Mediterranean Sea. There was a major Christian community there, and it was a growing intellectual center. One of the earliest schools of theology was located in this city. Alexandra was a beautiful young woman of the fourth century who fled the unwanted advances of a young man, left the city of Alexandria, and shut herself up in a mausoleum. She received food and supplies through a window from a woman friend. Alexandra maintained strict privacy through the remaining ten or twelve years of her life, keeping a curtain at her window so that no one ever saw her face to face again.
Melania the Elder sought a visit with Alexandra. When Melania asked Alexandra how she persevered through the harsh conditions and the difficult inner journey, she replied, *From early dawn to the ninth hour I weave linen, and recite the Psalms and pray; and during the rest of the day I commemorate in my heart the holy fathers, and I revolve in my thoughts the histories of all the Prophets and Apostles, and Martyrs; and during the remaining hours I work with my hands and eat my bread, and by means of these things I am comforted whilst I await the end of my life in good hope.*

Despite her strict privacy, Alexandra developed a reputation among Christians for her wise advice and spiritual direction.”\(^{191}\)

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   Keep my privacy and be away a little from people to have time for God.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   I feel that her story is very simple yet powerful. While she may not have been tortured or preached to many people, she remained faithful and was able to flee temptation.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   I can apply this in my practical life in that I can remind myself that it is ok to physically flee temptation. Moreover, this story encourages me to find something spiritual in my life to keep focused, whether it be reading or using my hands to build something.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes.

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7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Young adult.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
      I would use my family, father confessor, and my friends to help me overcome the situations. I do not think it is very practical for me to just leave and live on my own as this saint did.

   2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
      I can apply their leadership skills to my services at church as a Sunday School servant and mentor. Also, I can apply their assertiveness during my interactions with family and friends. I can assert my opinion if I believe it to be correct.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
   1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
      Yes, they are strong. Strength does not need to be physical, but it is more emotional and mental. They demonstrate strength against temptation and strength in speaking up.

   2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.
      Overall Coptic Women are stronger than before, due to more progressive thinking in society. In real life, Coptic Women are taking important positions within services in the church and their careers. This shows leadership and the assertiveness that they need to accomplish this.

   3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
      Supporting: Giving women important roles in service, supporting the success of Coptic women in the job market, etc.
      Not Supporting: Repressing the voice of the woman, in that women’s opinions are not as valued as men’s opinions. Also, not enough representation of the female saints among Coptic women.

278
4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women? Supporting: America says that it is accepting of all people and that is being promoted, which is definitely a benefit for Coptic women. Not Supporting: If our beliefs as Coptic women go against society, society becomes less tolerant of Coptic Women.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women? Supporting: Egyptian society refers to the full population of Egypt and there is support in the sense there is some tolerance for Coptic people in general. Not supporting: Religious differences in Egypt decreases the tolerance for the Coptic religion and therefore Coptic women specifically.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA? Yes and no. Yes, because the First Amendment clearly states freedom of religion; however, individuals may inhibit this process when beliefs contradict society.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt? Not entirely due to a majority of Egypt being Muslim. Tolerance is not always the case.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain. No. Far less equality for Coptic Women Saints who are mentioned in the commemoration, the synaxarium, etc.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church? Promote more female role models in the Coptic church.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women? Strong-willed, opinionated, firm, talkative.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church? To walk in the way of salvation and lead others down the same path, just as any other Christian is expected to do.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation? Continue to have women in the church who are successful be role models for young females. They can see that doors are open for them in that way. Also, teaching more
about female saints.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   My parents raised me in the Church. Being there my whole life, participating in services, and leading youth has kept me strong. I plan to give it to the next generation by mentoring them as they learn to serve as well as instilling virtues in the children I serve.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   I don’t think so, the Coptic church does not give women their rights.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   Venerations and commemorations.

5. Do you think that the female saints are being honored only for the historical or old women saints’ group or those who today are the Coptic martyrs and saints or both groups?
   Both groups.

6. Recommendations for church or families:
   Open more American Coptic churches to attract more nations to our church so we can learn from them and they can learn from our church.

7. Name our conversation:
   Women from rocks.

19- Coptic Women Saints Offspring
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others
3. What is your gender?
   • Female
   • Male
   • Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   • American
   • Egyptian
   • African
   • White
   • American/Egyptian
   • Multiple ethnicity
   • Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   • English
   • Arabic
   • French
   • Italian
   • Coptic
   • Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   • High school
   • College
   • Bachelor’s degree
   • Master’s degree
   • Doctoral degree
   • Others

7. Where are you born?
   • America
   • Egypt
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   • Orthodox
   • Catholic
   • Protestant
   • Others
Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are important because their lives are a great example to us that we live by and keep learning from. We also ask them to pray for us in front of the Lord because we are not as worthy as them.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   Many, I cannot count them.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   Virgin Mary, Saint Marina, Saint Demiana, Tamav Erini, St. Mary of Egypt.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   Virgin Mary.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Virgin Mary. Can you tell me why?
   Because she is number one female saint for Coptic Orthodox Christianity. She is at the highest level because she was the Lord’s mother on earth so she’s the perfect figure for a female saint. She’s the closest one to our Lord.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
   I remember that at a very young age, she devoted herself to serving God. She became engaged to a very old man (Joseph the carpenter) at a very young age and God called her to be his mother so He chose to come down to earth through her.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   I do not have a favorite story or miracle. I am usually amazed by each and every story I read or hear about. I’m sure each one is very unique.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   Nothing specifically that happened to me, but I always ask for their prayers every night and during my challenging school days.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   Devoting our entire life to the Lord, even to death.

2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
They are all important in our Coptic tradition.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   Virgin Mary.

4. You said that Virgin Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   Because she is number one female saint for Coptic Orthodox Christianity. She is at the highest level because she was the Lord’s mother on earth so she’s the perfect figure for a female saint. She’s the closest one to our Lord.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   I always hear stories about them, especially during persecution incidents that happen in Egypt, all the time.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   I learned and believe that female saints are equally precious to God. Male and female saints can love the Lord equally and can give up their lives to our Lord without a second thought. Female saints always have proven that God was their number one priority and that is why they were able to devote their lives, leave the world behind, and give up being wives/mothers because serving the Lord would give them much more joy and happiness than anything else in this world.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   Virgin Mary.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Not very knowledgeable because unfortunately male saints are more common in our church history/culture.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   5

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Read more, ask my father confessor, and do more research online and in the bible.

E. Reacting to the story:
I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:

Reading the story...

**Amma Sarah:**

“Amma Sarah was a native of Upper Egypt. Born into a wealthy Christian family, Sarah was well educated and a voracious reader. Moving to the vicinity of a women’s monastery in the desert of Pelusium (near Antione), Sarah lived alone for many years near the river in a cell with a terraced roof. She attended to the needs of the nearby community.

Eventually, Amma Sarah received the monastic garb and lived in a closer relationship with the community, serving as a spiritual elder. Sarah continued to follow the ascetic life by living alone in a cave by the river for seven years. She died around her eightieth year. Amma Sarah was deeply concerned that her heart should never be divided in her pursuit of God. Much of her desert struggle was centered on calming inner distractions and cultivating those things that brought her closer to God. “Lust” and “fornication” were not so much about bodily passions but rather anything or anyone that kept her heart distracted from God. The movement toward a deeper and more profound awareness of God is a spiraling movement toward simplicity that occurs when we voluntarily let go of all the attachments that keep us from moving deeper within. This is not a rejection of the created world, all of which is God’s delightful gift to us, but rather it is the rejection of our tendencies to grasp aspects of creation in a way that diminishes our unity with God.

Amma Sarah’s goal was purity of heart. As one grows and deepens in purity of heart, one deepens in pure love for Christ. Sarah lived with a deep sense of awe of God. She sought neither special treatment not recognition for herself.

Amma Sarah models for us the gift of tenacity and focuses on the final goal of life: oneness with God. Sarah sought to eliminate distractions that she experienced as stumbling blocks to total union. This is never an easy journey, and Sarah’s response was to pray for strength to endure and move into freedom. She avoided neither the challenges nor the pain; she stayed with her struggles until there was resolution.

Amma Sarah calls her followers to grow in self-awareness. Self-awareness is not selfishness but self-connectedness. It is deep and intense listening to our inner being, learning to be conscious and alert to what our inner world is trying to say to us. With self-awareness and self-knowledge, we understand our reactions toward others, issues that complicate our lives, blind spots that we can fall into, as well as our particular strengths and gifts. As we grow in self-awareness, we grow in God-awareness. Amma Sarah, in the desert tradition, understood that God has chosen humanity along with all creation as the vehicle of Divine Revelation. Her feast day is July 13.”

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

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3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   To be more self-aware and more connected with God, despite all the distractions and the blind spots we fall into in this world.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   It is impressive that she was able to deep dive her inner soul and figure that out on her own and how much she was connected to God.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   To have more quiet time with God on a daily basis and evaluate myself and see where I stand so I do not get lost and forget my real purpose of living.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Sure.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Via church and audio materials.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Adult.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
      I will never be in the same situation, but I would not know what to do right away. I do not even know if I am going to believe it at first. I would pray about it and make sure it is God’s choice first then go with it.

   2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
      I would try to take their lives as a lively example and try to copy them in my community through the challenges we face every day nowadays. I would not act like everyone else around me, I would think twice before making any decision or saying any word since I am God’s figure on earth and I need to be careful because I once read that we might be the only Bible some people ever read.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
   1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
Yes, because I think their lust might be less intense than males and because they are more emotional as humans.

2. **Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.**
   Some are strong, some are not. I cannot think of a specific example, but all I know is that the challenges Coptic women face today are much harder than before and people in general are getting more emotional and unstable as life gets harder for them and as the world worsens around us.

3. **In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   Coptic women are supported with lots of service options for them to keep them close to church, but they might not be supported emotionally. Example: we don’t have certified psychiatric servants at church for them that we can go to for advice, besides our father of confession (which sometimes are not the best doctors for specific situations). We do not have support groups at church that would be there all the time to give support and help as it is needed.

4. **In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   I think American society is doing a good job supporting women overall, not specifically Coptic women. It is doing a better job than our Coptic church in my opinion. They have more resources than church for providing support.

5. **In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   Egyptian society is not much of a support for Coptic women because women are a minority in general in Egypt, so they basically have not many rights to begin with.

6. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?**
   Yes, thank God, better than Egypt.

7. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?**
   Of course not!

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.**
   Tricky question! I would say yes and no. Yes, they are the same to God, they suffered and faced similar challenges/hate equally. And no because in general men and women are very different in Egyptian community. They are not equal; men have more rights than women.
9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   I think we are close on that; we just need to treat each gender equally and provide the same resources to both. Both have their own needs, challenges, personalities, and responsibilities.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    Kind, emotional, simple.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
    Servants, mothers, wives, daughters, sisters.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**

1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
   Make women today aware of their rights, know that they have support and resources, know that they are not alone, and be more knowledgeable in general.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**
   I made church (God, serving God) my top priority throughout the years. I never let anything take me away, and if it did, I went back and repented and stuck to God more. I have read the bible multiple times, served more, was there for people in need whenever I could. I would make sure I teach my kids to do the same.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   Not entirely, Coptic women are supported with lots of service options for them to keep them close to church, but they might not be supported emotionally.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   Remembering them in prayers and in Sunday schools and church readings.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   The old are being honored more.

6. **Recommendations for church or families:**
   Having certified psychiatric services at church for women so that we can go to for advice to someone besides our father of confession. Having support groups at church that would be there all the time for the support and help needed.

7. **Name our conversation:**
   Coptic Women Saints offspring.
**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where are you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are very important to me. They are like a window to heaven, showing me the way to heaven and reaching out to God by following their steps to salvation.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   About 10 Coptic women saints.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Mary mother of God / St. Demiana / St. Verena / St. Mary of Egypt / St. Eugina / St. Sarah who lived in desert / St. Hilaria / St. Anastasia / St. Euphemia / St. Barbara
   St. Marian / St. Dolagy / St. Rebecca.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Mary mother of God and St. Mary of Egypt.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Mary of Egypt. Can you tell me why?
   Because I feel that she left everything and went to the desert to serve God. I like this kind of life.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
St. Mary of Egypt. That she was in sin for a long time. She was committing adultery. She tried to enter the church in Jerusalem, and she could not. She felt that there were hands that pulled her out and preventing her from entering the church. Immediately she looked at St. Mary and she promised her to repent and start a new life. Sometimes I feel that she must have been so beautiful to attract all of those guys to commit sin with her. What comes in my mind that she has a strong heart filled with love because when she decided to love God, she did and left everything to follow him.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   In general no, but I feel when I pray close to the altar, that God hears me and answers me. In many situations God answers me and solves my problems so usually I love to enter the church and pray beside the altar.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   Yes, I was under masturbation for a long time and then pornography. I feel it damaged some parts in my brain. My brain is not functioning well. I could not get out of this. Day after day, month after month, year after year. I called Mary of Egypt and asked her to help me to stop that and be a good person. I told her you overcame sin, so please help me to overcome the masturbation. I felt her power in my life and after a year I stopped it and I feel that I have more peace, more self-confidence, more active brain and more love for the life that I live. I have pictures of her hanging in my room to help me feel her presence and feel her support.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**
   1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
      Sainthood means to me that you are holy, close to God, attending church, taking communion praying to God every day and loving God from the bottom of your heart. Give God time every day to read his Bible and listen to his commandments.

   2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
      St. George, St Takla, St. Mina, St. Mary, St. Marina, St. Verena, St. Demiana.

   3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
      St. Mary and St. Dolagy.

   4. **You said that St. Mary and St. Dolagy are the female Coptic saints who are most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
      St. Mary because she was so close to God that God descended from heaven to be inside her and also, she is close to humans because she has our nature as human beings. And St. Dolagy, She raised her kids in the fear of God and they were all martyrs at the end.

   5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
Not too much, sometimes in the church in Sunday schools and in the liturgy.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   I have learnt to be humble, to keep praying in the difficult times in my life. I have learnt to be strong to face the problems and try to solve it. Also, that I have the same equality as men in the Christian society.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   I love St. George, St. Maurice, St. Takla I take them as my model in my life. From among women saints I love St. Mary the most. I feel that she is like my mother.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Very good.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   8

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   By reading, watching movies about the saints.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  
Reading the story...

St. Euphrasia (Eupraxia) the virgin:
“The Departure of St. Euphrasia (Eupraxia), the virgin: On the 26th of Baramhat, the blessed St. Euphrasia (Eupraxia) the virgin departed. She was the daughter of a noble family in the city of Rome, who was related to Emperor Honorius. Before her father's departure, he asked the Emperor to care for her. Her mother went to Egypt to collect the revenues and rent of her estates and orchards, which her husband had left her. She took her daughter, who was nine years of age, with her, and they lodged in one of the houses of virgins. The nuns of that convent were on high degree of asceticism, piety and devoutness, they never ate food with meat, oil, fruits, at no time drank wine and slept on the floor. Eupraxia loved the life in that convent, and she was pleased with the nun that served her. That nun told her: "Promise me that you will not leave this convent": and she promised her that. When her mother finished her work that she came to achieve, her daughter refused to return with her and she said to her mother: "I have vowed myself to Christ, and I have no need for this world, for my true Bridegroom is the Lord Christ." When her mother knew that, she gave all her money and goods to the poor and needy, and she lived with her daughter in the convent for many years, then departed in peace. When Emperor
Honorius heard that, he sent asking for her. She answered back saying that she had vowed herself to the Lord Christ, and she cannot break her covenant. The Emperor marveled at her wisdom and righteousness and allowed her to stay. Eupraxia contended strenuously in the ascetic life, she fasted two days at a time, then three, then four, and afterwards she fasted for a week at a time, and during the Holy Lent she did not eat anything which was cooked. Satan was jealous of her, and he smote her with an illness in her feet, gave her pain for a long time, until God had compassion on her and healed her. God granted her the gift of healing the sick, and she was beloved by all the sisters and the abbess for her humility and obedience to them. One night the abbess saw in a vision crowns which had been prepared, and she asked: "Who are these for?", and she was told: "These crowns for your daughter Eupraxia, she will be coming to us after a short while." The abbess told the nuns of the vision which she had seen and commanded them not to tell Eupraxia about it. When her time came to depart of this world, she fell sick with a slight fever. The abbess and the nuns gathered around St. Eupraxia and asked her to remember them before the Divine Throne, then she departed in peace. Then right after her departure the nun her friend departed, and shortly after, the abbess fell sick, so she gathered the nuns and told them: "Choose whom will be abbess over you, for I am going to the Lord." When they came on the following morning to visit her, they found that she had departed. May their prayers be with us. Amen.”

193

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   To be a vegetarian and eat less because I love food and eating delicious food. I am overweight and I enjoy eating and cooking, eating a lot, all kinds of food so I need to eat healthy and be more ascetic and control myself on eating too much food.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   She knew her way since she was young, only nine years old. She loved the life of the monastery which is hard for everyone. She lived an ascetic life, she fasted two days at a time, then three, then four, and afterwards she fasted for a week at a time, and during the Holy Lent she did not eat anything which was cooked.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   To set my goal in my life which is to grow in spiritual life and have a good relationship with God.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes, I want to know more about her story and experience life in the monastery for a few days.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   I would like to know more through reading books articles and doing research about the Coptic women saints.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   I want to know more about saints as an elder woman, so I will have more time and more knowledge from the life experiences.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
      Yes, if I were in her position, I would go to the desert to worship God but not alone, I would want to be in nunnery. If I were her, I would be away from each person that might drag me into doing sins, be away from the world that hurts me a lot, be away from the people that deceived me and caused me a lot of emotional and physical pain. If I were her, I would leave the world or keeping myself in a room, no one knowing anything about me. I would love being with God and would worship him all my life.

   2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
      Be a good example for the people, be like an open Bible for everyone who needs me. Pray a lot for sick people. Practice ascetic life. Although I live in the world, I would decrease my social life, eat less and pray more.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
   1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
      I feel that they were very strong to face persecution and martyrdom. Strong in faith to offer their lives to God, sometimes with their children and their families.

   2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
      Give me an example from real life.
      They are very steadfast in faith, strong in their personality, tough enough to claim their freedom in a restricted Egyptian society. The women in Botrosia Church in Egypt, they faced the death of the bomb and they became martyrs while attending the liturgy. Victims’ families were very brave to face the death of their children or relatives and they prayed for the murderer to receive forgiveness from God.
3. **In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   They support women by taking care of her as is a weak person who needs help in everything so that gives the opportunity for women to learn more and get more. The Coptic society does not support the women in not accepting their opinions about serious stuff or to the stuff that is related to the church.

4. **In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   I love American society because it is supporting women in general and has all the rights for women. I do not see anything in American society not supporting women.

5. **In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   Egyptian society support women in getting an education and getting jobs in work field and Egyptian society does not support women by not receiving respect from men and not being treated equally. There is still a lot to do to achieve equality in Egypt and have the men respect their women as their bodies.

6. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?**
   Sure, they have the right to practice their beliefs and their prayers.

7. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?**
   No, the women in Egypt do not have the freedom to practice their beliefs freely. Some girls are rapped from Muslim guys to make them change the religion from Christianity to Islam. The culture and Muslims force Coptic women to change their religion sometimes. If you have an office in Egypt, you cannot put the cross, Christian photos or something like that in your office. Sometimes Coptic girls hide their cross necklace or their cross on their hands to avoid persecution from Egyptian culture.

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.**
   In God’s eyes the answer will be yes but, in the church, they prefer men stories more than women. They talk more about men saints more than women saints. They honor men saints more than women saints.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   By teaching groups of both men and women the principle of equality and by practicing that in the church community. Making a day in a Coptic church for celebrating equality.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
They are strong, generous, caring about their families too much, smart, fast learning women, they have blessings from God.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**

Teach, serve, take care of sick, get married and raised their children in the fear of God. She can be deaconess and recite the mass.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**

1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**

By reading, giving lectures and in some churches beginning a group for women who are interested to know more about Coptic women saints. Also, by publishing some articles and research studies about Coptic women and their roles.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**

My Mam, she is a very strong character, My Dad is very difficult to deal with, but my Mom never complained about that. She always gets up in the morning, the first thing to do is to pray the morning prayers. At night she always read a chapter of the bible every night before sleeping. She fasts all the Coptic fasting periods. She serves the sick. She used to serve disabled people. She is always saying that God arranges everything for good. She is never had a happy life, but she is satisfied and always thank God for everything. She is multitasked, she can handle a lot of things in one time and she is very active in serving the people and taking care of her guests. She is never mad at anyone, she said God is controlling the world and he is going to take care of that. For me, to transfer the spiritual power to the next generation, I will teach my kids how to be religious and be successful and read more about Egyptian Coptic saints. I will tell them to create a relationship with God through prayers and fasting. I will take them to visit Egypt and learn from the monks and nuns.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**

I would say yes and no. Yes, the church is trying to give women’s rights to the Coptic women but still not completed because our influences with the Egyptian culture that sees that should men dominant women and women have to obey men without thinking.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**

By doing their movies, writing books, painting icons, remembering them in synaxarium, naming churches after them and name their kids with saints’ names.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**

Both groups are honored the same.

6. **Recommendations for church or families:**
• Men need to respect women more in Coptic and Egyptian society.
• Egyptian families should respect their kids and give them more freedom to build kids personalities. Be friends with your kids. Gave them safety and space to express their opinions as a kids and adults instead of ignoring their thoughts.
• Churches need to have open discussions to listen to the adults and know their needs.
• Take women’s power and use it in teaching kids and involve the women in more activities to help the people in need, be kind to women and practice the equality in the church via teaching and make a day for equality in the church for men, women and kids.
• Talk about Coptic women saints, record their stories and hang a photo of these saints in your house.

7. **Name our conversation:**
   History repeats itself again and again.

21- **Coptic Female Saints in Our Lives.**

**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. **Which race/ethnicity best describes you?**
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - **American/Egyptian**
• Multiple ethnicity
• Others

5. **What is the primary language you speak?**
   • English
   • Arabic
   • French
   • Italian
   • Coptic
   • Others

6. **What is the highest level of education you have completed?**
   • High school
   • College
   • Bachelor’s degree
   • Master’s degree
   • Doctoral degree
   • Others

7. **Where are you born?**
   • America
   • **Egypt**
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

8. **Which part of Christianity do you belong to?**
   • Orthodox
   • Catholic
   • Protestant
   • Others

**Questions for interviewing the participants:**

**A. Importance of Coptic Saints:**

1. **How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?**
   Fairly important, their stories give me lessons and things to live by.

2. **How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?**
   Around 15.

3. **List some of the Coptic women saints?**
   St. Marina / St. Verena/ St. Mary / St. Demiana/ St. Eirini / St. Ellaria
   St. Marina the monk / Mary of Egypt/ St. Catherine and St. Barbara.
4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Virgin Mary and St. Mary of Egypt.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saints you relate to most are St. Virgin Mary and St. Mary of Egypt. Can you tell me why?
      St. Virgin Mary, I like her as my role model and to learn humbleness and love and obedience from her.
      St. Mary of Egypt because she repented.

   2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
      St. Virgin Mary, the most part I like about her when the angel told her she will be pregnant with the Lord Jesus.
      St. Mary of Egypt, she was a sinful woman and tried to enter a church and something held her back. She then repented and lived a holy life.

   3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
      My favorite story is when Jesus was on the cross and how St. Virgin Mary acted and also Mary’s obedience to her parents when they presented her at the altar.

   4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
      St Mary. When I was going in for an operation, asked for her blessing but I had a complication in the surgery, and everything was going wrong. So, I am sure it was her who made everything easy at the end.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
   1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
      Living in a Holy and prayerful life.

   2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
      St. Mina/ Pope Kyrillos.
      St. Mark/ St. George.
      St. Demiana.

   3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
      St. Demiana.

   4. You said that St. Demiana is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
      St. Demiana, her story is told the most often.
5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Not every often, but usually during the reading of the synaxarium in the church and also when we teach the kids about the saints’ stories.

**D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time, from the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   To be pure like St. Demiana.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   No.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Not very knowledgeable.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   Three.

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Trying to read their stories in the synaxarium.

**E. Reacting to the story:**

- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:

  Reading the story...

**St. Eksani (St. Xene):**

“The Departure of St. Eksani (St. Xene): On the 29th of Toba, St. Eksani (St. Xene) departed. She was the daughter of one of the noble and rich families of Rome. She was the only daughter of her parents. She was brought up at an early age to be accustomed to fasting and prayers, visiting prisoners and helping the needy. She used to visit the convents in Rome to spend time in worship. She distributed what she brought with her among the poor and was satisfied with what the nuns ate. She read the biographies of the saints and prayed to God to grant her a share among them. It happened that one of the ministers of Rome asked for her hand in marriage for his son. Her father was delighted about that and he brought her the best of clothing and the most precious gems and furnishings. Shortly before her wedding, she asked her mother to allow her to go to the monastery to visit her friends the nuns before getting married, in order to bid them farewell, and her mother gave her permission. She took her precious ornaments and two of her maiden servants and went quickly to the seashore. She found a ship going to Cyprus, which she embarked on. On her arrival, she went to St. Epiphanius and told him her story. He advised her to go to the City of Alexandria. She traveled to Alexandria, where she met Anba Theophilus, 23rd Pope of Alexandria. She informed him of her desire to live the monastic life. He agreed and
he cut her hair and clothed her in the monastic garb. She sold all of her jewels and clothes that she brought with her, and built a church in the name of St. Stephen, the Archdeacon. She resided with a group of virgins and nuns that Pope Theophilus settled with her. She practiced asceticism and strived for perfection. She lived only on bread and some moistened vegetables. She did not eat any cooked food, and she slept on the ground. She struggled in that manner for more than 20 years. When she departed, God shown a sign in heaven to reveal the heavenly blessings that she received. At midday, a cross of light, whose light exceeded that of the sun, appeared in heaven, and around it a circle of stars that shone like crowns. The cross remained shining until her body was buried with the other saintly virgins, then it disappeared. The people knew that the appearance of the cross was to manifest her virtue. Later on, the two maiden servants told the Pope her real story and how she had a covenant with them to conceal her story and to call her sister. The Pope marveled, glorified God, and he wrote her biography. Her prayers be with us. Amen.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No, I have not.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   Learned how to be humble no matter what. To focus on oneness with God and not to be attached to this world.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   It’s very inspiring. We can all learn to focus on the oneness of God from her.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   Practice to be humble with everyone around and live how God taught us to do. Try to keep our lives focused on God and not care too much about material things.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   I would like to know by all methods especially be reading online.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   I would like to know about them when I was child, adolescent, and as an adult.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   If I had had ever been in the same position as St. Mary of Egypt, I would have been offended that I was not allowed to enter the church.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   From St. Mary of Egypt story, I can apply that in my life as to be humble and keep my feeling of repentance and from St. Demiana’s story, is to focus on God only.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
   1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
      Yes, they are very strong. They are because God has created us all equal and he loved us equally.

   2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
      Give me an example from real life.
      They are strong and can reach some levels in any society and represent God but not as strong as the saints because we are distracted by material things.

   3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
      Yes, they do support them in everything.

   4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
      Yes, American society are supporting women. American society is neutral towards Coptic women.

   5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
      I don’t think Egyptian society support Coptic women because it will always be different between men and women in Egypt no matter how educated they get. It is just the mentality. Egyptian society does not seem to support Coptic women or Copts in general.

   6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
      In America yes, completely freedom.
7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No, but they do only a little bit.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Some do and some do not. It depends on the situation because some female had to be in monk places and were able to do all the things they were learning to do. I think the men saints are more famous than women saints.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   Men are favored in the Coptic church, not sure how this will change. Also, we can teach our kids that we are equal, and God created us differently to complete each other not to have one higher than the other.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    From the stories of the female saints from the Bible and church, they are humble, strong, meek, bold, fearless.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    They are role models to a lot of girls because we learn from their stories and characteristics. The Coptic women have supportive role, in addition to that teach children.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   Make sure the stories are passed down to all the generations. As each generation passes, hopefully women can do more and more in the church.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   I am trying to live according to the teachings of God, and I will make sure that I pass it to my kids as my parents did. I’ll try to keep my children in the church.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   No, I think there is a lot of old traditions that favor males.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   Remembering them and their stories. By reading their stories in the synaxarium and icons.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
Yes, they are both honored.

6. **Recommendations for church or families:**
   Try to teach. Learn more stories of the saints.

7. **Name our conversation:**
   Coptic female saints in our lives.
Part 6: Interview Transcripts (Egypt Participants):

*1- Bouncing Stuff Off My Chest*

Thank you for participating in the interviews “The power of the Coptic Female Saints”

Demographics: *Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.*

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - **35-44**
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - **Egypt**
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - **Egyptian**
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - **Arabic**
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where are you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Extremely important, we were born knowing those saints as our faith heroes.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   A lot.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St Philomena, St Demiana and the 40 virgins, St Marina the martyr, St Marina the monk,
   St Catherine, St Verena, The Mother Dolagy and her children, Mother Ereni, Mother Kereya,
   Om el 3`alaba, St Rebecca, St Monica, St Barbra, St Mary of Egypt, etc.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St Demiana, St Marina.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to the most is St. Demiana. Can you tell me why?
   St Demiana is the saint of my church, my heart touched her on so many occasions.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
I remember when she condemned her father because he worshipped the idols without getting scared.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   I like the miracle of Tamav Erini, with Philopater Abu- Seifein with the president Hosni Mubarak.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   St Demiana performed a miracle with my son when he was sick and went to the hospital. I cannot explain how strongly I felt St Demiana was with me, and I am sure she is always praying on behalf of my family and me before Our Lord.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**
   1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
      Sainthood means to be holy and grow up having a strong relationship with God.

   2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
      St George, St Mark, and St Demiana.

   3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
      St Demiana.

   4. **You said that St Demiana is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
      St. Demiana because she refused all the luxuries of life as a daughter of a minister and concentrated on just worshiping the Lord with the 40 virgins.

   5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
      A lot, in the church. The most recent one was Om el 3`alaba.

D. **Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**
   1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
      It is not necessary to be a single female to be a saint. A lot of them had kids and they taught them the right way to God.

   2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
      St George El Mozahem, he has a very tough hard story, because his parents had two different religions, but he made the right decision, and stuck to it even through torture.
3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Very Good.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   7

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Read more and ask God to give me a heart to believe.

E. Reacting to the story:
   - I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story...

St. Catherine

“St. Catherine was born in Alexandria to a family of a royal origin. She joined the Catechetical School of Alexandria. Due to her wisdom and intelligence, she outdid many of her mates and philosophers of her age. At the same time, her heart blazed with love for Christ to whom she consecrated her life.

   One day Emperor Maxentius (307-312) held a great celebration to offer sacrifices to the idols. For fear of torture and death, many weak Christians took part in that celebration. When St. Catherine learned about it, she hurried to the temple and rebuked the emperor for forcing the Christians to sacrifice to lifeless gods instead of worshipping the one and only God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

   The emperor was impressed by her beauty and wisdom, for he had not heard anyone talking so wisely as this maiden. Since he could not answer her arguments against his gods, he summoned fifty philosophers to oppose her. The night preceding the confrontation, the angel of the Lord appeared to her, encouraged her and told her that, aided by her God, not only would she win the debate, but also her opponents would become Christians and martyrs. Indeed, the angel’s words came true. Endowed by the power of the Holy Spirit, St. Catherine spoke eloquently and convincingly about the mystery of Christianity, which astonished all the philosophers present. Consequently, they confessed their belief in the true God, Jesus Christ and were therefore burnt to death by the enraged emperor. St. Catherine encouraged them until their last breath.

   As for the tyrant, he was infatuated with Catherine and tried to seduce her with an offer of a consort’s crown if she sacrificed to the gods. But the virgin Catherine withstood his temptation declaring her belief in Christ. St. Catherine contemptuously rejected his proposal, she was severely beaten and put into a dark prison cell without food. As she was bleeding and lying on the ground, a strong light burst out and the angels came to heal her wounds. A pigeon appeared carrying heavenly food giving it to her. St. Catherine was thus consoled and regained her strength.

   When Maxentius summoned her, he was surprised to see her in perfect health; for he thought she had been starved to death. Once more he resorted to promises of reward. On her indignant refusal, she was sentenced to be killed on a spiked wheel (whence our “Catherine-
wheel”). When she was placed on it, her bonds were miraculously loosed and the wheel broke, its spikes flying off [instantly]. Finally, she was beheaded and won the crowns of virginity and martyrdom in 307 AD. Her blessed body was carried by angels to the Sinai Mountain where it was buried in great dignity and many miracles were performed through the blessing of her relics. St. Catherine is venerated as the patroness of maidens and women students of philosophers, preachers, and apologists”.

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   Yes.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**
   Via Church and family.

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   It is a nice story and I loved the saint a lot.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   To get higher education and be intellectual.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Of course, I would like to know more.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   Yes, I would like to know more via church and reading books.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   Yes, when I was a child.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   I would not leave the palace, and I would look to have and enjoy my luxurious life.

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2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
I always teach all this story to my kids and emphasize the practical application of it.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
Very strong, they have strong faith.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
Give me an example from real life.
They are very strong facing the persecution against the Copts in Egypt.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
Not fully supportive.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
Not really supportive because society is so different from what we try to teach our kids as mothers. Also, society doesn’t give women as mothers much rest or enough help to raise righteous kids.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
Not really supportive because it is a male dominant society.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
Yes.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
Mostly, we just talk about male saints more in our church, but I think that is due to the male dominant society that we live at.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
Let them take communion depending on their faith not their own body (menstrual cycle communion prevention).
10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
Faithful, brave, courageous, and loving to our Lord.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
A lot of stuff, raising good kids, praying, preparing, serving the church, loving her husband and encouraging him to be a good priest of the house.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
Not to implement society trends and keep the traditions that we have learned from our bible and church.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
They helped me to grow spiritually, and I am trying to do the same with my kids.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
Not really, because women are not priest, nor deacons although they have the same mind as men.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
They do honor them by celebrating the feasts.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
Both groups.

6. Recommendations for church or families:
Stick to the right Christian traditions and faith, stay away from wrong inheritance.

7. Name our conversation:
Bouncing Stuff Off My Chest.

2- The Connection Between Heaven and Earth
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   • 18-24
   • 25-34
   • 35-44
   • 45-54
   • 55-64
• 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

3. What is your gender?
• Female
• Male
• Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
• American
• Egyptian
• African
• White
• American/ Egyptian
• Multiple ethnicity
• Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
• English
• Arabic
• French
• Italian
• Coptic
• Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where are you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
Saints are very important in our Coptic orthodox life. As Christian Coptic orthodox, we believe in their intercessions as it is a way of them asking God on our behalf.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
There are thousands and thousands of Female Saints.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
St. Mary, St. Justina, St Verena, St Rebeca, St Dolagy, St Mother Erini, St Demiana, St Mirna, St Marina.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
St. Mary, St Marina.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saints you relate to the most are St. Mary and St. Marina. Can you tell me why?
St. Mary is the mother of God; she is the closest person to Him.
St Marina, I like her story and how she suffered and left everything to be with God.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
St Marina, I like her story and how she suffered and left everything to be with God. She wanted to be a Nun, but there was no monastery for females. She cut her hair and dressed as a man and tried to get admitted to the monk monastery. They accepted her as a new male monk who was seeking to dedicate his life to God. One day a lady came and left a baby at the door of the monastery. St Marina or the monk Marinos took the baby to raise him, so another monk accused him (her) of adultery. She accepted that so she could cover the guilty girl’s sin and because she did not want to not tell anyone her own story. After her death they discovered that she was a female not a male monk.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
St. Marina is the patron saint of infertile women who have problems having a baby or getting pregnant. One of my friends for 12 years prayed to God and all the saints for a baby. One day she was told St Marina’s story so she began asking her intercession that God would send her a baby – and truly after a couple of years she became pregnant and now has a cute baby boy.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
Yes, I always ask St Mary to be with me in my studies, exams and any hard times and she never failed to be with me, supporting me and protecting me.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
Sainthood is very important; it is the ideal example of the life that we should all live.

2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
St Mary- St John the Baptist.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
St Mary.

4. You said that St Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
St. Mary is the mother of God and the closest person to Him and to all Humanity.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
Always, often in the liturgy they have to read the book of Saints to remember them in their commemoration.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
I learned that not only men can be saints but also women. This idea started from the very old ages. Before Jesus Christ like Hannah the Prophet, Miriam Moussa’s sister…. etc. So, there is nothing that can prevent the woman from serving God and dedicating her life to God and becoming a real Saint.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
Yes, St Mary, because she was so obedient to God, very calm and nice, a very respectable girl.
3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   I have a lot of knowledge about a lot of Saints but still my knowledge is minimal compared with the huge number of Saints.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   5/10

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Read more in the book of Saints or online to know more stories about them and discover more Saints.

**E. Reacting to the story:**
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

**St. Demiana:**
“On the 13th of Toba, St. Demiana was martyred. This chaste and fighter virgin was the daughter of Mark, Governor of El-Borollus, El-Zafran, and Wadi Al-Saysaban in the Northern delta of the valley of the Nile. She was the only daughter to her parents. When she was one year old, her father took her to the church of the monastery of Al-Maymah. He offered alms, candles and oblations so that God might bless her and keep her in His care. When she was fifteen years old, her father wanted her to be wed. She refused and told him that she had vowed herself as a bride to the Lord Christ. When she saw that her father was pleased with her intention, she asked him to build her a place where she could worship God in seclusion with her virgin friends. He fulfilled her wish and built her the house that she wanted. She lived in it with forty other virgins. They spent their time reading the holy scripture and in worship. Shortly after, Emperor Diocletian sent for Mark, St. Demiana’s father, and ordered him to worship the idols. He refused at first, but after the Emperor appeased him, he obeyed his order and worshipped the idols and forsook the Creator of the Universe. When Mark returned to his official seat, and St. Demiana knew what had transpired, she rushed to meet him. She did not greet him, but said, “What is it that I heard about you? I would have preferred to hear about your death rather than to hear that you have renounced your faith and forsaken the God Who created you from non-existence into being, to worship gods made by hands. Take note that if you do not return to your first faith and renounce the worship of stones, you are not my father and I am not your daughter," and she left him. Her father was greatly moved by the words of his daughter, and he wept bitterly. In haste, he went to Diocletian and confessed the Lord Christ. When the Emperor could not convince him with threats and promises, he ordered him beheaded. When Diocletian knew that the one who turned Mark from worshipping the idols was St. Demiana, his daughter, he sent her a prince to try- at first gently- to convince her to worship idols, and if she disobeyed him to behead her. The prince went to her with two hundred soldiers and the instruments of torture. When he arrived at her palace, he said to her, "I am a messenger sent from Emperor Diocletian. I came to call upon you according to the Emperor's orders, to worship his gods, so that he can grant you all that you want." The saint shouted in his face saying, "May God denounce the messenger and the one by
whom he was sent. Don't you have any shame at all to call stones and wood gods which are inhabited by devils? There is no god in heaven or on earth except one God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, the Eternal Creator, the Everlasting, who is everywhere, who knows all the secrets, and Who can throw you in hell where is the everlasting torment. As for me, I am the maidservant of my Master and my Savior Jesus Christ, and His Good Father and the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, Him I confess and upon Him I depend, and in His Name I die, and by Him I live forever." The prince became exceedingly angry and ordered her to be placed in the Hinbazeen (the squeezing press), until her blood poured out of her body on the ground. The virgins were standing weeping over her. When they put her in prison, the angel of the Lord appeared to her, touched her body with his illumined wings, and she was healed of all her wounds. The prince used all his evil imagination to torture St. Demiana, once by tearing her flesh and another time by placing her in boiling oil. Through it all the Lord raised her up safely. When the prince saw that all his attempts were in vain, before the steadfastness of this pure virgin he ordered her beheaded, and all the other virgins with her. Thus, they all received the crowns of martyrdom. Their prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen.”

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   Yes.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**
   Church, family, reading and a movie about her.

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   I learned that if you devote your life with a pure heart and with strong faith, God will help you achieve whatever will help you enter the paradise of Heaven.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   I loved her story it is so inspiring and touching.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   Believe more and more in God and all the saints. Believe that faith moves mountains and that Sainthood is very important.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes, for sure.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   I would use all the sources that can help me know more in depth about Saints’ lives.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**

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Child, so I would grow with strong numbers of stories about saints.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   [St Marina] I would be scared from such a responsibility and will refuse any accusation of adultery and maybe I would reveal my Identity to defend myself.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   Be obedient, kind, faithful, forgiving, sacrificing. Be the image of God on earth for my community.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, very strong because they suffered a lot more than any other women would handle.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   Yes, because most Coptic women were raised by Coptic families that put their kids into the arms of the church since they were very little kids so they would receive a strong base of the orthodox faith and beliefs.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The Coptic community gives strong support to Coptic females.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
   I think in America, there is a small amount of knowledge about the Coptic orthodox religion.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Not supporting women in jobs and education.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes, they have the freedom to practice their religion.
7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No, not really.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Coptic women saints do not have equality with men saints because of Egyptian cultural norms.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   Teach equality in the church.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    Faithful- religious women- smart- holding kind hearts.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    Sunday school teaching, ambassador of love, following up with the Coptic families that are away from the church.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   Being a living example.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   By seeing them as an example of strong faith and personality in real life and how this inspired me.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   Yes, the Coptic church allows Coptic women to have a role at church and have services that they can perform.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   The church strongly honors their Coptic Women Saints and on top of them all, St Mary.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   Both groups.

6. Recommendations for church or families:
   Teach the kids in Sunday Schools more stories about the Saints and teach them to use their intercession.
7. Name our conversation: 
The Connection Between Heaven and Earth.

3- Honoring Female Coptic Saints 
**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18- 24
   - 25-34
   - **35-44**
   - 45- 54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - **Egypt**
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - **Egyptian**
   - African
   - White
   - American/ Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - **Arabic**
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where are you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      They are very important because they intercede for us.

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      About 10.

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      St. Mary, St. Justina, St. Demiana, St. Marina, St. Anastasia, St. Verena.

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      St. Mary the mother of God.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to the most is St. Mary. Can you tell me why?
      Because St. Mary is the mother of God. She’s the closest to God; she’s above the Cherubim and Seraphim (the angels).

   2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
St. Mary gave birth to Christ who is the word of God. She raised him and suffered a lot when He died on the cross. One of her great stories is her intercession to Christ at the Wedding of Cana of Galilee. When they ran out of wine at the wedding and she asked Jesus to solve the problem, He listened to her and made the great miracle of turning the water to wine.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
One of the female Coptic saints is St. Justina. The prince at that time wanted to marry her but she devoted her life to Christ. He asked a magician to bring Justina to him. The devil took her image, and once the prince mentioned her name to greet her, the devil disappeared. The devil vanished by only mentioning her name.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
All the time, I ask St. Mary during times of tribulations, I always feel her prayers supporting me.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**
1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   It means being close to the saints who made it to heaven and be friends with them and ask them for their intercessions as they are alive in heaven and pray for us.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   Male saints: St. George, St. Mina, Pope Kyrillos (Pope Cyril VI of Alexandria), St. Anthony, St. Pishoy.
   Female saints: St. Mary, St. Demiana, St. Marina.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Demiana.

4. **You said that St. Demiana is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   St. Demiana encouraged forty female virgins to live all together in a life of prayer and devotion to Christ.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Every Sunday in the liturgy, the story of the saint of the day is read. It depends on the day whether it is a male saint or female saint.

D. **Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**
1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity, or you have learned from saints’ stories?**
I learned that the lives of the saints were full of challenges and difficult times, but they were able to bear their crosses through our Lord Jesus Christ who supported them and strengthened them.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
One of my role model male saints is Pope Kyrillos because he was a man of prayer. He rarely preached any sermons himself, but he was a truly man of prayer and he performed many miracles and that is still happening because of his intercessions.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
Not much but ok.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
5

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
By reading more about their life stories.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

St. Sarah, the sister of St. Moises
“After the death of his father, St. Moises wanted to join a community of ascetics, but before doing so, he meant to have his sister Sarah married. When she knew of his plan, she told him that she would not get married unless he did so. He said to her: “I have committed many sins and want to repent by dedicating my life to God. I cannot get married and work out my salvation at the same time.”

Her reply was: “Your plan and desire are the same as mine.” When he saw how resolute she was, he distributed all their money among the poor. He first placed her in a community of virgins outside Alexandria and then went away and joined a group of ascetics.

They did not see each other for ten years. When Emperor Decius started persecuting the Christians (249-250) during the time of Pope Demetrius I, who was the twelfth pope of Alexandria, St. Moises sent word to his sister informing her of his intention to win the crown of martyrdom. Immediately, she took leave of her mother superior, asked for the blessing and prayers of her sisters and joined her brother on the way to Alexandria. Both of them confessed their faith in Christ before the prefect, who severely tortured them and gave his orders that they would be beheaded. The Coptic Church commemorates their martyrdom on the twenty-sixth of Misra.” 197

197 The Convent of Saint Philopater Mercurius for Nuns, The Angelic Life: The Virgin Mary and other Virgins in Different Ages, (Old Cairo, Egypt: The Convent of Saint Philopater Mercurius for Nuns, 2004), P.148

321
1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   To be very strong in the faith and not abandon any part of it no matter what.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   How God strengthened this saint and her brother through all the sufferings of torture.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   To surround myself with spiritual family members and friends who can help me grow spiritually and support me.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes, it would be very valuable and beneficial.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   I would like to know more about the story through reading.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Child.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   It would be very hard to live the life of St Mary the mother of God. She went through doubts and people accusing her of sinning and finally seeing her own Son our lord Christ suffering on the cross. I would not be able to handle that.

   2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   Living the life of purity, which is very difficult these days, and living a life of prayer (praying without ceasing) which is also difficult with the busy life nowadays.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, they are very strong because they refused to deny their faith even if it cost their lives.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   No, they are not strong enough because of our busy lives. I think during the times of persecutions the faith was much stronger or at least it showed in the saints’ strong faith.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   I see that the Coptic Community does not support women in Egypt, but it supports women outside of Egypt like the Coptic community in the U.S., which is supporting Coptic women strongly because the church has deaconesses (female deacons). They do not serve as deacons or inside the altar, but they are in the church choir. The Coptic church in the U.S. added that as a way of encouraging girls and young ladies to participate in the church hymns and come early to attend the mass. But in Egypt we do not have deaconesses yet. Hopefully this will apply soon in the Coptic church in Egypt. I also see that the Coptic church needs to provide more opportunities for female bible studies.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
   I see one good thing about American society is that it gives females in general freedom, respect, and equal opportunity to worship.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   I see that the Egyptian society is improving in its support of Coptic women. However, the women do not have full freedom to practice their beliefs yet.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   It is improving but they do not have complete freedom yet.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   As far as recognizing them yes, but the famous saints are mainly men.
9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   By building more churches with female saints’ names and providing more opportunities for service for females in the church.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
   They are very strong in faith and in teaching their kids the faith. They are very patient.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
   To serve God, maybe through Sunday school classes especially the young kids.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   By teaching the upcoming female generation to be strong in the faith and by not spoiling them.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   By attending church frequently and seeing my parents applying the faith not only teaching it. I’m going to hopefully give it to the next generation by teaching them the faith (through Sunday school) using the techniques available to us nowadays.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   Yes, I believe so by providing them with many services.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   By mentioning their stories in the church and chanting hymns and praises for them.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   Both groups.

6. Recommendations for church or families:
   I recommend that families do not spoil their kids and raise them to be strong in faith.

7. Name our conversation:
   Honoring Female Coptic Saints

4- Know More About Your Beloved Saint
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   • 18-24
2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others
7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      They are important; in early ages and even now, the saints were the reasons for following
      the church’s teachings and spreading the faith through their stories. Also, the saints are
      important because they are like our friends in heaven

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      I know a lot, but I can’t remember how exactly how many I know.

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      St. Demiana - St. Mary of Egypt.

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      Tamav Ereni.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Tamav Ereni. Can you
      tell me why?
      Tamav Ereni – because I asked for her intersession to help me through my exams.

   2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell
      me her story?
      I don’t know the details about her story, but I know that she was able to see heaven with
      the spirits during her life on the earth.

   3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
      No.

   4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through
      something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
I don’t have something specific, but I did ask for the saints’ prayers during my exams and I am getting good grades even in the difficult exams.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   Purity and high level of spirituality.
2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   Pope Shenouda III and Pope Kyrillos.
3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary.
4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   St. Mary because she is the mother for all of us.
5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   Many times, during the liturgy and in Sunday School.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity, or you have learned from saints’ stories?**
   The most important things that I have learned from the women saints are how much they valued purity and repentance.
2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   I took Pope Shenouda as my role model. I love him so much.
3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   I believe that my knowledge is good but not very good.
4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   6
5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Trying to read more to know more.

E. Reacting to the story:
I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:

Reading the story...

**St. Dorothea, The Virgin:**

“St. Dorothea belonged to a noble and rich family from Alexandria and she decided to devote her entire life to her Savior: She enjoyed spiritual talents, physical beauty, and a fine education. These gifts earned her a prominent position in her society. Fearing the consequences of her tremendous worldly success, she decided to flee the world and consecrate her spiritual and mental gifts to the Lord.

Before she could carry out her plan, she received an invitation from the Emperor urging her to come to his palace. When she stood before Emperor Maximinus, he fell in love with her sweet talk and exceeding beauty. He was surprised when she refused his gifts and promises. He was then told that she was a Christian. He sent her some people from his court with two choices: either to live with him, enjoying the pleasure and luxury he could offer her, or to undergo terrible torture and death.

Her reply was:

“My body is a sacred temple of the lord and it is not to be defiled by worshipping the idols or sinking in any evil pleasures. I would rather die a hundred times. Go and tell your Emperor that whoever talks about shedding the blood of Christians ought not to speak about happiness.”

The Emperor was furious when he heard her answer and gave his orders to kill whoever objected to him. The chaste virgin put all her confidence in the Lord and preferred a life in the desert to one of shame and humiliation. In the middle of the night, she headed towards the desert accompanied by her loyal maids. When Maximinus heard of what she had done, he ordered the arrest of all the virgins remaining in the city. They were to sacrifice to the idols or else be slaughtered. They all chose death and won the crown of martyrdom.

But Dorothea stayed in the desert for many years, living a severely ascetic life of prayer and fasting. A great number of virgins lived with her taking her as their example. She departed this world peacefully in 320 AD and the Church commemorates her departure on the eighth of February.” 198

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   To be Courageous and that age is not important to achieve any goal.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   She is a strong woman.

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5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   Be proud of my Christian faith.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Definitely.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Via friends.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Old woman.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
      I chose Tamav Ereni, If I were in her situation, I would pray a lot and give my life to worship God.

   2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
      To treat people with love and mercy. Be humble in my behavior towards people.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
   1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
      Yes, they are very strong because they pray for us in heaven. I love Mary of Egypt’s story; she was very strong to leave the world after repentance and live in the desert for the rest of her life.

   2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
      Give me an example from real life.
      Yes, because they defend their faith when it is needed.

   3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
      I see that the Coptic society is not supporting the women in Egypt because it can be seen that there are no deaconesses in the Coptic church in Egypt. Also, the ladies can’t enter the altar and can’t serve on the altar.
4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
I don’t know a lot about American society, but I know that, out of Egypt women have more freedom and more support than in Egypt.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
Egyptian society wasn’t supporting women before but nowadays women are supported in Egypt, some women hold leadership positions in governmental and non-governmental jobs.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
Yes, they have, as we hear that a lot of churches have been built in America.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
Before they didn’t have the freedom to practice their religion, but nowadays they have a lot of freedom compared with past times and this can be seen through the building of a lot of new churches in Egypt.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
Yes, they have equality, because both of them were in synaxarium.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
By letting the women be deaconesses.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
A woman is a caregiver, taking care of everyone in her household. She is the main source of Christian teaching for her kids. And she takes care of her husband and is kind to him.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
They help and serve in the church.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
Through education and spreading positive thoughts.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
My parents have taught me the Christian faith and I am going to transfer that to the next generation by teaching my kids how to practice the real Christian spiritual life.
3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving the women’s rights to the Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   No, they don’t give the women their rights.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   By telling us their stories and celebrating their feasts.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   Female Coptic saints are honored as saints through ages.

6. Recommendations for church:
   Teach us more about the saints and their stories.

7. Name our conversation:
   Know More About Your Beloved Saint.

5- Intercessions of the Saints
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18- 24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45- 54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
• African
• White
• American/Egyptian
• Multiple ethnicity
• Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
• English
• Arabic
• French
• Italian
• Coptic
• Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where were you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are very important; they are a good example to follow – Also, they are good for interceding between people and God.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   A lot.
3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Mary- St. Anna Simon- St. Marina- St. Barbara- St. Demiana.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Demiana.

**B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:**
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Demiana. Can you tell me why?
   St. Demiana because she offered her life to God.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   [St. Demiana] was from a Christian family from Egypt. Her mam died when she was young. Her father built her a castle to worship God with forty virgins. She was praying and fasting a lot. When she knew that her father worshipped idols, she got mad of him and went to her father blaming him for abandoning the faith, he refused to return to the Christian faith. St. Demiana went to her castle and started praying for him to get him returned to the faith. God heard her prayers and her father returned to the faith. When the king knew that he ordered his head to be cut. St. Demiana was happy that her father didn’t leave his faith until death and offered his life to God. She also refused to get married to the prefect and refused to obey his order to worship the idols, so Diocletian ordered her head to be cut off.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   No.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   Yes, I have with St. Demiana and St. Marina.

**C. The Tradition of Sainthood:**
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   It means purity and living with God.

2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary – St. George – Pope Kyrillos.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary.

4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
St. Mary because she is the mother of God.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   A lot on many occasions and especially on their feasts.

**D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**
1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   Holiness, purity and love of God.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   St. George because his love to God.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Intermediate.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   3

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   By reading synaxarium.

**E. Reacting to the story:**
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  - Reading the story

**The Departure of St. Eksani (St. Xene):**
“On the 29th of Toba, St. Eksani (St. Xene) departed. She was the daughter of one of the noble and rich families of Rome. She was the only daughter of her parents. She was brought up at an early age to be accustomed to fasting and prayers, visiting prisoners and helping the needy. She used to visit the convents in Rome to spend time in worship. She distributed what she brought with her among the poor and was satisfied with what the nuns ate. She read the biographies of the saints and prayed to God to grant her a share among them. It happened that one of the ministers of Rome asked for her hand in marriage for his son. Her father was delighted about that and he brought her the best of clothing and the most precious gems and furnishings. Shortly before her wedding, she asked her mother to allow her to go to the monastery to visit her friends the nuns before getting married, in order to bid them farewell, and her mother gave her permission. She took her precious ornaments and two of her maiden servants and went quickly to the seashore. She found a ship going to Cyprus, which she embarked on. On her arrival, she went to St. Epiphanius and told him her story. He advised her to go to the City of Alexandria. She traveled to Alexandria, where she met Anba Theophilus, 23rd Pope of Alexandria. She informed
him of her desire to live the monastic life. He agreed and he cut her hair and clothed her in the monastic garb. She sold all of her jewels and clothes that she brought with her, and built a church in the name of St. Stephen, the Archdeacon. She resided with a group of virgins and nuns that Pope Theophilus settled with her. She practiced asceticism and strived. She lived only on bread and some moistened vegetables. She did not eat any cooked food, and she slept on the ground. She struggled in that manner for more than 20 years. When she departed, God shown a sign in heaven to reveal the heavenly blessings that she received. At midday, a cross of light, whose light exceeded that of the sun, appeared in heaven, and around it a circle of stars that shone like crowns. The cross remained shining until her body was buried with the other saintly virgins, then it disappeared. The people knew that the appearance of the cross was to manifest her virtue. Later on, the two maiden servants told the Pope her real story and how she had a covenant with them to conceal her story and to call her sister. The Pope marveled, glorified God, and he wrote her biography. Her prayers be with us. Amen.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   Yes.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?
   Church.

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   Purity and chastity.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   To be pure and chaste.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   For sure yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   A child.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of

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this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?

[St. Demiana] I will hang on to my faith until death.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
Obey God’s commandments and stick by my faith.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, they are because they offered their life to God.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   They are at the middle level, not very strong because they are busy with working, taking care of the house and bringing up the kids.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Supporting in education and health.
   Not supporting in getting jobs and getting into the leadership positions.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Supporting in education
   Not supporting: Egyptian society does not treat the women as it does the men and does not give the women their right to speak up.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   Yes.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Yes, they are equal in everything.
9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   By treating them equally

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    They are full of faith, purity, chastity and are loving of God.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    Serve the people who are in need and helping people who need help in anything.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   Every woman has to raise up the kids in the fear of God and loving Him - Going to church on regular basis.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   By going to the church and praying continuously.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women?
   Explain to me how?
   Yes, by letting the women serve in the church.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   Yes, by honoring them in the feasts and asking their intercessions.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   The church honors all saints.

6. Recommendations for church:
   Give the women significant role in the church and let the women carry the responsibilities inside the church.

7. Name our conversation:
   Intercessions of the Saints.

6- What You Can Learn from Women

Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   • 18-24
   • 25-34
   • 35-44
   • 45-54
• 55-64
• 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

3. What is your gender?
• Female
• Male
• Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
• American
• Egyptian
• African
• White
• American/ Egyptian
• Multiple ethnicity
• Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
• English
• Arabic
• French
• Italian
• Coptic
• Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where were you born?
• America
• Egypt
8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:

1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are extremely important; saints’ stories give us hope that we can reach a high level of spirituality by the grace of God and the Holy Spirit who works inside us and will help us to reach eternal life. Also, their stories give us examples of how to overcome obstacles and how to be steadfast in faith. Without saints’ stories the spiritual life seems impossible to follow.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   Four.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Demiana- St. Verena- St. Mary of Egypt- St. Rebecca and her five children.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Verena.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:

1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Verena. Can you tell me why?
   [St. Verena] because she was a foreigner in Europe. She was originally from Egypt and she travelled to Europe. She had a human message for everyone. She had taught the people in Switzerland how to be clean and how to take care of their hygiene. She spent the rest of her life worshipping God in Europe.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   [St. Verena] because of her a lot of people believed in Christianity. She provided a lot of hungry people with food. She took care of sick and ill people, especially the lepers. She washed their wounds and put ointments over them to make them heal. She wasn’t afraid of being sick or getting an infection from the people she was serving.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   I don’t care too much about miracles.
4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint? Yes, I have but I don’t want to share it.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   It means to be sad for committing sins and it means treat people with mercy. Also, it means doing what is right and having a humble spirit and being pure in heart and being a peacemaker. You must also tolerate persecution with happiness and joy.

2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary is most important and after her St. George- St. Mina- St. Marina and St. Philopater Mercurius.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   All of them are very important.

4. You said that ……….is the female Coptic saint that is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   All of them are very important because we can learn something from every saint’s story something.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   In Sunday Schools and in the sermons.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   The purity and having power.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   St. Moses the Black, because he repented after doing a lot of sinful things. His life of repentance gives us a great example to follow.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Not very deep.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   Three.
5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Reading the synaxarium every day.

E. Reacting to the story:
   ● I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
   Reading the story...

Amma Sarah:
“Amma Sarah was a native of Upper Egypt. Born into a wealthy Christian family, Sarah was well educated and a voracious reader. Moving to the vicinity of a women’s monastery in the desert of Pelusium (near Antione), Sarah lived alone for many years near the river in a cell with a terraced roof. She attended to the needs of the nearby community.
Eventually, Amma Sarah received the monastic garb and lived in a closer relationship with the community, serving as a spiritual elder. Sarah continued to follow the ascetic life by living alone in a cave by the river for seven years. She died around her eightieth year.
Amma Sarah was deeply concerned that her heart should never be divided in her pursuit of God. Much of her desert struggle was centered on calming inner distractions and cultivating those things that brought her closer to God. “Lust” and “fornication” were not so much about bodily passions but rather anything or anyone that kept her heart distracted from God. The movement toward a deeper and more profound awareness of God is a spiraling movement toward simplicity that occurs when we voluntarily let go of all the attachments that keep us from moving deeper within. This is not a rejection of the created world, all of which is God’s delightful gift to us, but rather it is the rejection of our tendencies to grasp aspects of creation in a way that diminishes our unity with God.

   Amma Sarah’s goal was purity of heart. As one grows and deepens in purity of heart, one deepens in pure love for Christ. Sarah lived with a deep sense of awe of God. She sought neither special treatment not recognition for herself.
Amma Sarah models for us the gift of tenacity and focuses on the final goal of life: oneness with God. Sarah sought to eliminate distractions that she experienced as stumbling blocks to total union. This is never an easy journey, and Sarah’s response was to pray for strength to endure and move into freedom. She avoided neither the challenges nor the pain; she stayed with her struggles until there was resolution.

   Amma Sarah calls her followers to grow in self-awareness. Self-awareness is not selfishness but self-connectedness. It is deep and intense listening to our inner being, learning to be conscious and alert to what our inner world is trying to say to us. With self-awareness and self-knowledge, we understand our reactions toward others, issues that complicate our lives, blind spots that we can fall into, as well as our particular strengths and gifts. As we grow in self-awareness, we grow in God-awareness. Amma Sarah, in the desert tradition, understood that God has chosen humanity along with all creation as the vehicle of Divine Revelation. Her feast day is July 13.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   To look always to the heavenly life. Not caring about what people say about me. God is looking to man’s heart. Also, I have learned not to desire anything in the world but focus on God.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   After I have read her story, I felt that I am very far from God and I need to get back and have a meditation time with God like she did.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   Praying to God and have a good life with him.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Best thing for me is by reading.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Child.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   [St. Verena] If I were her, I would be afraid of getting an infectious disease and of being secluded.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   I will pray so I can get the virtues.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, because they had taught the world lessons about how to be holy and they gave us examples for how to face persecution and reminders not to cling to this world.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   Some of them are very strong and they have a significant role in society while others have less power because they grew up in a society that believed men should be in authority and women should just have dreams about getting married. One example of a strong woman is Tamav Ereni. She was the head of the monastery. She was very holy, and by the Holy Spirit she was able to see the other saints who live in the heaven.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Coptic community supports women in letting them teach the children in Sunday Schools about the importance of the women in the bible and teach the children how to respect women and not look at them as weak figures.
   Encourage self-confidence among the women who serve in Sunday School and work in the church.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Egyptian society does not support women at all. Being Coptic women in Egyptian society means being on the lower level of the pyramid of society.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Absolutely yes

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No, they can’t practice it freely.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   No, I do not think so because the women saints are not mentioned like men saints in the liturgies.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
By teaching Egyptian men how to respect the women’s mentality and let the women serve and enroll in churches’ councils.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
   They have the fear of God in their lives. They are like the mountains; they can bear anything upon their shoulders in this harsh life.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
   Serving in different fields.

H. Coptic women in the future:
   1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
      By education.

   2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
      I got it from having a harsh life, not through my parents. And I will transfer it to my kids by telling them saints’ and bible stories and guiding the kids in the right path.

   3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
      No, I don’t think so. The church doesn’t give the women their rights; It is just speeches but not in action of real life.

   4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
      In vespers.

   5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
      Only for the historical women and for the women who were mentioned in the books.

   6. Recommendations for church:
      Focus more on women. Give them more roles in the church. Teach about the equality between men and women.

   7. Name our conversation
      What You Can Learn from Women.

7- She Is the Mother of Our Saints
   Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
   1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
      - 18-24
      - 25-34
• 35-44
• 45- 54
• 55-64
• 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

3. What is your gender?
• Female
• Male
• Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
• American
• Egyptian
• African
• White
• American/ Egyptian
• Multiple ethnicity
• Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
• English
• Arabic
• French
• Italian
• Coptic
• Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where were you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Very important; I feel that they were on the same page and the same culture that I used to live in, those saints are still alive in our thoughts, and we always remember them in our church. I love St Antony and St. Paul, who were Copts and lived in Egypt’s deserts to worship God.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   I’ve known a lot of saints since I was a kid, but most of them are from different nations. I can remember about three Coptic Women Saints.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   Tamav Ereni and Mary of Egypt.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   Tamav Ereni.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Tamav Ereni. Can you tell me why?
   [Tamav Ereni] When I read Tamav Ereni’s story and saw the movie about her life, I admired how she was so close to God and in love with Him and offered her life to Him. She always was obedient to God's commandments, and she tried to please God via her prayers and follow the ascetic road. She sacrificed her life to serve God, love him. Also, she had grown up spiritually with wisdom and grace.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   She was born in a religious family who brought her up in a spiritual environment and a strong relationship with God. When she was a baby, a dangerous insect had bitten her, and she was ill, but St. Mary (as I remember) appeared and cured her. Tamav Ereni was in a strong bond with St. Philopater Mercurius. When she became an adult, she decided to
go to the Monastery to serve as a nun. After a while, she was the head of this Monastery. Tamav Ereni always trusted in God and his servants and saints.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
I generally love how saints gained the kingdom of heaven in their lives, and how they grew more and more in wisdom and grace when they live close to God by worshiping him and dedicated their time to him.
I also love Saint Therese, the baby Jesus and Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa, who served the poor, she had her belief and her strength from God and from believing in Him. She forgot and ignored herself as she went to help and serve the poor.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
I pray in front of the saints' icons and pictures. Sometimes I call their names and talk to them about things that I need their help with. I feel that they can hear me in heaven beside Jesus.
I like Mother Mary's icons and photos that depicted St. Mary over her Church in Cairo at El Zeitoun.
Saints are very close to us when we need them, they can feel our sorrows and pains, and they are living around us, but we can't see them, and there is our faith.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
Sainthood means holiness and purity of a person and being close to God and becoming the light for the world.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
St. Mary Mother of God- St. Antony father of all monks- St. Mark the evangelist- St. Pishoy the beloved to Jesus.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
St. Mary, Mother of Jesus.

4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
Saint Mary was pure and humble, so God had chosen her from among many people to incarnate through her. This is the reason that I love and praise her.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
I hear their stories a lot when the synaxarium is read and when I was kid attending Sunday School.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
I have learnt from their stories to be attached to God and this kind of life will cause good behaviors to be done right in front of people. Their stories were a good model to follow and to encourage us to achieve good deeds like them. After hearing the saints’ stories, I look on them as friends in my life.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
St. Justina- Tamav Ereni- Mother Teresa- Mary Magdalen- Saint Paul- Pope Kyrillos- Saint Pishoy- David the king- Saint John
I chose them because they were close and following God in their life by praying to Him and being humble and far from sexual desire.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
Moderate because I didn’t have more time to read about saints. Most of the stories I know I learned when I was kid.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
6

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
I would love to read the articles about their lives.

E. Reacting to the story:
● I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
Reading the story...

Amma Synclética of Egypt:
“For just as those who wish to gaze at the sun damage their vision, so also those who try to mirror the radiance of her life fall victim to confusion of mind, dazzled, overcome, and unstrung by the magnitude of her achievements.

We know of Amma Synclética from the Sayings as well as from the Life and Regimen of the Blessed and Holy Teacher Synclética, a fifth-century work by Pseudo-Athanasius. The early church thought her so important that her Life survives to this day. An early theologian of mysticism, Evagrius Ponticus, influenced her teachings.

Amma Synclética was born in Alexandria into a well-respected Christian family of Macedonian heritage. Her two brothers died at relatively young ages and her sister was blind. Synclética began her ascetical practice in her parents’ home. She was well educated and had a reputation for her beauty.

At the death of her parents, Amma Synclética sold all her possessions and distributed the family wealth among the poor. She then cut her hair as a sign of consecration and moved with
her blind sister to the family tomb outside Alexandria. Here she began her life as a desert ascetic.

As women began to gather around her, Amma Syncletica reluctantly agreed to serve as their spiritual mentor, training them in the disciplines of the inner life. She trained her followers to cultivate such qualities as gentleness, patience, and endurance- each grounded in love and vitally needed for a fruitful spiritual journey.

For Syncletica, this discipline meant emptying oneself of all stumbling blocks: attitudes, motives, addictions, emotions not united with Christ, as well as any ignorance that hindered the inner journey. Amma Syncletica sought to relinquish anger, vindictiveness, envy, and ambition, and challenged her followers to do the same. Through her Life and Sayings, she encourages us to grow in self-awareness, to understand our passions and desires, and to purify them, always directing us toward God.

Amma Syncletica lived into her eighties and died after three and a half years of intense physical suffering, most likely from cancer. Her feast day is January 5.” 201

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   
   No

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   
   I should help others like she helped her blind sister and remember that she gave her wealth to the poor. – Prayers are important to help us to know God.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   
   She was strong; She was a leader for many women. She served God first in her place at home then she went to the desert.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   
   To live the spiritual life with God and not to go with the stream of the world that surrounds us.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   
   Yes, for sure.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   
   By reading or watching movies about the saints.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**

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In my childhood and adolescent stages because there was more time.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   [Tamav Ereni] If I were in her situation, I would do the same, praying to God to defeat the devil, fasting and helping the people in need.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   Be a good example and act spiritually.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   They were strong because they faced persecution without any fear.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   Not necessarily. Some of the women put an effort into raising their kids in the Christian life but other women don’t care about that, they don’t even have time for their kids. These women are more secular and don’t care too much about the church’s teachings.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   I think the Coptic society is trying to support women as much as possible through education and sermons.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Egyptian society is poor relative to its support of women due to the domination of the men in the society and in jobs.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
Not really, because until now we as Coptic women were often persecuted and kidnapped.

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.**
   There is not an equality between Coptic women and Coptic men saints, and this can be shown in synaxarium that we have more men’s stories than women’s stories.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   It’s hard to bring about equality between men and women in the church since the Coptic church is a part of the Egyptian culture; the environment in Egypt gives the men more rights than women.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    She is strong, she will fight against any danger; she is a very caring and giving person, is very obedient and humble.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
    They are the mothers of generations and these generations are supposed to be the spiritual light of the world.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**

1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
   By bringing up the kids in fear of God.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**
   My Mam was taking me to the church regularly to attend holy mass. She was sending me to attend church’s retreats to be surrounded with Christian teachings. She was reading to me the bible and saints’ stories regularly. For the next generation I’ll do the same as my Mam did with me.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   The church gives the women some rights within the limit of the Egyptian society.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   By giving the churches and the monasteries their names- By mentioning their names in the books, as in Tamav Ereni’s books- By mentioning their names in the praises and prayers in the church.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   The church honors the modern and contemporary women saints like Tamav Ereni.
6. **Recommendations for church:**
   Create a syllabus for mother teachings to help mothers to raise the kids spiritually- Pick from the bible what is matching with the culture and society to improve the relationship between society and church- Update the Sunday School curriculums.

7. **Name our conversation**
   She Is the Mother of Our Saints.

8- **How to Be a Saint**

**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18- 24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45- 54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - America
   - **Egypt**
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. **What is your gender?**
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. **Which race/ ethnicity best describes you?**
   - American
   - **Egyptian**
   - African
   - White
   - American/ Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. **What is the primary language you speak?**
   - English
   - **Arabic**
   - French
6. **What is the highest level of education you have completed?**
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. **Where were you born?**
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. **Which part of Christianity do you belong to?**
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

**Questions for interviewing the participants:**

**A. Importance of Coptic Saints:**

1. **How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?**
   They are important; they are a good example to follow.

2. **How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?**
   5

3. **List some of the Coptic women saints?**
   St. Mary of Egypt

4. **Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?**
   St. Mary, Mother of God.

**B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:**

1. **You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Mary. Can you tell me why?**
   [St. Mary, Mother of God] because she has a very good traits and virtues like her faith, and keeping silent.
2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   Her father’s name is Joachim. She went to the temple to serve there and later on she became the mother of God.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   I have a story about Tamav Ereni, when the army wanted to knock down and damage the monastery, this happened during the Mubarak Era. Tamav Ereni kept praying and then she appeared with the soul of Pope Kyrillos to Mubarak and asked him not to destroy the monastery. After that, Mubarak ordered his army not to touch this monastery under any circumstance.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   When I was about to deliver my baby, I asked for St. Mary’s intercession to be with me and deliver me safely and prayed that the baby would be good and that happened.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
   1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
      St. Mary

   2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
      St. Mary, the Twelve Apostles of Christ and the Popes.

   3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
      St. Mary

   4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
      St. Mary because she had all the virtues and she was humble.

   5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
      In Sunday Schools and in the church’s sermons.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
   1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
      From St. Mary, I have learnt to be humble.
      From Mary of Egypt, I have learnt that there is always a hope to become good and to repent.
2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
The disciple John because he was beloved.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
Medium.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
3

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
Reading on the Internet, listening to sermons and attending meetings and Sunday Schools.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
Reading the story...

**St. Potamiaena:**
“Potamiaena was born in Alexandria to pious parents who nurtured her with the true faith from an early age and brought her up in the love and fear of Christ. Taking her example from the Lord and His Holy Mother, St. Mary, she decided to consecrate her life to her Savior. The pious virgin was a handmaiden of a rich man who was given over to a life of pleasure. Since she was young, accomplished and exceedingly beautiful, her master tried to induce her to purchase her freedom at the expense of her chastity. However, she rejected his proposal with contempt. Unable to subject her to his will, he became furious and handed her over to the prefect of the city. He claimed that she was a Christian who mocked the emperors and the gods of the Empire by uttering blasphemies against them. He asked the prefect not to hurt her if she agreed to marry him. If she abstained, she should be punished with every kind of torture and sentenced to death.

Potamiaena was led to the forum but did not tremble or show any sign of fear when seeing the instruments of torture or hearing the threats of death. When asked to deny her Lord, she sealed her soul and said: “Thou judgest with iniquity, O judge, for thou commandest me to become subject unto fornication. I am the handmaiden of Christ, and I should stand before His throne without blemish.” As a result of her determination, she was to be stripped and cast into a cauldron of boiling pitch. Upon hearing her sentence, the virgin, who was mainly concerned with her chastity, said to the magistrate:

“I beg of you, by the life of the emperor whom you honor, not to oblige me to appear unclothed; rather suffer me to be slowly lowered into the cauldron fully dressed, that you may see the patience which Jesus Christ, whom you know not, bestows upon those who trust Him.”

Her request was granted and Basilides, one of the guards, was ordered to lead her to execution. He treated her with respect, protecting her from the insults of the crowd. She thanked him for his courtesy and told him that after her death she would pray for his salvation. The cruel sentence was carried out and the chaste virgin delivered her soul unto God to be crowned with a
good martyrdom Her mother Marcella was martyred with her in 202 AD during the age of Septimius Severus (194-211).

After her martyrdom, St. Potamiaena appeared to many people in Alexandria and guided them to the true faith. Among them was Basilides who refused to take an oath when asked to do so. He said that he was a Christian and therefore could not swear by false gods. He informed those who visited him that St. Potamiaena had appeared to him and “placed on his head a crown which she said she had won for him by her prayers.” He received baptism in prison and, having confessed the true faith before the magistrate, he was beheaded.

The Coptic Orthodox Church commemorates the martyrdom of St. Potamiaena on the twenty-seventh of Amshir.

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   Chastity.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   She was pure and she loved the God from her heart until death.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   Not to marry a guy just because he is rich. This saint refused to marry the master although he was rich. No guy can buy a good girl with his money but with his love.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   Audiobooks.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   In all ages.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

1. **Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of**

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this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
[St. Mary, Mother of God] I cannot be like St. Mary; she is above all.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   I can apply that, by being a good person; everyone who sees me realize that I carry Jesus in my life and in my behaviors.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
   1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
      They are very strong because they have many virtues.

   2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
      Give me an example from real life.
      Kind of, they are not weak nor strong; they are in the middle.

   3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
      The Coptic community is supporting the Coptic women through its services to them.
      The Coptic community is not supporting the Coptic women enough and this can be seen because of the fact that most of the women’s stories are still unknown.

   4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

   5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
      Support is still in the process of development.

   6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

   7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
      Not too much.

   8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain it
      Yes, they have. St. Mary, her name is in all liturgies and in all of our prayers before the angels and before men saints.
9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   To add deaconesses to the Coptic church in Egypt.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    She is honest, humble and love giving.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    Preaching in Jesus name by her good deeds.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   By emphasizing the women’s stories and acting like these saints.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   They were reading the saints’ stories and the bible for us every night. They were always encouraging us to go to church and to services.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women?
   Explain to me how?
   Not really.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   By the church praises that mention their names and the synaxarium that mentions their stories.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   For the historical women saints and the saints who were mentioned in old books.

6. Recommendations for church:
   Go deep in faith.

7. Name our conversation:
   How to Be a Saint.

9. Women Saints in All Ages
   Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   • 18-24
   • 25-34
   • 35-44
2. Where do you live?
   • America
   • **Egypt**
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

3. What is your gender?
   • Female
   • Male
   • Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   • American
   • **Egyptian**
   • African
   • White
   • American/Egyptian
   • Multiple ethnicity
   • Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   • English
   • **Arabic**
   • French
   • Italian
   • Coptic
   • Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   • High school
   • College
   • **Bachelor’s degree**
   • Master’s degree
   • Doctoral degree
   • Others

7. Where were you born?
   • America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are important for their intercession.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   A lot.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   Mary of Egypt- St. Demiana- Tamav Ereni (Mother Irene).

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   Tamav Ereni (Mother Irene).

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Tamav Ereni. Can you tell me why?
   [Tamav Irene (Mother Irene)] she always listens to my prayers.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   Her fight against Satan, when Satan tried to set her cell on fire while she was praying. She started screaming and all the nuns heard her and when they came, they didn’t see any fire.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   I love all of their stories and that they were close to God.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   Yes.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
To praise Jesus’ name.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary, Mother of God.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary, mother of God.

4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint that is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   [St. Mary, mother of God] because she is Theotokos (mother of God) because she was humble, she didn’t have pride and she kept silent in every matter in her life.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   I have heard about them a lot in Synaxarium.

**D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time, from the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   Hang on to my faith and prevent myself from doing anything sinful.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   St. George because he didn’t give up his faith although he suffered a lot of torture.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Medium level of knowledge.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   5

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Reading a lot.

**E. Reacting to the story:**

- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

**St. Apollonia, Virgin and Martyr:**

361
“This blessed saint belonged to a noble rich family from Alexandria. She decided to live as a virgin and served as a deaconess in the church. After the death of her parents, she lived in a cave outside Alexandria.

When Decius began to persecute the Christians between 249-250 AD, she left her cave, entered the city and confessed her faith. She was severely tortured; her persecutors whipped her and struck her so hard on the jaw that they broke all her teeth. Then they led her outside the city, lit a great fire, and threatened to throw her alive into it unless she agreed to repeat certain words, “to her the equivalent of apostasy.” However, she was given a short time for reflection. She feigned acceptance, took advantage of the inattention of the persecutors, and threw herself into the fire, an act that was impelled by the Holy Spirit. She was immediately consumed by the flames and won the crown of martyrdom.

Since she lost her teeth while being persecuted, she is often “invoked against toothache and all dental diseases;” and is known as the patron saint of dentists and of those with toothaches. She is often portrayed carrying “a pair of pincers holding a tooth, or else a golden tooth suspended on her necklace.”

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   
   Don’t give up on your faith and don’t go with the world’s stream of sin.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   
   I like that she lived in the cave in order to live an ascetic life.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   
   To not live a worldly life.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   
   Yes.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   
   Via Church.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   
   In all ages.

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F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   [Tamav Ereni (Mother Irene)] I would live in a cell and worship God because the cell is the main place to meet with God and pray to Him. Also, I would like to see my parents and my sister while I am giving my life to God.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   Act like saints in their behaviors and speech.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Yes, because the mothers of these women saints raised their children with the courage and love of God to make them willing to become martyrs.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   I think saints were stronger than women today because today there is more luxury in life which prevents people from living as ascetics, but still there are a few women who live with ascetic and spiritual values.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The Coptic community does support Coptic women by offering bible study meetings for them.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   I can’t answer this question related to the political situation in Egypt and do not want to address the issue of freedom of speech.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
I can’t answer this question related to the political situation in Egypt and do not want to address the issue of freedom of speech.

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.**
Yes, they are equal because the church does mention the women saints and has set up feast days for them.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
Treating women as equal to men and giving them the same responsibilities as men.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
They are strong in their personalities - Pure and Chaste.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
Create a new generation full of saints.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
Create more spiritual activities for the mothers and their kids to grow strong in their faith.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**
By attending church with my parents and I am doing the same with my kids.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
Yes, by letting them serve in the church.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
They honor their relics by putting spices [honoot] on them and mentioning their names in church’s praises.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
The church honors all saints.

6. **Recommendations for church:**

7. **Name our conversation:**
Women Saints in All Ages.

**10- Women in Christianity**
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/ Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      They are very important; they are intercessor for us.

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      25

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
      St. Demiana- St. Mary of Egypt- Tamav Irene- St. Marina.

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      Tamav Ereni.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Tamav Ereni. Can you tell me why?
      [Tamav Ereni] because she dedicated her life to serve God in the monastery.

   2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
      On her departure day, the person who was with her in the ambulance was healed from a severe disease.

   3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
      No.
4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint? I always ask the saints to be with me to help me pass my exams.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you? It teaches us the true relationship with God and how we should live with him.

2. In general, what are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition? St. George- St. Demiana- Disciples and Apostles.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition? St. Mary.

4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why? [St. Mary] because she is the mother of God.


D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories? To be brave and humble.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint? St. Mary because I feel she is my spiritual mother.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints? About average.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 how do you evaluate your knowledge? 3

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints? By reading and watching movies about them.

E. Reacting to the story:
I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:

Reading the story...

**St. Alexandra:**
“Alexandria in Egypt was a major port established where the Nile meets the Mediterranean Sea. There was a major Christian community there, and it was a growing intellectual center. One of the earliest schools of theology was located in this city. Alexandra was a beautiful young woman of the fourth century who fled the unwanted advances of a young man, left the city of Alexandria, and shut herself up in a mausoleum. She received food and supplies through a window from a woman friend. Alexandra maintained strict privacy through the remaining ten or twelve years of her life, keeping a curtain at her window so that no one ever saw her face to face again.

Melania the Elder sought a visit with Alexandra. When Melania asked Alexandra how she persevered through the harsh conditions and the difficult inner journey, she replied, *From early dawn to the ninth hour I weave linen, and recite the Psalms and pray; and during the rest of the day I commemorate in my heart the holy fathers, and I revolve in my thoughts the histories of all the Prophets and Apostles, and Martyrs; and during the remaining hours I work with my hands and eat my bread, and by means of these things I am comforted whilst I await the end of my life in good hope.*

Despite her strict privacy, Alexandra developed a reputation among Christians for her wise advice and spiritual direction.”

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   Be content and satisfied with what I have in food and clothing as the saint was content with the food that was given to her through the window.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   She was simple and pure.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   To thank God about everything that I have, He grants us many blessings.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes, I would love to know more about her.

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368
7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Elder woman.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
      [Tamav Irene] I couldn’t be a nun, but I would pray to God to lead my life and to teach me his way.

   2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
      By going to church, attending the liturgies, reading the bible to be connected with God.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
   1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
      Yes, they are strong because they could tolerate the tortures only because they were Christians

   2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
      Give me an example from real life.
      They are strong too because they raise their kids in fear of God and to be holy. In addition to that, they play significant roles in their fields of work.

   3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
      The Coptic community does support women in the church only but not outside the church.

   4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

   5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what do ways you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
      I prefer not to answer that.
6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No, for example we can’t wear our cross pendant on our chest in some places because that bothers the Muslims.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   No, they do not have equality. We have heard a lot about monks but for nuns we know little.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   Through education and by embedding the concept of equality in our sermons.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    Strong- straight forward- good at carrying the responsibilities- Always thankful.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    To serve in the church.

H. Coptic women in the future:
   1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
      Raising up our children with Christians virtues.

   2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
      I got it from my Mam after my dad died, she dedicated her life to us to raise us and take care of us financially and spiritually.

   3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
      No, they don’t give the women their rights. The church is still looking at the women as though they are weak.

   4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
      By reading the synaxarium and telling us saints’ stories.

   5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
      For all saints.
6. Recommendations for church:  
Listen to women’s voices.

7. Name our conversation:  
Women in Christianity.

11- I Have a Great Mediator  
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?  
   - 18-24  
   - 25-34  
   - 35-44  
   - 45-54  
   - 55-64  
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?  
   - America  
   - Egypt  
   - Canada  
   - Europe  
   - Others

3. What is your gender?  
   - Female  
   - Male  
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?  
   - American  
   - Egyptian  
   - African  
   - White  
   - American/Egyptian  
   - Multiple ethnicity  
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?  
   - English  
   - Arabic  
   - French  
   - Italian  
   - Coptic
6. **What is the highest level of education you have completed?**
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. **Where were you born?**
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. **Which part of Christianity do you belong to?**
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

**Questions for interviewing the participants:**

**A. Importance of Coptic Saints:**
1. **How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?**
   They are very important; we are proud of them.

2. **How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?**
   A lot.

3. **List some of the Coptic women saints?**

4. **Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?**
   St. Marina- St. Mary (Theotokos).

**B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:**
1. **You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Marina. Can you tell me why?**
   [St. Marina] because she insisted, she wanted to live in the monastery even after they refused her. Also, she was strong enough to accept the accusation and treat the people around her with love. She thanked God for this trial, and she did not reveal her sex.
2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?**
   [St. Marina] She went with her father to the monastery. She had her hair shaved in order to get into the monastery; she didn’t declare her sex. She dressed like a man and she lived in the monastery in peace until she was accused with committing adultery with a girl and after the baby’s delivery St. Marina took care of the baby and raised him. She accepted that responsibility with thanks to God and she didn’t defend herself against her accusers and she didn’t reveal her sex.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   Yes, St. Perpetua, she kept herself and her body pure even when she was tortured.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   Yes, my children and I are always asking St. Mary for her help. One Good Friday something not good happened to my daughter and St. Mary saved her.

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**C. The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   To consecrate our hearts, and our thoughts to Jesus in this busy world.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary – St. Marina.

4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   [St. Mary] All of the Copts love St. Mary so much. She is a mother for everyone. In every nation they love St. Mary and honor her. She is close to everyone and helps them through her intercession. She is a great mediator between humans and God.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   In Synaxarium and on their feasts.

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**D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
Chastity- Quietness- Praying- Love for Jesus and for people around me- making sacrifices.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   St. Marina because she was willing to accept the situation until the end when God took her home and her sex was revealed.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Good but still I don’t know all of them because I need to read more and some of the female saints are not known.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   4

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   By reading- visiting the monasteries- ask for their intercession which will increase the connection between me and the saints.

E. Reacting to the story:
   ● I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story...

St. Rebecca:
“The Martyrdom of Sts. Agathon, Peter, John, Amun and Amuna and Their Mother, Rebecca: On the 7th of Tout, Sts. Agathon, Peter, John, Amun, and Amuna and their mother, Rebecca, were martyred. They were from Kemola of the district of Kus. Our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to them and informed them of what would happen to them, and that they would receive the crown of martyrdom in the city of Shoubra which is near Alexandria, and that their bodies would be carried to the city of Nakraha in the province of El-Behairah. The Saints rejoiced at this vision, and they rose up early and gave all their possessions to the poor. Agathon, their eldest brother, was a man of high position in the city and was loved by everyone. Rebecca, their mother, strengthened and encouraged them to endure the torture in the name of the Lord Christ. They came to the city of Kus and confessed their faith in Christ before Dionysius, the Governor. He tortured them severely, starting with their mother who bore the torture patiently and with joy, and then he tortured her five children. When he was weary of torturing them, he was advised to send them to Alexandria so that they might not lead other people astray, for they were loved by everyone. Because of them, many confessed their belief in the Lord Christ and received the crown of martyrdom. When they brought the saints before Armenius, the Governor of Alexandria, who was in a city called Shoubra, and when he learned about their case, he tortured them very severely. He hacked their bodies, cast them in a boiler, squeezed them with wheels, then crucified them head down. From all these tortures, the Lord Christ raised them whole until the governor and all his people were ashamed. Finally, he ordered that their heads should be cut
off and their bodies were to be drowned in the sea. They cut their heads off and placed their bodies in a boat to cast them in the sea. God sent forth His angel to a rich man from the city of Nakraha and commanded him to take the bodies of the saints and the man was exceedingly glad. He came to where the bodies were, gave the soldiers much silver and took the holy bodies. He laid them in the church, and he heard a voice saying, "This is the abode of the righteous." The bodies remained there till the end of the era of persecutions. 13 They then revealed the bodies and a big church was built for them. God was made manifest through their relics, showing many signs, and working many wonders. Then they transferred the bodies to the city of Sonbat, where there is now a church known as "The Five and Their Mother" or "El-Sitt Refka" (Lady Rebecca). Many visit this church every year to receive their blessings. May their intercession be for us all. Amen.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   Yes.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?
   By reading and through my Mam.

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   I admire her for bringing up her children to be strong in faith.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   By bringing up my children to be strong in faith.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes, for sure.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Via movies so I can remember their stories more.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   In all ages but in childhood the information settles down in the minds most easily.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of

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this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
[St. Marina] If I were in her situation, I would defend myself and say that I did not commit that adultery and this lady is liar. I would reveal my sex to the monks. Also, I would pray to God to lead me to another place to worship him.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
By acting good towards everyone.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
Yes, they are strong. An example of that can be seen in what is happening on St. Marina’s feast. A lot of miracles have come through her relics. Also, Tamav Irene and her miracles. I think that saints in heaven feel what we feel on earth. They support us.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
Give me an example from real life.
Yes, they are strong. Although women today have a busy life, Coptic women still care about taking their children to church and teaching them the Christian faith and joining them in spiritual activities in the church.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
The Coptic community supports women in many ways, but the main thing women do in Coptic society is take care of their kids spiritually, physically and emotionally.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
These days Coptic women are taking some positions in Egyptian society; this has happened since the revolution.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
In the church yes but outside the church no.

376
8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
The Coptic women saints have a great influence in our church, and I cannot compare women and men saints from the equality perspective. Everyone has a specific role in the Coptic Church.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
These days the church has opened a lot of fields for women to serve in and this a beginning to equality in the church.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
Strong faith- caregiver person- Patient- giving love- taking care of herself and her family-
Very good dealing with problems and solving them.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
They serve in many activities in the church- especially taking care of the kids.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
By choosing a role model in every generation so we can follow the true faith.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
I did not get a lot from my parents, but I got help from going to the church and being in Sunday School. For the next generation I’ll teach my kids about the orthodox faith, saints’ stories and church history.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
Not really.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
By celebrating their feasts.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
The modern saints like Tamav Ereni and the Botroseya Martyrs.

6. Recommendations for church:
Increase the number of priests and build more churches.

7. Name our conversation:
I Have a Great Mediator.
12- Good Scent of Saints

Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
- College
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree
- Doctoral degree
- Others

7. Where were you born?
- America
- Egypt
- Canada
- Europe
- Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
- Orthodox
- Catholic
- Protestant
- Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are very important; the church gives us these saints as models to follow. Also, I feel they are very close to us and they work as mediators between us and God. It is nice to have the intercessions of these saints in the church.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   I know six female saints.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   Mary of Egypt, St. Demiana, St. Marina the martyr, St. Marina the monk and St. Mahraiel.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Demiana and St. Marina.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saints you relate to most are St. Demiana and St. Marina. Can you tell me why?
   St. Marina, After I got married and I did not get pregnant, I was told by someone to go to St. Marina church in Cairo and I would be pregnant after that and it happened. So, I feel that St. Marina is very strong in this matter, she intercedes for barren women to have babies. Later I was told by many people that St. Marina is very famous for that; if any
woman asked her and prayed to have a baby in Marina’s church in Egypt, she would have
a baby.

2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?**
I can’t remember Marina’s story, but I remember Demiana’s story. [St. Demiana] her
father was a prefect and she dedicated her life to serve God. She was in a monastery with
forty virgins or nuns. She was a strong character in front of her Dad; she criticized him
when he later began worshipping idols and she caused him to return to the Christian faith.
Also, she was a leader of forty virgins and that wasn’t easy at that time. St. Demiana had
a leader personality.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
I used to go to St. Demiana’s monastery on her feasts. One day some people saw a white
dove perched on her church. Also, I like the St. Mary apparitions in Shubra, Cairo. I saw
St. Mary; the sad face inside the church during the liturgy. I love to be in this
environment that is surrounded with saints’ apparitions.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
St. Mary, I feel that she is very close to me and to my family. In difficult situations I have
asked for her help in solving my problems.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
It means that someone has achieved his goal to reach to God because he loves God. There
is no one born a saint, but he will become a saint if he perseveres until he reaches his goal
in the spiritual life. Sainthood means your relationship with God is very good.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
St. Antony. Because of him there is a monastic life that he began and that still exists and
it has spread all over the world. He had a huge effect on the Coptic church and on the
world - Also St. George and St. Mark because we received the faith because of him- And
St. Mary mother of God and St. Demiana.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
St. Mary.

4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
[St. Mary] because she intercedes for everyone and she is close to God because she is the
mother of Jesus. She took some of our nature and she took some from God because he
came through her. She is unique. We will never find that in any saint. So, St Mary is very close to God and very close to us.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   In Sunday school, synaxarium and Coptic movies.

**D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   They were very brave. Women are usually known to have strong emotions that control them, but in the saints I see they did not care about anything in the world and they were willing to sacrifice their children to martyrdom. Some of the children were beheaded while sitting on their mothers’ laps. That was not easy for them, so I see women as very brave and strong.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   Pope Kyrillos because I prayed to him in many situations, and he answered my prayers. He was a man of prayer. He celebrated the liturgy and put any problem on the altar until it was solved. He was honest in his service. Some people were against him, but he stood fast and was able to lead the church at that time to safety.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Weak because I am just listening to what the church is saying about the saints, but I am not searching to read about the saints.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   Two.

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Reading is the best thing because that gives you everything in detail.

**E. Reacting to the story:**

- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:

  Reading the story...

**Sts. Thecla and Mouji**

“The Martyrdom of Sts. Thecla and Mouji:
This day 25th of Abib marks the martyrdom of Sts. Thecla and Mouji (Mugi). They were born in the city of Kerakus, and they were brought up by a God-fearing woman, who was a teacher. Once when they were crossing the river, they saw the governor torturing the Christians. They were appalled by from his hard-heartedness. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and showed
them the glory of the saints. They went to Alexandria, where they confessed the Lord Christ before the governor, who tortured them severely. Then, he cut off the head of St. Mouji. As for St. Thecla, he sent her to the city of Demtaw, where she was martyred, after much torture. Thus, they received the crown of martyrdom. May their prayers be with us. Amen.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   They wanted to offer their lives to God so when they heard about the martyrdom; they went and offered themselves to be martyrs.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   Good friendship- Great love to God.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   Choose good friends who encourage, share and help me.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes, when you learn more, you will know more.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Childhood.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life;
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   [St. Marina] I would do like she did and keep the secret until death and I would take care of the baby.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?

Preaching about God and being a good example among people.

**G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:**

1. **Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?**
   They are very strong because they raised their kids not to fear martyrdom.

2. **Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?**
   *Give me an example from real life.*
   The poor Coptic women are very strong in faith more than the wealthy women because they don’t have money to depend on, they have God only who supports their needs. Examples are the mothers of Libya’s martyrs; they raised their sons to have strong faith which allowed those men (laborers) to accept the martyrdom without withdrawing or escaping from the situation.

3. **In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   It is supporting the women in some services, like teaching in Sunday Schools but not supporting them in letting them become deaconesses.

4. **In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   It supports them by giving the women more rights than the church does because this is the US system.

5. **In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?**
   It does not support them at all because of discrimination. Being women and also being a Coptic doesn’t give the Coptic women any rights in Egyptian society. Some Coptic women deserve some positions, but they are not allowed to have them because they are women and they are Copts.

6. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?**
   Yes.

7. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?**
   No.

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.**
   Yes, the important saint for Coptic culture is St. Mary and she is a woman. She is above all.
9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church? 
   Giving women more opportunities for service like men have. Give women a chance to do 
   what men do.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women? 
    She cares too much about her house and her family - She is very patient - She loves the 
    other more than herself so she can pray for them, serve them and take care of the people 
    around her more than herself.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church? 
    Be a good model in spirituality.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic 
   women from generation to generation? 
   By narrating the stories from generation to generation.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and 
   how are you going to give it to the next generation? 
   My Mam and Dad were always in the church most of the time - they were serving inside 
   and outside the church, so I grew up in the church environment. For my sons, it is very 
   hard to get them involved in the church. I am struggling to help them want to become 
   attached to the church.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? 
   Explain to me how? 
   Yes, the Coptic Church is giving the women’s right except they she could teach the adults 
   from men and women; the Coptic women can teach the children in Sunday schools but 
   not teach the adult from men and women. She cannot give a sermon or be a speaker in a 
   meeting of men and women in the church.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic women saints? 
   Usually the church honors their saints by celebrating their feast - mentioned them in 
   synaxarium.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, 
   old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups? 
   The modern saints more being honored than the historical ones.

6. Recommendations for church: 
   Take care of the girls to protect them. 
   The church can build more monasteries for the nuns. We have a lot of monasteries for 
   men and just a few for women.

7. Name our conversation
Good Scent of Saints.

13- The Egyptian Saints Between the Past and the Present

Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where were you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
• Orthodox
• Catholic
• Protestant
• Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
The saints are important for me and for the Coptic community. They are people close to God. They are taking our prayers and send it to God. They are intercessors.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
4

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
St. Rebecca- St. Mary of Egypt – St. Marina – St. Demiana.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
St. Rebecca.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Rebecca. Can you tell me why?
[St. Rebecca] because she encouraged her children to hold on faith and offered their lives for martyrdom.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
She let her children to get martyred in front of her eyes so she could make sure they would get to the heaven before her.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   St. Mary Mother of God, my son saw her in our apartment waving to him. Also, I saw her in a dream.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   Every time I was pregnant and was close to delivery, I was going to St. Mary church and asked her to be with me in the delivery process and I got two children and the delivery for both of them were very easy, convenient and everything went very well.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   Being a good and righteous person who was able to avoid committing sins and following Christ commandments. Most of the saints lived in the desert not in cities.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. George- St. Mina- St. Abo Safein- Pope Kyrillos- Pope Shenouda- St. Demiana- St. Rebecca- St. Mary Mother of God.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Demiana.

4. **You said that St. Demiana is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
   [St. Demiana] because she encouraged the forty virgins to be martyrs with her.

5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
   In synaxarium and in saints’ feasts.

D. **Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**

1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
   To be simple and pure – help and serve people.

2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
   St. Mary [mother of God] because she was simple, pure and she is the mother of God.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**

387
Good.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   7

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Reading their stories.

**E. Reacting to the story:**
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

**St. Basillisse:**
"St. Basillissa grew up in a pious Christian family that enjoyed fame, material affluence, and spiritual richness in Antione (at present Mallawi in Upper Egypt). Her parents made it their concern to educate her in the best possible way and to sow in her the seeds of loving Christ and His saints. Consequently, she had a strong desire to live only for her Saviour. She was her parents’ only daughter, and they married her to a pious and noble young man called Julian. After the wedding, the couple decided to consecrate their lives to God for they had the same spiritual desires. They were kneeling down and praying when the house began to shake and very strong light, stronger than the sun, shone over the whole place. The beheld our Lord Jesus Christ with multitudes of angels. To His right stood the Holy Virgins, St. Mary accompanied by a group of virgins. The Lord blessed the young couple who spent their first night praising and glorifying Him in a state of ecstasy and joy.

They decided to divide their house into two separate wings. St. Basillisse lived in one part taking care of the sick, the widows and orphans of her sex. Soon a great number of virgins lived with her and took her life of continence and purity as their model. As for Julian, he used to serve the strange people and was known as “the host of the strangers”.

St. Basillisse’s spiritual daughters continued living under her guidance until a decree of persecution, issued by Emperor Diocletian, reached Egypt. It caused much horror among the Christians everywhere. The saint was worried lest any of her daughters should be devoured by the wolf or the lion. (Jn 10:12, 1 Pt 5:8) She prayed and fasted for a very long time until one night in a vision the Lord informed her that He would call this choir of virgins to His presence very soon and they would not be harmed by the coming persecution. However, Julian was to continue his spiritual struggle on earth.

St. Basillisse thanked the Lord for His care. Then she stood up and gathered the virgins telling them:
“let us give thanks to the Lord who informed us in advance of some hidden secrets. Soon our life on earth will come to an end and the time of enjoying everlasting life is near. Let us forgive one another and purify our hearts of any anger and envy. For purity of body alone is not enough to inherit the eternal glory.”

The foundations of the room, where they were praying, started shaking and they all saw a column inscribed with the following words:
“Here is what He says the first and the last, all these virgins are sacred vessels in My eyes. Come to me to inherit the Kingdom prepared for you.”

As soon as they read these words, the column disappeared, and they were overwhelmed by indescribable joy. In a short time, St. Basillisse’s daughters departed from the world, one after the other. Having been consoled by a heavenly vision in which she saw all her daughters enjoying the glory of paradise, the saint’s soul ascended to heaven to share in this eternal joy.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
Yes

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?
Church

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
Don’t give up on your faith.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
Walks in the narrow way of God instead of wide way of the world.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
Yes, for sure.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
Via reading on the internet.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
Childhood.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
[St. Rebecca] I couldn’t do what she did.

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207 The Convent of Saint Philopater Mercurius for Nuns, The Angelic Life: The Virgin Mary and other Virgins in Different Ages, (Old Cairo, Egypt: The Convent of Saint Philopater Mercurius for Nuns, 2004), P.150-151
2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? To be humble and pure in actions.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   They were very strong because they were descendants of the pharaohs who were very strong.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   Women nowadays are weaker than the women before.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Coptic community supports their women by having meetings for women.
   The Coptic community doesn’t support women by not allowing them to be deaconesses in Egypt and also limiting what women are allowed to do compared to men.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Americans support all women and because of this the men are afraid to marry them because the woman can get divorced any time and leave the man if she is treated badly by him.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Support in giving the women some of their rights but still looking at women as being weaker than men.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   No, the Coptic men are larger in number than the women so we can see a lot of churches with the names of men saints and only a few churches have the names of female saints.
9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   By not differentiating between men and women and giving both the freedom to do what they want.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    Stubborn – They keep the Egyptian tradition- The church is the main thing in their lives-
    A Coptic woman dresses properly in the church, not wearing short skirts or dresses to show her respect for the church

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
    To serve in the church and in Sunday Schools.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**

1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
   By bringing up their children in the church environment.

2. **How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?**
   My parents took me regularly to church.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   The church is trying to give women their rights, but still it is not complete due to the influence of the Egyptian culture that surrounds the Coptic Church.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   By celebrating their feasts- Name the newborn girls with saints’ names at baptism- talking more about the female saints in the church.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   The church honors every woman saint (modern and ancient).

6. **Recommendations for church:**
   Talk about women saints more.

7. **Name our conversation**
   The Egyptian Saints Between the Past and the Present.

**14- Fragrances of Saints**

*Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.*
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
7. Where were you born?
- America
- Egypt
- Canada
- Europe
- Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
- Orthodox
- Catholic
- Protestant
- Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   The saints are highly important. They are like the lights that show us our way to God. They help us to grow in faith. They remind us what we should do and how we should act in life. God hears our prayers through them. Although the saints live in heaven, they still take care of us and they feel our emotions and needs.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   15 female saints.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Mary- St. Elizabeth- St. Martha & Mariam- St. Anna the mother of Samuel- St. Demiana- St. Rebecca- St. Mary of Egypt- St. Hilaria-. St. Marina the monk- St. Marina the martyr- St. Anna Simon- St. Barbara- St. Philomena- St. Mahraiel- St. Youanna- St. Tamav Eirini- St. Anastasia- St. Athanasia.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Mary.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Mary. Can you tell me why?
   St. Mary because she is the mother of Christ Jesus.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   She was pure and humble, and she was the mother of God. She raised Jesus Christ. She did not teach or leave words we can quote, but her silence was the greatest teaching for all nations. She kept everything in her heart. She became the mother of everyone.
3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
When I was 22 years old, I got my first job, I saw St. Mary’s apparitions in her church in Zeitoun province in Cairo, Egypt. That was April 1968. There was a large crowd waiting for her apparitions, sometimes St. Mary appeared like a dove or light. For me one day when I was at her church at that time, I saw a light inside the church from heaven to earth; then suddenly her face appeared on the ceiling of the church. I was astonished and I felt like my mind had opened too wide. I could not concentrate; it was something beyond my normal mindset. For more than a month, I felt that mind was open. Every time I was standing for prayers, I remembered that scene and it took my mind to heaven and all I could think about was St. Mary. Also, within a crowd a lot of people were healed from their diseases. They were singing religious songs about St. Mary and were waiting for her to appear in the sky. It brought a lot of blessings.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
Yes, I have, I love St. Demiana. When I married husband, I became involved with his family’s tradition. His big family used to celebrate St. Demiana’s feast in St. Demiana’s church at Sharkia in the countryside. They slaughtered big cows or buffalos and distributed the meat to everyone in the village for both Christian and Muslim families as a celebration of St. Demiana’s feast. Also, my husband and his brothers on St. Demiana’s feast, May 20th of each year, they attended the liturgy and after that made a huge lunch for everyone in the church and for the priests and bishops. The tables had all kinds of food. It was a blessing for our family. I usually asked St. Demiana to be with my children in their studies at school and college and I felt there were a lot of her blessings in my life.

My daughter in her pregnancy and her delivery was in critical situation, she and her baby were in danger of dying. I prayed and asked St. Mary to be with her and to save both the daughter and the baby. She answered my prayer. Both of them were safe after a few months and the baby lived.

My son had heart surgery and it was dangerous, and he could have died, his heart rate was very high. I prayed continuously to St. Mary to save him during the surgery (in Egypt most of the surgeries are not successful because it is still being developed country and medical treatments are not good enough). God saved my son through the intersession of St. Mary.

My husband had a number of diseases more than once. He was close to death and the physicians did not know the cause of his last illness. We went from one doctor to another without knowing the disease or the treatment. As our last hope, we went to the hospital next to St. Mary church in Zeitoun, Cairo and had them do other lab tests. I asked St. Mary in the church to heal him. I have four children and we married with a true love story. After that when we went to the doctor in the same hospital next to St. Mary church,
he told him that everything is good, and he is happy to see him alive and he said that was a miracle that he was still alive.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   Sainthood means that the saint clings to God and does good deeds by the power of God. Also, saints could be martyrs or might live in the desert or perform miracles. God reveals their characters at the end of their lives.

2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary.

4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint that is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   Because of her many apparitions in Egypt. I saw her myself.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   Synaxarium that is read in the holy mass.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   I have learnt from their stories to stick by the faith, be silent, to love others. Love Jesus. Serve everyone.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   The women disciples of St. Paul that were mentioned in the Epistle of the Romans chapter sixteen because these women were serving God and were a strong foundation for the church at that time.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   6

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   Good.
5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
Reading the saints stories, bible and synaxarium every day.

E. Reacting to the story:

● I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
Reading the story...

St. Verena:
“St. Verena is an Egyptian virgin who travelled through Europe. She settled in a cave in the Swiss mountains and was known as the mother of maidens.
Her unwavering faith, long life of charity, and the many miracles she performed “contributed to the spread of Christianity among the Alemanni in what is now known as Canton Argau, Switzerland.”

St. Verena was the only daughter of a distinguished Christian family living near Thebes (Luxor). Their village belonged to the city of Koss in the South of Kena province in Upper Egypt. The name “Verena” means “a good seed of fruit”. At an early age, she dedicated her life to the Lord, Jesus Christ. While still living with her family, she led a highly ascetic life of constant prayers and fasting. She would also regularly attend the liturgical services at church.

During the reign of Diocletian (284-305 AD), two legions of soldiers were assigned to Thebes to protect the borders of the Roman Empire. However, the Theban Legion, headed by ST. Maurice (Mauritius), was so famous that Emperor Diocletian ordered it to depart to Europe to help Maximian, his co-ruler, to subdue a revolution that had broken out in southeast France.
“In keeping with an old Coptic custom whereby women followed their legionnaire men folk to give them spiritual support and relief,” Verena and another virgin, St. Rigola, accompanied their soldier relatives, St. Victor and St. Felix, who were members of this famous Legion.

The Legion arrived in Rome, where it was divided into smaller regiments, each containing 550 officers and men. They were dispersed among the most important Roman camps stretching from the northern Alps all along the Rivers Aar and Rhine, to East Germany. While each regiment headed towards its camp, St. Verena stayed in Milan with some devout Christians.

Having fulfilled their mission and achieved a great victory, the soldiers received orders from the Emperor to worship and sacrifice to the idols in gratitude. However, St. Maurice refused to obey. All the soldiers and their officers, about 500 men, did the same. Consequently, they were tortured and finally martyred in the city of Agaunum, at present St. Maurice en Valais, in Switzerland. That was how their Coptic blood watered Switzerland. Meanwhile, St. Verena kept moving from one place to another following the footsteps of the legion, to help the wounded. On hearing of the martyrdom of St. Victor and his Theban brethren, she crossed the Alps to Agaunum and went to Solothurn, a place beyond the Aar in north Switzerland, to visit their site of martyrdom.

Afterwards, the Holy Spirit guided St. Verena to retire to a cave nearby. There she led an ascetic and austere life to torture the body so as to save the soul. She became a lamp stand to the whole area and attracted many virgins around her. Thus, she came to be regarded as “the mother of maidens”; for she guided those virgins into the paths of Christian virtue and piety. They used
to spend their time praying and glorifying the Lord while singing the Psalms and reading the Holy Books.

St. Verena supported herself and the rest of the virgins by means of handiwork, mainly sewing and embroidering clothes. She would also give some of their income to help the poor and needy. There was a woman who used to sell their products and buy them their necessities. God was also supporting them in a miraculous way. It happened one day that they ran out of food; so, the saint prayed to the merciful Lord who gives food in due season (Mt 24:45). She had hardly finished her prayers when forty sacks of flour were put at the door of their cave. They never knew who sent them. Moreover, the flour miraculously increased. So, they thanked their Lord for His blessings.

Verena became well known to the local people for her knowledge of nursing and hygiene. She used to help the sick and cure them through her fervent prayers and her use of herbs. God bestowed on her the gift of performing many miracles, such as healing the sick and casting out demons. She also evangelized many of the pagans from the Germanic tribes in that area.

Then, when the governor heard of her preaching the word of God, he imprisoned her. St. Maurice appeared to her in the prison; and she was afterwards released when the governor was miraculously cured of his illness through her prayers. As her fame spread, she dreaded being honored by people lest she should lose the fruits of her ascetic labor. She decided to flee from Solothurn and seek seclusion on a tiny island, dwelling in a small hut built by some believers who knew and loved her. There she spent her days constantly worshiping the Lord, who performed many miracles through her prayers, which once more made the inhabitants love and honor her.

However, her growing fame forced her again to move to an even more remote island, which lay at the confluence of the Rivers Aar and Rhine. It had so many snakes and scorpions which made her unable to get any physical rest. She prayed to God Almighty, the pantocrator, who can subjugate all creatures. Then a voice from heaven told her to make the sign of the cross on those poisonous reptiles and to order them to go in the name of The Holy Trinity. The saint did as she was told, and immediately they crawled into the water and never returned. Many of the sick who used to come to her were healed because of her prayers.

When Emperor Constantine the Great ascended the throne of the Roman Empire and the Church enjoyed peace, St. Verena decided to stay in Tenedo (present-day Zurzach on the River Rhine at the Swiss-German border) for the rest of her life. She founded a church dedicated to our Lady, St. Mary, and she lived in a house nearby. St. Verena used to serve in the church; she looked after the sick, fed them and cleansed them. In the meantime, she kept to her ascetic life and used to spend the nights in vigils.

The saint then spent the last eleven years of her life as a recluse in an isolated cave. When her time had come and God wanted to relieve her of the burden of this world, the Mother of God told her the date of her departure. In 344 AD, her soul departed in the presence of St. Mary and other virgins who came to her cell. St. Verena was spiritually strengthened by this visit saying, “Why should this great thing happen to me? How should I deserve that the Mother of my Lord and God come to me, His servant?”

The Mother of Light replied, “Because you have served the Lord, your God, I came to reward you. So, follow me with those virgins to earn everlasting joy.”
The Cell was filled with a sweet aroma. The virgins buried her in Zurzach and her remains were enshrined in the crypt built on the place of her death. This then became one of the most frequented pilgrimage centres in the region. It acquired its fame from the miracles performed for whomever asked for the saint’s prayers. A great church was built dedicated to her in the same city in the province of Argoni, and a second one, in the city of Solaire (another Swiss city on the river Aar). Besides, many religious foundations, churches and chapels were consecrated in her name throughout Europe. The Coptic Church commemorates her departure on the fourth of Tut. Her whole life was thus a fulfillment of her name: she was the good seed that bore ripened fruit.” 208

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. (Yes): **Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. (No): **What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   It is a strong spiritual story. She loved serving and helping people. She could prevent the people from getting infectious diseases by teaching them how to take care of themselves and care about their hygiene. She was able to combine the practical and spiritual lives. She offered to the people Christian teachings and practical services.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   When you serve and help people, you honor God himself.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   Do good things if I can do it. Help people if I can do that without delay.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   Via reading and church in reading synaxarium.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   Childhood.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of

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this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it? [St. Demiana] I would act like her and get to martyrdom.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
To love God with all your heart and your thoughts and from your soul and also to love your neighbor as yourself. So, I need to love everyone around me. I don’t accept their sins, but I can love people. Also, to do good things for friends, family and for my coworkers so they can praise God through my deeds.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
They aren’t strong physically, but they are strong in spirituality because of the Holy Spirit who lives within them.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.
The Coptic women was strong in the past, and they are strong at the present and they will be strong at the future because they receive their power from their strong relationship with God and the power of the Holy Spirit who supports them.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
The Coptic community is always supporting women by letting her pray in the church as men and serve in Sunday Schools, go on trips, participate in hymns and spiritual competitions. Also, the Coptic community allows women to go to confession and receive communion.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women? Yes support.

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women? Yes supporting, examples of that the women who got their rights by having many positions in the society as physicians in many hospitals in many provinces in Egypt and as ministers.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
Yes, they have the freedom to practice the religion but being the religious person in the USA is not important and being a Coptic in faith is not important.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   Yes and No. Yes, inside the church but no outside the church (in Egyptian society). They can’t practice their faith in public. In some places they can wear the cross as a neckless but in other places in Egypt you can’t do that because of those are Muslims territories.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Yes, they have equality. For instance, there are many St. Demiana churches in Egypt. So, if you compare the numbers of churches with the names of men saints and women saints, you will find the numbers are almost the same. Also, the monasteries have almost the same number for women and men.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   Yes, we can bring it about because this is the foundation of Christianity, the equality of man and women. God created Eve from the Adam’s rib which was located in the middle of his body which meant that Eve is was equal to Adam. God didn’t take the part from his head so Eve wouldn’t be higher nor from his lower part because she wouldn’t be lower. God took Eve from the middle of Adam’s body so he could love her and see her as being equal to him.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    The Coptic woman is the virtuous women who was mentioned in the Book of Proverbs, chapter 31, her worth is above rubies. She does good for her husband not evil. Her husband praises her. Her children call her blessed. She opens her mouth with wisdom. She doesn’t eat the bread of idleness. She extends her hands to the poor. This is what the Coptic woman is and what she is doing.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    Bringing up the next generation by teaching Sunday School.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   As the yeast does the fermentation for the whole dough. As the mustard seed in spite of its small size, grows very big and becomes a huge tree. As St. Mark is one person who spread the Christianity in all Egypt. As the Coptic women transfer empowerment from generation to generation by their strong faith.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
My father was a man of peace. He loved everyone in his big family, both the poor and the rich – and he treated them equally. Many families asked my father to help them to solve the disputes between the members of the family and he was able to deal with that. It looked like he was a marriage counsel before this job existed. My Dad brought me up to have self-confidence and challenge the stuff that seemed beyond my limits. He taught us, to be content about what we had and to live with happiness in the simple life. He taught us that expensive stuff was not what would bring us happiness nor to be in the high level of the society. He was a man who loved to read. He used to read every day the bible and other books. He knew three languages perfectly. He didn’t compare himself with others. He was always thanking God for everything.

For My Mam, she was humble and never lied. She opened the house for every guest, never complained. We were seven sons and daughters and it was a huge responsibly for her. She always used to smile. She used to encourage me and my brothers and sisters to go to church. She taught us to pray every day and at night before going to bed.

I did the same with my children as my parents did with me.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   Yes, the church does because the bible says so. There are a lot of verses in the bible that confirm equality between men and women. St. Paul in first Corinthians confirmed equality between men and women.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   By mentioning the saints’ stories on their feast and on their departure days. Also, by making statues of the women saints like St. Mary statues – by printing pictures of women saints and distributing them at Sunday School to the kids – By making movies about women saints.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   The church honors the historical women saints more.

6. **Recommendations for church:**
   Be honest when you serve God. Be pure, God is looking into our hearts.

7. **Name our conversation**
   Fragrances of Saints.

15- **Gold in a Haystack**

**Demographics:** Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
• 35-44
• 45- 54
• 55-64
• 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

3. What is your gender?
• Female
• Male
• Others

4. Which race/ ethnicity best describes you?
• American
• Egyptian
• African
• White
• American/ Egyptian
• Multiple ethnicity
• Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
• English
• Arabic
• French
• Italian
• Coptic
• Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where were you born?
8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are important. Examples to follow, reference in life, we can use it and get back to it anytime- represent a part of my culture and identity- knowing me and my Coptic history because the Coptic church has saints every year.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   10 saints.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   Demiana- Rebecca- Mohrael- Verena- Paesia- Thais- Mary of Egypt- Marina the monk- Anna Simon- Hilaria.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   Hilaria.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is Hilaria. Can you tell me why?
   I love her story; she had a strong character. She was a daughter of the king; she left this luxury life to live in the desert. She loved Jesus more than her family. She was honest in the monastery and she had a good reputation. She had empathy toward her sister, and she was praying for her until her sister got healed.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   She was the daughter of the king; his name is Zenon. She was thinking a lot to be a monk, so she decided to hide in men’s clothing and shaved her hair to be like a man. She had to do that because at the time monasteries weren’t for nuns. When she was on her way to Alexandria; she met with a deacon; his name in Theodore and he led her to the monastery.
3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   St. Verena because she went with St. Maurice and his legion. When the whole legion was
   martyred along with St. Maurice; she decided to stay in Switzerland and teach people
   about cleanliness. In Switzerland, they have a statue for her, and many churches were
   built in her name. We know about her and about her story from Europe then her story
   spread into Egypt.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through
   something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   [St. Hilaria] I have an icon for her in my house and I love to ask for her intercession.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
   1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
      To be like Jesus. He said be holy as my father in heaven is holy.

   2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic
      tradition?
      St. Mary- The twelve disciples of Jesus - Martyrs.

   3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic
      tradition?
      St. Mary.

   4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the
      Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
      [St. Mary] because she carried Jesus in her womb- She was carrying our salvation.

   5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
      Synaxarium and in Sunday Schools.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
   1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and
      lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have
      learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
      The Coptic church is full of saints- the mothers are the main sources of creating the
      strong spiritual life in their homes and with their children.

   2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for
      yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
      Fr. Bihoj Kamel because he wasn’t a monk nor lived in the desert. He lived among us as
      a normal person. He was taking care of his people and always was searching for the lost
      sheep (searching for the lost people to get them back to the faith).
      Tamav Ereni because she was good model for girls who has encouraged a lot of girls
      these days to go to the monasteries and be nuns.
3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Intermediate

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   6

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   By reading.

E. **Reacting to the story:**
   - I'd like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
   - Reading the story...

**St. Mary of Egypt**

“The Departure of St. Mary of Egypt
On the 6th of Baramounda of the year 137 A.M. (421 A.D.) the hermit St. Mary of Egypt departed. She was born in the city of Alexandria about the year 61 A.M. (345 A.D.) from Christian parents. In 292 when she turned twelve years old, Satan, the enemy of the human race, seduced her and led her astray, and made her his net through which he caught innumerable souls. She continued in this sinful conduct for seventeen years until the mercy of God touched her life, when she met people going to Jerusalem and she went with them. Since she did not have money to pay for the trip, she gave herself to the owners of the ship in return, until she came to Jerusalem. She also went on doing the same thing there. She wished to enter through the door of the church of the Resurrection, but she felt a hidden power pulling her from the back preventing her from entering the church. Whenever she tried to enter, she felt as though someone was preventing her from doing so, and right away she realized that it was because of her uncleanness. She lifted up her eyes with a broken heart, and she wept interceding with St. Mary and asked her to intercede on her behalf before her Beloved Son. She felt encouraged and wished again to enter with those entering, and this time nothing prevented her from entering, and she prayed therein to God asking Him to guide her for what was pleasing to Him. She stood before the icon of the blessed and pure Virgin and asked her fervently to guide her that she might save her soul. A voice came out of the icon saying: "If you cross the Jordan river you will find rest and salvation." She rose in haste and when she left the courtyard of the resurrection and on her way, she met a man who gave her three small coins with which she bought bread. Then she crossed the Jordan river to the wilderness where she lived for forty-seven years. She strove strenuously for seventeen years, Satan fought against her by tempting her with the fornication that she repented from. She overcame Satan with the grace of God and she during all this period she ate only the herbs of the desert. In the forty fifth year of her living in the desert, St. Zosima went to the wilderness, according to the custom of the monks there, during the holy Forty Days of fast for devotion and asceticism. While he was walking in the desert, he saw this Saint from afar and he thought that she was a shadow or mirage. He prayed to God to reveal to him the fact about this mirage, and he was inspired that it was a human being. He went toward the shadow, but it fled from him. When she saw that he persisted in following her, she called him from behind a hill.
saying: "O Zosima if you wish to talk to me, throw me a rag that I may cover myself for I am naked." He marveled for she called him by his name, he threw to her what she covered herself with, and she came to him. After the greetings and the metanias, she asked him to pray for her because he was a priest. He asked her to tell him the story of her life from the beginning to the present time. After she told him, she asked him to bring with him in the next year the Holy Eucharist to partake of it. In the next year he came to her and she partook of the Holy Mysteries, then he gave her what he had from dates and lentils, she only took a handful of lentils, and she asked him to come to her in the next year. When he came to her in the next year, he found that she had departed, a lion standing beside her and writing beside her saying " Bury Mary, the poor woman, in the dust of which she was created." He marveled from the writing and from the lion that was protecting her body and while he was thinking how he was going to dig to bury her, the lion came and dug a grave for her. He prayed over her and buried her. When he returned to his monastery, he told the monks the story of the strife of this holy woman, and they all increased in steadfastness in the Divine Mercy and progressed in the spiritual life. All the years of her life were seventy-six years. May her prayers be with us and glory be to God forever. Amen.»

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   Yes.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**
   Church; in Sunday School. Also, by reading.

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   Strange story. God didn’t allow her to enter the church. He wanted to give her lesson that God’s house is holy, and she needed to repent. On the other side when she entered the church; she decided to be a good person and she started off a new life which was difficult for her in the beginning, so she took it seriously. Also, God didn’t forget her; he sent her Father Zosima at the end of her life to take her confession and bury her body. God wanted to reveal her story to us to learn from it.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   I am valuable to God- Honor the church- Trust in the Lord- Trust the Lord for his forgiveness for us.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes, to know in detail. I want to know more about her character and how she was able to live in the desert. I want to know her daily life in the desert.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**

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8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
Childhood so I can take all the stories with me until advanced age.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
[Hilaria] I would stay in the palace with my Dad and I would serve God with being with my family. I wouldn’t go to the desert nor experience this kind of hard life.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
Honesty; I am honest with my family, friends and coworkers. Also, I do good actions as a way to preach with my Christianity.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
They were very strong because the Egyptian culture is very hard to live with; still through all of these circumstances they are able to live in Egypt and carry a strong faith and ascetic life practices with them.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
Give me an example from real life.
Yes, they are strong because of the persecutions that the Coptic women face and still they are bringing up their children not to fear death because of their religion. An example of that is the mother of Marina and Veronia who was martyred in Botroseya’s bombing. She had only two daughters and they died in this persecution. The other story is about the old lady of Mynia province; she was made famous by the “Saidat El Karm” Muslim terrorists who forced her to be naked in front of all people in the street because she was a Christian and after a while she was shown on Egyptian TV and she forgave those people and she left her experience in God’s hand to give her rights instead of counting on the government.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
Yes, the Coptic community is supporting Coptic women in allowing them to be leaders in some services, but not supporting them when they want to become deaconesses like men.
4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Egyptian society sometimes supports Coptic women because they are well known for their honesty and their dedication to their jobs. But it does not support Coptic women by looking at their clothes as more open and inappropriate attire because they do not wear Islamic veils (Hijab) and are not wearing long sleeves and long skirts.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   In the church only and that is ok with us. The government allows us to come one hour late on Sundays so we can go to church to pray but we can’t talk about our religion freely in the streets. We can’t preach about Jesus to Muslim people in public.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Yes, they have equality. The synaxarrium mentions both of them in daily mass- in Tasbeha (church praises) mentions both.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   Before the church taught that, the woman couldn’t teach in the church; the teaching positions are for men only; but these days the church allows women to teach in the church and lead some services.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    The Coptic woman is the main column that holds up the house. She is the main school for the children- Church is her life, and Jesus is in her house.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    Teaching in Sunday School.

H. Coptic women in the future:
   1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
      By living the spiritual life in the house- by praying every day with the members of household.

   2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
My Mam and Dad read the bible with us every day at night. Every new year my parents gathered us and let us put a plan for a new year and set goals; some of the goals were spiritual and during the year my mam reminded us about our goals.

3. **Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?**
   Yes, the Coptic church is giving the women their rights, such as education. The church encourages girls to go to and sometimes the church pays the school fees for the girls because their families can’t pay for the education. Also, the church gives women the right to vote and organizes places for that.

4. **How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?**
   By building shrines for the saints and caring about the relics- Writing their stories and printing books in which to record their names.

5. **Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?**
   Both groups.

6. **Recommendations for church:**
   Give the women the freedom to speak and express their opinions. Make meetings for them; listen to women’s suggestions and accept new ideas from them. Help women to solve their problems by speaking and finding solutions for the problems.

7. **Name our conversation**
   Gold in a Haystack.

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**16- Eve in the Shape of Adam**

**Demographics:** *Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.*

1. **Which of the following categories describes your age?**
   - 18- 24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45- 54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. **Where do you live?**
   - America
   - **Egypt**
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

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409
3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - **Egyptian**
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - **Arabic**
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - **Bachelor’s degree**
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - **Egypt**
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - **Orthodox**
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others
Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are exceedingly important. I am proud that Coptic church and its history have a huge number of saints. The saints lived the biblical life and follow the bible’s instructions.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   8

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   Demiana.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Demiana. Can you tell me why?
   [St. Demiana] we celebrate her feast on May 20th every year and my daughter was born in May.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   [St. Demiana] she was in charge of 40 virgins. She was able to live with these forty virgins at a time in history time that did not support women and only thought of women as being useful for marriage.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   Thais, she was from a rich family. Her family used to host many guests and they supported the poor. After her parent’s death she did the same, but later her house became a house of prostitution, she lived a life of sin. One day there was a monk who knew her family and what happened to her, so he disguised himself as a man want to have sex with her. He got into her room and he asked her to lead him to a room where no one, not even God could see them. She answered him “If you fear God, God is everywhere, and He knows everything.” So, the monk started to talk to her about God and reminded her about her pious family. She asked him what she should do so he told her that they should leave the place right away. While they were walking in the desert, it became dark, so they decided to sleep the night at the desert a little far away from each other. When the morning came the monk went to Thais and he figured out that she died. The monk was very sad and confused why God took her soul and he asked himself was she going to enter heaven. He was in that city for a few days. After that, he had a revelation that in heaven there was a very chair of glory and when he asked the angel to whom this chair belonged the angel said to him, “You have to guess.” So, the monk answered, “It is for
St. George or St. Antony….” But the angel said, “It is for Thais,” so the monk knew that God had accepted Thais’s repentance as soon as she moved out of the house of prostitution.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   My daughter was born prematurely, and I asked for St. Demiana’s intercession to protect my baby. My baby daughter was born very good and healthy.

C. **The Tradition of Sainthood:**
   1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
      Sainthood means that the person is the image of God. It can be seen in the person’s behaviors, teachings and life. Sainthood isn’t by gaining information about the spiritual life but by acting and practicing it until holiness becomes part of one’s personality.

   2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
      St. Mary- St. Demiana- St. Marina- St. George- St. Theodore- St. Abu Seifein.

   3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
      St. Mary.

   4. **You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?**
      St. Mary, she is always in our prayers. The Coptic church celebrates many feasts to honor St. Mary, and she is in the monthly synaxarium and it offers special praise to her (Tasbeha Kiahk).
      Also, God chose St. Mary from all the women in the world in all ages to become incarnate through her.

   5. **How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?**
      On Egyptian Mother’s Day because the priests mention most of the female saints to give us examples to follow as mothers. Also, I hear their stories in church when the synaxarium is read.

D. **Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:**
   1. **Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?**
      I have learnt that woman can do anything a man can do. Jesus came from a woman, so the women has to be honored and respected.

   2. **Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?**
I took Joseph the carpenter because he was taking care of St. Mary. It is said in the Coptic church that he was a guard for the salvation story.

3. **How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?**
   Intermediate.

4. **On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?**
   6

5. **How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?**
   Reading and listening to audio books.

**E. Reacting to the story:**
   - I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story...

**St. Piamon the Virgin:**
“A city that has a pious consecrated virgin is protected by the Lord because of that virgin.” St. Athanasius

The hagiography of this pious virgin is recorded in *The Lausiac History* by Palladius who visited Egypt in 388 AD and wrote about the Egyptian monks and ascetics. He did not name this saint’s hometown but simply recorded that she was from one of the villages in Upper Egypt. The dates of her birth and departure are not mentioned but it could be easily inferred that she lived during the fourth century.

St. Piamon spent all her life at home with her mother near a small village on the banks of the Upper Nile. She led a life of simplicity and austerity as she spent her nights in vigils, praying and reading the Holy Books. She ate once a day, in the evening and labored at the weaving of linen.

She was renowned for the gift of prophecy and the powers of intercessory prayer. This gift was clear when a fight occurred among some villages in Upper Egypt over the division of the water of the river Nile for irrigation. They fought so violently that many people were killed, and others were beaten to death. Then it happened that one village, which was stronger than the virgin’s native village, rose up against it in fierce wrath, and a group of violent and boastful men came carrying staves and spears to kill the people of her village. The angel of the Lord revealed to St. Piamon how their enemies were secretly planning to fall upon the helpless inhabitants of her village. Immediately, she called for the elders and priests of the village and told them what she had learned and advised them to make peace with the other village.

The priests believed Piamon; for they were fully aware of her piety and virtue. Afraid to confront their enemy, the elders asked her to settle the dispute saying: “We do not dare to go forth to meet these people and talk to them, for we know how hard-hearted they are. If you wish to save us all, go forth and meet them so that they would leave us in peace.”

413
However, it was difficult for the blessed virgin to do so, as she did not want to go out of her house and her solitary life. She spent the whole night praying to the Lord in strong faith saying:

“My Lord Jesus Christ, you are the judge of the whole earth and you do not accept any sort of injustice. Hear my prayer and give ear to my supplications, with your mighty hand and unlimited power make those who are coming to kill us stand still as stone.”

At dawn, when she was finished with her prayer, the enemy was three miles away from her village. All of a sudden, they stopped and were unable to move. Everyone knew that such a miracle took place through the prayers of Christ’s handmaiden. The threat was averted, and the enemy asked for peace saying:

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He has answered the prayers of Piamon the virgin and prevented us from hurting you.”

The Church commemorates her feast on the third of Tubah.” 210

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   Appreciate and respect women because they have something special and some of them are very talented.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   She was wise and a woman of prayer. Her village was asking for her help and her prayers. She was a courageous woman who want to help her village.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   Pray when I get in troubles.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Reading books and researches- looking up on the internet.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   All ages.

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F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?
   [St. Demiana] I would not act like her. I could not take the responsibilities of forty virgins.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
   To behave well and respect people regardless their gender.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   The Coptic women saints were very strong in faith. The old book about monasticism (Bostan El Rohban) mentioned some women in the early ages and considered them equal to monastic fathers like St. Macarius and his visit to two ladies who were married; God revealed to him that they were equal to him in spirituality.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   They are strong in faith, all the male saints, bishops and Popes came from women saints or from good mothers.
   Another example, I have in my church the priest’s wife who had a great success in her service at the church. She is caring about everyone with her love.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The Coptic Community supports women by letting them attend the mass; when you enter the Coptic church; there is a right and left side, so the right side is for women and left side is for men. Compare that with the Muslims in Egypt where the Muslim women can’t pray with men on Fridays in mosques. But Coptic women can enjoy praying in the church; they can serve, and they have their own meetings for studying the Bible.
   Not supporting: There are no ordained deaconesses in Egypt as there are in the US.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Egyptian society supports women by giving them the right to receive an education and work like men and sometimes the women get higher salaries than men.
Not supporting in: There is still sexual harassment on Egyptian streets and men look at women as the source of desires and the source of pleasure; they look at her body not at her mind.

6. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?**

7. **Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?**
   It was hard for a Coptic woman to wear her cross but eventually the Coptic woman convinced Egyptian society to accept her with her cross around her neck. When ignorance increases, freedom decreases. When the Arab conquerors entered Egypt, their concept of woman was strange and they looked at her as a submissive partner to the man and she had to stay at home and she could not leave the house without her husband’s permission, and she had to wear long clothing and cover her hair. But these days, after the revolution, we can see the beginning of women’s freedom.

8. **From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain it**
   Yes, there is equality. There are a lot of churches that have both men and woman saints’ names.

9. **How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?**
   By increasing awareness of the equality of women and men with the people who are in charge and with the leaders who guide the congregation.

10. **What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?**
    She is simple and strong. She has a simple education; a bachelor’s degree is her maximum goal. Most of the elder Coptic women and women in upper Egypt were not educated. The Coptic woman has to fast until sunset every day. She can’t be mad at anyone; she has to reconcile with her enemies before the sun sets; she doesn’t carry any hatred in her heart. She doesn’t have a lot of the information or know much history, but she practices the spiritual ascetic life every day.

11. **What is the role of Coptic women in the church?**
    The Coptic woman is half of the church, she is half of Egyptian society and she is the joy of her home.

**H. Coptic women in the future:**

1. **From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?**
   By spreading education, reading research and books.
2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?  
My parents didn’t teach me how to be religious but they acted their beliefs in front of me so I could learn. They read the bible every day and they went to church. They fasted often; I grew up in an environment like that and I’ll transfer it to my children too as I received it.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?  
Yes, the church is granting women their rights. The church doesn’t differentiate between men and women. All are equal.  
Here’s an example: There was an old lady in her seventies in Mania, Egypt and her son got into a fight with a Muslim guy and she tried to get between them to top the fight. But some Muslim guys grabbed her and took off her clothing right in the street. That story spread very quickly on social media. The President Sisi brought her to his home and apologized to her and kissed her hands and honored her on behalf of all the Egyptians. Pope Tawadros also honored her.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?  
Mentioning their names in the liturgies and in the names of churches- Celebrating their feasts.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?  
Both.

6. Recommendations for church:  
Keep the Coptic tradition and do not change it to adapt to the world; this is what makes the Coptic church unique — its history.  
Ordaining deaconesses in the Coptic church in Egypt.

7. Name our conversation:  
Eve in the shape of Adam.

17- Don’t Worry and Be Happy Because Jesus Is Your Father and St. Mary Is Your Mother 
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?  
- 18- 24  
- 25-34  
- 35-44  
- 45- 54  
- 55-64  
- 65 or older
2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others
8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   - Orthodox
   - Catholic
   - Protestant
   - Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   Very important. They are very valuable to me because they are role models to follow. The represent the life of obedience, purity and humbleness in the world filled with desires and temptations.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   A lot. I can’t count them.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Marina- St. Mary- St. Demiana- St. Rita- Mother Teresa- St. Verena- St. Mohrael.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Mary- St. Marina.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saints you relate to most are St. Mary and St. Marina. Can you tell me why?
   St. Mary because she surrendered her life to God’s will. She went to serve in the temple at a young age. She trusted in the Lord and what he said to her.
   St. Marina because she wanted to be a monk in a time when there were not monasteries for girls, so she challenged all obstacles and got into one monastery by dressing like a man.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   St. Marina, she was young when she went with her father to the monastery in Egypt. She lived with her father without any sexual desire between her and her father. She hid her gender until it was revealed after her death.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   I like Mary Magdalen, I know she is not Coptic, but I love her story because she didn’t change because of society’s judgements and condemnation. She trusted in the Lord who saved her, and she loved him so much after that.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
Yes, I got through an accident (car hit me on my way from school) and I was in coma for a few days in the hospital. A lot of relatives came to see me. I had bleeding in the brain, had broken my vertebral column and suffered a concussion. I dreamt St. Mary came to me and at that time I woke up and returned to life.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   Purity and real repentance.

2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary- St. George- St. Maurice- St. father Abd El Misieh.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary.

4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   [St. Mary] Because of her purity and humbleness since she was young.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   A lot in the church.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   Trust in the Lord although there are persecutions, but I trust in him that he will come on time to save me or take me to heaven- Obedience to God’s commandments.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   “St. Moses the black the strong” because he committed a lot of sins and then he offered his life to God in the desert and became a monk. His story totally changed, and he became one of the greatest desert fathers in Egypt.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Intermediate.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   4
5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
By reading and doing my research for knowing the saints’ stories.

E. Reacting to the story:

- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

**St. Theodora of Alexandria:**
“St. Theodora was born in Alexandria at the end of the third century. This virgin belonged to a rich and noble family. Her Christian parents were keen to bring her up to be devout. From an early age, she consecrated herself to God through the practice of an ascetic life. She would not leave the house except when going to church to receive Holy Communion or to listen to sermons. She spent the rest of her time at home praying, reading the Bible, or doing work. In 303 during the reigns of the joint Emperors Diocletian and Maximianus, the prefect of Alexandria, Eustratius, issued an edict of persecution. Consequently, he filled the prison cells with many Christians who were later martyred. Meanwhile, someone reported that Theodora did not worship the idols; nor did she sacrifice to them. She was taken to the governor who was impressed by her beauty and refinement. When asked about her religion, she confessed being a Christian who owed her freedom to Christ. When the governor realized that she belonged to a noble and rich family, he tried to shake her fortitude with sweet temptations. However, the blessed virgin said:

  “I have vowed to be betrothed to no one but my Lord Jesus Christ who, for our salvation, became man. He saved us with his life-giving death and granted us eternal life if we remain steadfast in our faith.”

  Despite a long conversation, the governor failed to make Theodora change her mind. So, he started to threaten her with the severest kinds of torture. He sentenced her to exposure in a house of ill-fame. Still, the saint’s faith was unshakable, and she kept praying to the Lord to preserve her chastity.

  Didymus, a Christian young man who dressed up as a soldier, rescued her from the brothel. He changed clothes with her, and she left the place while wearing his big hat and lowering her head so as not to be discovered. Didymus was soon detected and tried. When asked about the reason behind his deed, he confessed his Christian faith and made it clear that he was sent by God to save her. He was sentenced to death and the news spread throughout the whole city.

  As he was taken to his execution, Theodora ran after him saying: “Brother, do not steal my crown; I have to get mine before you.” They were both decapitated in 304 AD. In this way, to quote St. Ambrose: “The two contended, and both gained the victory, and the crown was not divided, but became two.” The Coptic Church commemorates their martyrdom on the first of Ba’unah.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?

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421
No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story? 
   To hold on the faith through the stress of the life’s activities and the desires that surround the world.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story 
   I feel that every Coptic person loves God because he or she experienced life with him during the tribulations. Also, patience is an important thing in our life in order to see God’s plan for us.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life? 
   To fight against one’s desires until one attains purity of heart to see the Lord.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint? 
   Yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods? 
   Reading & Church.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman? 
   A child.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
   1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it? 
      [St. Marina] If I were her, I would defend myself and I would say I am a girl not a man. I would accuse the other woman of not telling the truth because I didn’t do anything wrong with her, I didn’t even touch her.

   2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? 
      Do good things to people and be glad to help everyone who asks me for help and be humble.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

422
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?  
Yes, they were strong because they had faced the persecutions and the tortures.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?  
Give me an example from real life.  
Not really because of the stress of life, a lot of divorces occur between spouses and there is an increase in the desires of the world.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?  
Support in having equality in the faith.  
The Coptic community does not support women. It does not give them the freedom of speech and the freedom to make their own vital decisions in life.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?  

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?  
Support in keeping the Egyptian traditions, this tradition kept the women pure with good reputations and away from evil acts.  
Doesn’t support them when it gives the man the authority to control the woman.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?  

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?  
No.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.  
From sainthood perspective, they have equality.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?  
The church can lead the discussions without bias toward men and not to look at a woman as a human with low ability and low power.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?  
Very kind- have great patience- persistent.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
Spread love and smile everywhere they go- Take responsibility as they usually do to achieve a good religious life.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   Continuing the Coptic tradition and spiritual activities in the church along with adaptation with modern life.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   I have it from my grandma. She raised my up in the fear of God. She woke me up every day in the early morning before school to pray. She took care of me and made sure that I was going to church and Sunday School.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   Since Coptic women are a minority in Egypt, the church is dealing with Coptic women as the Egyptian society is dealing with them. The church is influenced by Egyptian society which sees women as weak.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   Printing books for them contain their stories.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   Saints from the books and old times.

6. Recommendations for church:
   Update the Sunday Curriculum and seek for professional teachers for the Sunday Schools.

7. Name our conversation:
   Don’t Worry and Be Happy Because Jesus Is Your Father and St. Mary Is Your Mother.

18- Act like a Man and Think Like a Woman

Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.

1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18-24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older
2. Where do you live?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others

3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/ Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   • Orthodox
   • Catholic
   • Protestant
   • Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
   1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
      I think they are very important because they give us a good example to follow.

   2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
      About 10.

   3. List some of the Coptic women saints?

   4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
      St. Mary.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
   1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is……… Can you tell me why?
      St. Marina.

   2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
      St. Marina, her mam died when she was little, and her father wanted to go to the monastery, so she insisted that she wanted to go with him. She cut her hair and went with him and they became monks. Later, her father died. One day she went out with some monks to the city to get supplies for the monastery. They stayed at a place like a hotel. Later when she got back to the monastery, the Inn housekeeper accused St. Marina of committing adultery with his daughter which is what his daughter told him. The monks treated St. Marina very bad and kicked her out of the monastery. After the lady delivered the baby, she gave the baby to St. Marina to raise. St. Marina stayed outside the monastery for many years asking the monks to accept her repentance. She was feeding the baby from goat’s milk and after a few years the monks accepted the return of St. Marian to the monastery, but they still gave her harsh punishment. The baby grew up and became a monk. St. Marina died and when they prepared her for burying, they discovered that she was a woman, so they were ashamed for what they had done to her, and the way they had treated her, and they asked for her forgiveness.
3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   St. Verena, she was with St. Maurice the leader of the Theban legion. The emperor of the place where they were fighting, asked the legion to stop worshiping their God and to worship idols. They refused to obey his commands because there were Christians. The emperor started to kill them until he killed the leader St. Maurice. St. Verena was there; she was not martyred; she was teaching the young children how to be clean and she talked about God. She was imprisoned and after she was released, she continued her service about teaching cleanliness to people and preaching about God.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   There were some thieves who stole things from our apartment. They entered all the rooms except the room that had St. Mary’s and St. Philopater’s pictures on the wall and this is the room where we kept all our jewelry, gold and diamonds — so St. Mary and St. Philopater saved us from the thieves and protected our stuff.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
   1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
      These saints in general decided to live according to the rules of God and not the rules of the world — so they decided they didn’t want to be associated with what the world wanted them to do but what God wanted.

   2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
      St. Mary- St. Verena- St. Demiana
      Pope Shenouda III- St. Mina – St. Mark- St. Philopater.

   3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
      St. Mary.

   4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
      St. Mary because she is the mother of God. She is a great example of purity and humbleness. She is a perfect example for all Christian women.

   5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
      Not very often. I hear it in liturgy when they are brought up in synaxarium reading.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
   1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
It showed that it doesn’t matter if you are female or male. They both have great stories. They both sacrifice so much for God. They are very strong and brave. I have learnt to be humble and stick to my faith, focus more on heaven. Stick to God not to the world.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   I took St. Verena as my role model. She was a great example how to take care of kids. She included God while she was teaching them about hygiene.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Intermediate.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   5

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   By reading more

E. Reacting to the story:
   - I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
     Reading the story...

   The Departure of St. Anastasia:
   “On the 26th of Toba, St. Anastasia departed. She was from a noble family in the city of Constantinople. She was very beautiful and had a great moral character. 201 Emperor Justin, who was married, wanted to marry her. She refused and went and told his wife. The Empress sent her to Alexandria on a private ship. She built her a convent outside the city of Alexandria and named it after her. When the Emperor knew where she was, he sent for her, but Anastasia escaped and hid herself in the wilderness of Sheheat (Scetis), disguised as a prince. She met with Anba Daniel, the archpriest of the wilderness, and revealed her story to him. He brought her to a cave and asked one of the elders to fill a water pot for her once every week, and to place the pot at the door of the cave and leave. She remained in this place for 28 years, without anyone knowing that she was a woman. She used to write her thoughts on pieces of pottery and leave them at the door of her cave. The elder who brought her the water used to take the pieces of pottery without knowing what was written on them and give them to St. Daniel. One day he brought a piece of pottery to St. Daniel who wept when he read it, and said to his disciple, "Come with me now to bury the body of the saint in that cave." When they entered her cave, they received blessings from each other. St. Anastasia said to Anba Daniel, "For the sake of God, bury me with what I have on my body." Then she prayed and bade them farewell and departed in peace. They wept and buried her. When the disciple was caring for her burial, he found out that she was a woman, and he marveled in silence. After they buried her, and they returned to their place, the disciple knelt before St. Daniel and said, "For the sake of God, tell me her story, for I have seen that she was a woman." The elder told him her story, that she was from one of the
noble families of Constantinople, and how she surrendered herself to Christ, forsaking the vain glory of this world. Her prayers be with us and Glory be to our God forever. Amen."

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No, I have heard her name but not her story.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   To escape from temptation and from evil situation as she did. Also, I have learnt not to be bothered with the world’s rules, the important thing is to satisfy God first.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   It is a great story. She disguised herself as a man to escape from temptation. She had strong faith which led her to live in the desert.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   Well, try to get closer to God and read and learn more. I should tell the kids in my Sunday School and my friends about her.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Of course.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   Everything like church, in sermons, reading by myself. All methods help.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   Child, when you were a child the stories stick up in your head better and always remember it. The children have an empty brain so many things can be saved in childhood.

F. **Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

1. **Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?**
   [St. Marina] I would have said that I am female. I have nothing to do with this and just leave me alone.

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2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? Well, learn from them and their virtues and then start teaching it to other people. Make everyone aware of the saints’ stories and who they are.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   Of course, they are strong because they have showed us that it does not matter if you are female or male. The females can do what males do. Both got martyred, persecuted. There is a quality in that part.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life.
   Of course, they are strong because they become doctors and engineers and they have high positions.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
   The Coptic churches are very supportive of women, the women become leaders in the church, and they can help in coordination and services inside the church. Their opinion is heard these days, not like before.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Egyptian society is supportive of Coptic women. They let them work and some have high positions. The only thing that it is not supported by Egyptian society is that Coptic women do not wear the veil (Hijab) at all, and it is kind of required in most of Egyptian governmental jobs. So Coptic women are prevented from applying for these kinds of jobs.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   It depends. If you are in a Christian school you can practice Christianity freely; in this kind of school, they pray and talk about God. But If you are in public school you can’t do that, and you have to cover your hair and wear veil (Hijab). One day, there was a Coptic girl in elementary school, she was the only Christian in the class; the teacher dragged her
by her hair and ordered her to cover her hair and the teacher got a pair of scissors and cut the Coptic girl’s hair without getting permission. This was done as a punishment for her because she didn’t cover her hair; this story was on social media.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
Both are recognized, respected and appreciated but we have more resources about men saints than women saints.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
Talk more about their stories- Teach Sunday school kids

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
They are very strong and brave. They are very courageous. They stick up for what they want. They don’t give up easily.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
Teaching kids in Sunday Schools.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
By teaching, each generation teaches the next generation about saints’ stories and their virtues.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
I watch them practicing their religion, how they pray, how they are persistent about reading the bible and giving to the poor and I will do that with my kids too.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving the women’s rights to the Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
Yes, because of all the services for women and they have important positions in the services.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
They put their names in synaxarium and they talk about their stories.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
For everyone who was tortured and martyred for the name of Jesus, so for both groups.

6. Recommendations for church:
The churches just need to talk more about the women’s stories and emphasize their roles.
7. Name our conversation
Act Like a Man and Think Like a Woman.

19- Coptic Women Leaders for the Future
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   • 18- 24
   • 25-34
   • 35-44
   • 45- 54
   • 55-64
   • 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   • America
   • Egypt
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

3. What is your gender?
   • Female
   • Male
   • Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   • American
   • Egyptian
   • African
   • White
   • American/ Egyptian
   • Multiple ethnicity
   • Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   • English
   • Arabic
   • French
   • Italian
   • Coptic
   • Others
6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   • High school
   • College
   • Bachelor’s degree
   • Master’s degree
   • Doctoral degree
   • Others

7. Where were you born?
   • America
   • Egypt
   • Canada
   • Europe
   • Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
   • Orthodox
   • Catholic
   • Protestant
   • Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:
A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are very important because they lived a life filled with tribulations and persecutions; so when I look to my life, I feel like what I have had to deal with in regard to problems and sufferings has been less compared to what the saints had to suffer. They give me an example that I need to be strong and tolerate what life has for me in regard to difficulties and misfortune.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   7

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Sophia and her three daughters- St. Marina- St. Demiana- St. Rita- St. Teresa- St. Verena- St. Rebecca.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Sophia and her daughters Love, Faith and Hope.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Sophia. Can you tell me why?
[St. Sophia and her daughters] because she didn’t deny her faith. She held on to her faith and encouraged her daughters to do the same.

2. **What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?**
   She is originally from Egypt and immigrated to Italy and had three daughters. She raised her daughters in the fear of God and taught them real Christian life. She was preaching about Jesus in Italy. When the emperor Hadrian heard about that, he ordered the soldiers to bring St. Sophia with her daughters to him. He asked her to leave the Christian faith and she refused so the emperor ordered the soldiers to martyr her daughters in front of her eyes and after that she died from sadness after seeing her daughters tortured and martyred.

3. **Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?**
   I love St. Therese. She was born in France. She wasn’t Egyptian. She was preaching about Jesus when she was young. She died at the age 24. There are two churches in Egypt that carried her name — one in Cairo and another one in Asyut. She left wisdom quotes which I like so much and try to follow it. St. Therese went to the monastery when she was little, and she was kind to the poor and took care of their needs. She set up a foundation for people who they have incurred diseases and she served them and gave them love and peace and encouraged them at the end of their lives.

4. **Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?**
   No.

**C. The Tradition of Sainthood:**

1. **What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?**
   Sainthood means to stop committing sins and live a life of righteousness. We have two natures: one that we inherit, and it is evil and the other one that is inside us and that’s a good one. These two natures fight against each other, so we have to overcome our evil nature and guide ourselves in our righteous nature. Also sainthood means to read the bible and go into depths to understand it and live as the bible says with its words and have a good communication with God so you have the fear of God that will prevent you from doing evil things and prohibit you from sinning. God loves sinners but doesn’t love sins. In addition to that, sainthood means chastity and purity.

2. **In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?**
   Female: St. Verena- St. Demiana- St. Sofia- St. Rebecca.
   Male: St. Mina- St. George- Pope Kyrillos- Pope Shenouda.

3. **What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?**
   St. Mary.
4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   St. Mary because she is the mother of Jesus, she is pure. God chose her among all women to come through her. She is a great intercessor for every generation. She was a strong mother and mother of faith even when she saw Jesus on the cross and she wept.

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   In the church, in their feasts; I always see the icons of the saints inside the church that tell us their stories in colors and paints.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:

1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you have heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories? Patience and bear the persecutions that come to me.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   St. Sofia because she had strong faith. She believed in life after death; and in eternal life which is more important than earthly life. Although that she saw her daughters die in front of her eyes, she kept her faith without any doubt.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Very good.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   8

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   By reading books and online websites.

E. Reacting to the story:
   ● I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
      Reading the story...

St. Euphrasia (Eupraxia)
“The Departure of St. Euphrasia (Eupraxia), the virgin:
On the 26th of Baramhat, the blessed St. Euphrasia (Eupraxia) the virgin departed. She was the daughter of a noble family in the city of Rome, who was related to Emperor Honorius. Before her father's departure, he asked the Emperor to care for her. Her mother went to Egypt to collect the revenues and rent of her estates and orchards, which her husband had left her. She took her daughter, who was nine years of age, with her, and they lodged in one of the houses of virgins.
The nuns of that convent were on high degree of asceticism, piety and devoutness, they never ate food with meat, oil, fruits, at no time drank wine and slept on the floor. Eupraxia loved the life in that convent, and she was pleased with the nun that served her. That nun told her: "Promise me that you will not leave this convent"; and she promised her that. When her mother finished her work that she came to achieve, her daughter refused to return with her and she said to her mother: "I have vowed myself to Christ, and I have no need for this world, for my true Bridegroom is the Lord Christ." When her mother knew that, she gave all her money and goods to the poor and needy, and she lived with her daughter in the convent for many years, then departed in peace. When Emperor Honorius heard that, he sent asking for her. She answered back saying that she had vowed herself to the Lord Christ, and she cannot break her covenant. The Emperor marveled at her wisdom and righteousness and allowed her to stay. Eupraxia contended strenuously in the ascetic life, she fasted two days at a time, then three, then four, and afterwards she fasted for a week at a time, and during the Holy Lent she did not eat anything which was cooked. Satan was jealous of her, and he smote her with an illness in her feet, gave her pain for a long time, until God had compassion on her and healed her. God granted her the gift of healing the sick, and she was beloved by all the sisters and the abbess for her humility and obedience to them. One night the abbess saw in a vision crowns which had been prepared, and she asked: "Who are these for?", and she was told: "These crowns for your daughter Eupraxia, she will be coming to us after a short while." The abbess told the nuns of the vision which she had seen and commanded them not to tell Eupraxia about it. When her time came to depart of this world, she fell sick with a slight fever. The abbess and the nuns gathered around St. Eupraxia and asked her to remember them before the Divine Throne, then she departed in peace. Then right after her departure the nun her friend departed, and shortly after, the abbess fell sick, so she gathered the nuns and told them: "Choose whom will be abbess over you, for I am going to the Lord." When they came on the following morning to visit her, they found that she had departed. May their prayers be with us. Amen.”

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   She went to the monastery when she was nine years old, so Christianity and ascetic life can begin at any age.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   Very powerful story.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   To teach the kids the religious life, let them practice fasting a few hours in a day when they are young so they can grow up practicing the ascetic life.

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6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint? Yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods? By going to church and listening to the sermons and continuing to read so I can know more details about the saints because the church doesn’t cover all the details and information about the saints.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman? Child, because education received in childhood will last long and create the personality of the person.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:
1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it? [St. Sophia] I would act like her and give my daughters to martyrdom to earn heaven for them and for me.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church? I’ll narrow the saints’ stories to my friends and to my family. Also, I’ll help the poor.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:
1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that? There were very strong because they didn’t fear death and they believed that life with Jesus after death was more valuable.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that? Give me an example from real life. Not all of them but some of them keep teaching about Christianity. Some of the women serve in the church and give their time to God and help people. Also, some of the women have an important role in society nowadays.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women? Support: The church praises some women who have a great role in the church and mention their names and encourage women to serve in the church. Not support: Nothing.
4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Support: Nothing
   Not support: Then Coptic women don’t have the right to talk about Christianity and Jesus in public nor preach about it.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No, they don’t have the freedom to practice their religion, but they force society to accept their religion, their practices and their prayers. For instance, in Upper Egypt, there is a lot of persecution of the Copts and the Copts have never stopped going to church to attend the liturgies.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   No, they don’t have equality. The men saints usually were priests, but women weren’t, therefore the men saints are more well-known than the women saints.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   To increase the awareness between people; as the man can lead, woman also can lead too. They both have the same brain and the same organs.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
   Generous- good listener- woman of prayer.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
   Serving and teaching.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   This is done by the mothers at home by teaching their children the Christian principles and the need for prayer. Also, the parents should act wisely in front of their children and they have to be a good model, so the children act like them- Reading the bible every day which is the constitution of our life- Memorize the verses and psalms in the bible.
2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
   My parents used to take me to church, and they let me participate in some Christian retreats which helped to increase the information and practice of spiritual activities.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
   Yes, the Coptic church gives the women their rights because the church doesn’t differentiate between men and women; all are equal. The church follows the bible instructions which confirmed the equality of men and women since Adam and Eve.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
   The church honors the saints by mentioning their names in the liturgies and on their feasts. The church talks about saints in their sermons and in Sunday School.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
   The modern saints are more honored than the former ones.

6. Recommendations for church:
   For church: I advise the servants in Sunday school to take care of the children. Contact the children when they are absent by calling them or visiting them. Give the children some gifts when they act well or memorize some parts of the bible; keep encouraging the children because they are the future of the Coptic Church- Try to attract the youth to the church by holding interesting meetings for them and spiritual activities.
   For family: Have good communication between parents and children, let the children talk and express their opinions and the parents listen, make conversations and discussions so the children can learn from the discussions.

7. Name our conversation:
   Coptic Women Leaders for the Future.

20- The Golden Gate to the Coptic Church
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   • 18-24
   • 25-34
   • 35-44
   • 45-54
   • 55-64
   • 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
   • America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

3. What is your gender?
• Female
• Male
• Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
• American
• Egyptian
• African
• White
• American/Egyptian
• Multiple ethnicity
• Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
• English
• Arabic
• French
• Italian
• Coptic
• Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
• High school
• College
• Bachelor’s degree
• Master’s degree
• Doctoral degree
• Others

7. Where are you born?
• America
• Egypt
• Canada
• Europe
• Others

8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:

1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   It is very important; for me I feel like saints are as important as my cellphone. Calling 911 and asking for help through my cellphone is exactly the same concept as asking the saints for Jesus’ help in my hard time/emergency.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   From 7 to 11.

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Mary the Egyptian/ St. Saint Demiana and the 40 Virgins/ St. Ilaria the daughter of King Zeno/ St. Rebecca and her five children.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Rebecca and her five children.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:

1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Rebecca. Can you tell me why?
   [St. Rebecca and her five children] St. Rebecca witnessed each of her children being tortured and killed, the youngest was slaughtered on her knees. I have no idea how she could control her motherly instinct! In my opinion St. Rebecca must be the real "Wonder Woman"!!

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint, can you tell me her story?
   St. Rebecca was a widower who brought up her children in the fear of God. She lived in a village near Luxor, in Upper Egypt. When Emperor Diocletian waged persecution against the Christians, St. Rebecca strengthened her children to withstand torture and suffering for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. St. Rebecca witnessed each of her children being tortured and killed, the youngest of which was slaughtered while on her knees; finally, she, was likewise beheaded. Today their bodies lie in the Church dedicated to St. Rebecca and her children in Sonbat in Egypt.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   Me personally I don't have any stories to share.
4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint? I usually ask for the help of the Virgin Mary the mother of Christ whenever I'm experiencing a hard time since she is the real and true mother, "the second Eve." She either solves the problem or gives me the strength and comfort to handle and pass this hard time.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:

1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   It means a lot; I believe from my own perspective the tradition of Sainthood is to be considered as the continuity of the book of Acts of the New Testament.

2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
   Coptic Male: St George / Coptic
   Female: St. Saint Demiana and the 40 Virgins.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   I think all of them are equally important

4. You said that _____ is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   All of them are equally important

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   I hear the stories of the female Egyptians (Coptic) during the Liturgy every Sunday. Before the reading of the Bible the priest usually reads the Synaxarium which tells us about the stories of the saints of the Coptic church from the very early first Century.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:

1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   I have learned that the real value of the woman is not coming either from her beauty, body or the powerful positions; the real value of the human beings comes from knowing that we have been created in the image of God. "So God created mankind in his own image,” - Genesis 1:27.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   Female saints- Virgin Mary the mother of Jesus Christ - she had no leading position in the early church, yet she is the most powerful Woman in the entire Bible as " the mother of God -Theotokos"
3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Very good.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   7

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   Spiritual knowledge usually comes from a relationship more than a dry knowledge, so I'm trying to follow the same path of praying, service and purity and by doing that I may grow/understand more about the Coptic saints.

E. Reacting to the story:
   ● I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
   Reading the story...

The Departure of St. Theopista:
“On the 20th of Tout, we commemorate the departure of St. Theopista. She was married and had a son. Her husband died while she was still young. She took it upon herself to become a nun. She started to practice the spiritual life. She persisted in fasting and continual prayers and worshipping day and night. She went to the holy father Abba Macarius, bishop of Nekios. She bowed to him, took his blessings, then she asked him to pray on her and put on her the garb of monasticism. The bishop advised her to try for a year and he promised her that he would put on her the garb of monasticism after that year. She went to her house and shut herself in a small room. She closed its door and made a small opening in it. Her son, who was then 12 years old, was taking care of her needs. She embarked on strenuous worship with asceticism and devotion. The year elapsed, and the bishop had forgotten that he had promised this saint that he would put on her the garb of monasticism. He saw her in his sleep in a shining figure, telling him, "My father, how did you forget me till now, and I am passing away tonight?" The father the bishop saw that as if he was awake, he prayed on her the prayer for ordaining monks, and put on her the garb of monasticism. When he did not find a Kalansowa (cover for the head), he took off his own and put it on her head. Then he put on her the holy Eskeem. He asked his disciple for another Kalansowa and put it on. She had a silver cross in her hand which she gave to him saying, "Accept this from your disciple." And it was said that when he awakened, he found the cross in his hand and he looked attentively at the cross which was beautifully made. He was amazed and glorified God. Early in the morning he went with his disciple to the house of this blessed woman. Her son received him crying with tears. When he asked him why he was crying, he replied saying, "My mother called me in the middle of the night and bid me farewell and told me whatever the bishop tells you, do and do not break it. I will depart this night to go to the Lord Christ. She prayed over me and advised me, saying, 'Keep all that I commanded you and do not disobey our father, the bishop, and here now I am in your hands.'" The bishop came to where the saint was lying and knocked on the door, but she did not answer. He said, "This blessed saint had departed indeed," and he ordered his disciple to open the door. When the bishop entered, he found that she had given up her soul. She had on the Eskeem that he had put on her in his vision
and also the Kalansowa that he had on. His eyes were filled with tears. He praised and glorified God who works out the satisfaction of His saints. The bishop shrouded her as was the habit of the monks and called the priests who carried her to the holy church and prayed over her with great honor. 29 There was in the city a paralytic infidel man, suffering from evil spirits. When he heard the chanting of the priests, he asked his people to carry him and take him where the body of the saint was. When they brought him to the church, he drew near to the holy body with faith and he was cured instantly. The devil came out of him, and he became well. He and his people believed in the Lord Christ and the bishop baptized them. And everyone who had a disease, or a deformity would come to the church and touch the holy body and would be healed immediately. When the governor heard about these wonders, he and most of the city believed in the Lord Christ. He came to the church, carried the body and buried it with honor. Glory be to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and His good Father and the Holy Spirit, forever. Amen.”

1. Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?
   No.

2. (Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?

3. (No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?
   People can forget but God never forget. God is always on time.

4. How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story
   I feel it is a typical Coptic saint story where the love of Christ is the main driving factor.

5. How can you apply this story to your practical life?
   I'm doing my best to control my senses to keep my heart pure and clear.

6. Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?
   Yes.

7. Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?
   Reading in books is my favorite method to increase my knowledge.

8. Would you want to know about this saint when you were child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?
   Child.

F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:

1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of

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444
this woman saint. What would be your reaction toward this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?

[St. Rebecca] Well I'm not going to lie, if I'm in the same situation as St. Rebecca., I will first be praying for God’s help and waiting for his help to save me and my kids but once one of my kids is tortured I will be more like blaming God " How would you do that to me and I'm faithful to you trying not to deny you?.. " ..then I hope God would give me some strength as he supported Jesus on the Cross also give me some comfort, acceptance and hope that we will meet together again as one family in heaven……please consider what I just said is from my theoretical stand point but at the time of Tribulations the real heart / faith will be revealed.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?
To love God from my heart and then love people around me as myself.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
It depends on your definition of strong; I can say that they are strong in their personality and in their faith.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
Give me an example from real life.
Not all of them but most of them because the environment around them puts a pressure to make them strong enough to survive.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?
I think the Coptic church supports women in their marriage and try to help women to solve their marital problems.
Not support: the Coptic community doesn’t listen to women’s voices and doesn’t let them speak up and have their opinions.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?
Support: the American Society lets women choose whatever they want – from choosing their husband to choosing their education. Also, it lets women vote. Due to diversity in the U.S., the society gives women the freedom of choice to be happy and the opportunity to achieve success.
Not support: the American society doesn’t differentiate between Muslims and Christians when it comes to knowing someone from the Middle East. It is not clear to Americans that there is a minority group in the Middle East who are Christians and Copts. Also, American society has some bias towards some nations.

445
5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?
   Support: I can’t find something positive for supporting the women
   Not support: the Egyptian society doesn’t give the women their right to speak up. The government is Muslim, so the women are submissive to men. The Egyptian women can’t lead but they are followers. The society can’t see women as valuable humans. The Egyptian girls can’t choose her husbands, usually they have to accept the arranged marriage from the families. They can’t travel by themselves or get higher education. Society sees that the important thing for women is to get married and have kids.

6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
   Yes.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
   No.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
   Yes, the church follows the same celebration process/ prayers for either men or women on commemoration day.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
   By respecting women and having discussions with women that let them express their opinions and let their voices be heard.

10. What do you know about the characteristics or traits of Egyptian Coptic Women?
    Sensitive- empathy- caring- tolerance- integrity- elegance- politeness- intelligence- Power- faith and gratitude.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
    Her main role is to serve in the church in Sunday School, but Coptic women can’t participate in making holy bread (Orban) for communion; they can’t be deaconess in the church of Egypt.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
   I believe the empowerment of Coptic women is very important and it doesn't have to be limited to leadership only. - For example, as I mentioned before the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, is the most high-ranked saint in the Coptic church, yet she hasn't written any of the Gospel!! although she was the closest person to Jesus Christ as “his mother.” The empowerment of Coptic women can be achieved through one of the
following ways: for example, they should transfer/ carry the value of faith through teaching and prayers to next generation of Coptic women.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
I believe by seeing them as a role models and to mimic what they do / their lifestyle. I will follow the same path to give it to the next generation "focusing on myself to be a role model for my kids.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
Yes, for example during Children Baptism both the father (Male) and mother (Female) play equal roles during the baptism prayers. Also, in many parts of the liturgy on Sundays, some parts of the prayer’s response are dedicated to "people" which includes both males and females with no separation by sex.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
As mentioned before in one of the previous answers, the church recognizes the commemoration day for the saint during the reading of the Synaxarion during Liturgy.

5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups?
Both groups

6. Recommendations for church or families:
Pay more attention to Sunday School and kids’ needs (Psychological). Include more courses in Sunday School about the Coptic Christian women saints. Includes more courses about premarital relationship to help achieve equality which will lead to successful marriage.

7. Name our conversation:
The Golden Gate to the Coptic Church

21- The Christian Dialogue
Demographics: Please highlight the answer of the demographic part.
1. Which of the following categories describes your age?
   - 18- 24
   - 25-34
   - 35-44
   - 45- 54
   - 55-64
   - 65 or older

2. Where do you live?
3. What is your gender?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   - American
   - Egyptian
   - African
   - White
   - American/Egyptian
   - Multiple ethnicity
   - Others

5. What is the primary language you speak?
   - English
   - Arabic
   - French
   - Italian
   - Coptic
   - Others

6. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   - High school
   - College
   - Bachelor’s degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Doctoral degree
   - Others

7. Where were you born?
   - America
   - Egypt
   - Canada
   - Europe
   - Others
8. Which part of Christianity do you belong to?
- Orthodox
- Catholic
- Protestant
- Others

Questions for interviewing the participants:

A. Importance of Coptic Saints:
1. How important are the saints to you as a Coptic Christian?
   They are important because we are acting like them in life. We ask for their prayers and for their intercessions.

2. How many female Coptic saints are you aware of?
   3

3. List some of the Coptic women saints?
   St. Mary- St. Demiana- St. Rebecca.

4. Who is the female Coptic saint that you relate to the most?
   St. Demiana.

B. The Coptic Saints you are related to:
1. You said that the female Coptic saint you relate to most is St. Demiana. Can you tell me why?
   St. Demiana because I live in front of St. Demiana’s Church. St. Demiana is the intercessor for my family. I was baptized in St. Demiana church.

2. What kind of stories do you remember about this female Coptic saint; can you tell me her story?
   St. Demiana is a saint. She was martyred with forty virgins. We have a big monastery for girls under the name of St. Demiana. Also, she was mentioned in synaxarium. In addition to that she encouraged her father not to leave his faith until death.

3. Do you have any favorite stories or miracles about any of female Coptic saints?
   No.

4. Do you have experience with any female saints through your prayers or through something that has happened in your life, including the effect of this saint?
   I always ask St. Demiana to bless me and my family and protect my family from any danger. I ask her to give us peace in the house.

C. The Tradition of Sainthood:
1. What does the tradition of sainthood mean to you?
   Sainthood means to me; Chastity- the strong relationship between the person and God- love the others as yourself.
2. In general, who are the most important Coptic male and female saints in the Coptic tradition?
   Women: St. Mary- St. Demiana- St. Rebecca.

3. What female Coptic saint do you think is the most important to you in the Coptic tradition?
   St. Mary.

4. You said that St. Mary is the female Coptic saint who is most important to the Coptic tradition. Can you tell me why?
   St. Mary because she is the mother of God (Theotokos).

5. How often do you hear stories of female Egyptian saints in church? When?
   All the time through the synaxarium and when the priests talk about them on the feasts.

D. Connecting with Coptic Saints in your childhood:
1. Think about your childhood up until now and take your time. From the stories and lessons you’ve heard about Coptic female saints, what do you think you have learned about womanhood and femininity from saints’ stories?
   The person should always pray to God. Also, I have learnt not to give up and abandon the Christian faith- Tolerate the tortures and persecutions with joy to earn the kingdom of heaven.

2. Have you ever taken any of the male or female saints as your role model for yourself? Why did you choose this particular saint?
   St. George because he’s very fast to answer any prayers.

3. How do you believe your knowledge is about Coptic female saints?
   Intermediate.

4. On a scale from 1 to 10 (10 being the most knowledgeable), how do you evaluate your knowledge?
   7

5. How would you keep building your spiritual knowledge and raise your understanding of Coptic saints?
   By reading and listen to the church sermons.

E. Reacting to the story:
- I’d like to read you a story about an Egyptian Coptic Woman Saint, and you tell me your observation:
  Reading the story...

Eugenia of Alexandria:
“The story of Eugenia evolved into a fantastic martyr legend. However, the mosaic was formed from historical pieces of an earlier woman.

Eugenia was the daughter of Philip, proconsul of Egypt under Commodus from 180 to 192 C.E. She was raised in a pagan Roman family but privately began to follow the Christian way. Eugenia rejected an arranged marriage to Aquilinus, a man of high standing but not a follower of the Way. Before another suitable marriage could be arranged, Eugenia and two of her fellow students met a monastic community of men and decided to join.

Disguised as a man, Eugenia entered the community and quietly began to live the monastic life. Eventually elected abbot, she reluctantly accepted the office and made a little cell for herself by the side door of the monastery that she might remain in it continually. She protected her desire for silence and solitude while serving as spiritual elder for the brethren.

It is recorded that Eugenia was martyred in Rome around 257 C.E., during the reign of Valerian and Gallienus.”

1. **Have you ever heard of this woman Saint?**
   No.

2. **(Yes): Did you learn about this saint from your family, or through your readings or via your church or other methods?**

3. **(No): What lessons do you think you can learn from this story?**
   Not to marry a non-Christian person.

4. **How do you feel about the story? Comment on her story**
   She knew God from the bottom of her heart- She made a little cell for herself to keep her solitude. She was elected as abbot, which meant she was very good at leading others.

5. **How can you apply this story to your practical life?**
   Try to acquire her virtues and apply them to my life.

6. **Do you think it would be valuable to learn more in-depth about this woman saint?**
   Yes.

7. **Would you like to know more about the story via church or reading or other methods?**
   Via church & synaxarium.

8. **Would you want to know about this saint when you were a child, adolescent, adult or elder woman?**
   In all ages.

**F. Applying Coptic Saints to your own life:**

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1. Imagine that you lived in the same era of the woman saint that you have picked at the beginning of our conversation (back to Q: B1) and being in the same situation of this woman saint. What would be your reaction towards this situation? How were you going to face it? How were you going to handle it?

   St. Demiana, if I were at her position, I would act like her. Being Christian and following the biblical life doesn’t depend on the time nor age.

2. From the perspective of women saints’ lives and their stories, how can you apply the virtues of the female Coptic saints to your life now and to your community around you including friends, family and your church?

   Virtues are not inherited but acquired; so I will try my best to acquire the virtues of saints and apply them to my life by being humble and loving others and praying to God continuously.

G. Women’s position in Coptic, American and Egyptian society today:

1. Do you feel that the Coptic Women Saints are strong enough or not? Why do you think that?
   
   They were very strong because they knew God and the faith which helped them to stick by the Christian faith.

2. Do you believe that Coptic Women nowadays are strong? Why do you think that?
   Give me an example from real life.
   
   Some of them are strong but not all of them. Examples my Mam was, and my daughter is very strong. They faced some persecutions and they have overcome them.

3. In what ways do you see Coptic Community supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Coptic society NOT supporting Coptic women?

   Support: by giving women the right to pray in the church, take communion, go to confession and get baptized.
   
   No support: I don’t see anything that the Coptic community isn’t supporting the Coptic women.

4. In what ways do you see American society supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the American society in general NOT supporting Coptic women?

   Support: American Society gives women freedom which was being abused by women.
   Not support:

5. In what ways do you see Egyptian society in Egypt supporting Coptic women and in what ways do you see the Egyptian society in Egypt NOT supporting Coptic women?

   Support: By giving the Egyptian woman the freedom to choose what is suitable for her family’s growth.
   Not support: Don’t allow women to get divorced as a Christian woman, it has to be through church first then through the government.
6. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in the USA?
Not really because only a few members of the Coptic churches across the USA.

7. Do you feel that Coptic women have the freedom to practice their beliefs and their worship freely in Egypt?
Yes, because the women can go to the churches. There are a lot of churches in Egypt. There are a lot of priests and bishops. The churches in Egypt have active roles spreading the Christian teachings between Copts which has a great influence on the Copts’ life.

8. From the perspective of equality, do you think that Coptic Women Saints have equality in comparison with Coptic Men Saints? Explain.
Yes, the saints of men and women have equality.

9. How can we bring about equality between men and women in our Coptic Church?
Both women and men are equal in Coptic church because this is the teaching of Christianity. Both of them have the same faith and the same relationship with God.

10. What do you know about the characteristics of Egyptian Coptic Women?
The Coptic woman is obedient, a servant, beloved and loves others, is silent and keeps her secrets. She has a strong relationship with her husband and her family; she does well as a caregiver and takes care of everyone in the family and friends.

11. What is the role of Coptic women in the church?
Teaching in Sunday School. She can guide and advise other women.

H. Coptic women in the future:
1. From your opinion how can you help in transferring the empowerment of Coptic women from generation to generation?
By coaching the new generation.

2. How did you inherit your strong personality and strong faith from your parents and how are you going to give it to the next generation?
My parents used to take me to the church to pray, they teach me to be away from the sins and follow God’s way. My parents were praying with me every night before going to bed.

3. Do you consider that the Coptic Church is giving women’s rights to Coptic Women? Explain to me how?
Yes, by letting her take communion and pray at the church which is not done by some other religions that do not respect women.

4. How do you see the church honor their Coptic Women Saints?
By building the churches with saints’ names. The church mentions the female saints in synaxarium and establishes liturgies to celebrate their feasts.

453
5. Do you think that the female Coptic saints are being honored only for the historical, old women saints or the Coptic women saints and martyrs of today or both groups? Both.

6. Recommendations for church:
The priests and preachers should have training before ordination and before starting their service in preaching. They should have a degree in theology or religious studies before ordination and before starting the preaching service because some of them do not have wisdom and mislead the congregation.

7. Name our conversation: