

Online Coptic Theology: A Comparison between French and British Websites

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This study addresses the question of the role the Internet plays in the religious life of Coptic Christians living in Europe. It does so by analysing websites created and administered by communities located in Great Britain and France and by adopting a particular angle: the transmission of textual traditions. My research is part of a collective project dealing with textual practices of Oriental Orthodox Christians in Europe since the 1970s.¹ I am interested in understanding which role the internet plays in the transmission of religious texts besides the usual printed material that is still circulating abundantly. Another question touches on the impact digitization has on the production and reception of those texts. I am also looking at content produced especially to be displayed online, what could be called screen texts.² We can indeed divide the texts we find online into different categories which partially overlap: we encounter translations and original productions, and we can also distinguish between screen-texts and book PDF's or eBooks, which can be original content or translations. I will argue that the translation process generates tensions in Coptic communities, anxious about the potential alteration of the "chain of transmission"³ linking them to their past. One of the greatest challenges of religious diasporas is to rebuild a robust chain linking them to their roots, but that would fit at the same time their new environment of living. The internet completely changes the situation regarding text transmission and production. There are two important constraints linked to this new situation: first, websites ask for new kinds of texts to be written and displayed to fill in the rubrics typical of the architecture of this digital media. Second, the potential audience totally changes: those textual productions can potentially be read by anyone interested. Many of those screen-texts are also directed at a virtual audience of outsiders and are thus also a kind of justification of the Coptic faith and tradition.

1 ERC, *Rewriting Global Orthodoxy. Oriental Christianity in Europe between 1970 and 2020*. The project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 834441 GlobalOrthodoxy).

2 A term coined in French by Souchier who speaks about « écrit d'écran », see Emmanuël Souchier, "L'écrit d'écran. Pratiques d'écriture et informatique," *Communication et langages* 107 (1996): 105–119.

3 See Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *La religion pour mémoire* (Paris: Cerf, 1993).

Copts and new media

Many studies have addressed what has been called “digital religion,” which is now fully part of the experience of most believers worldwide.⁴ As scholars in this field have shown, the internet has an impact on the way people appropriate religious knowledge, on the concept of authorship but also, and probably more crucially, on relations of authority within religious groups. If the internet allows for a quick and massive diffusion of authoritative versions of orthodoxy, whatever is considered as such, the same is true for the many counter-discourses easily accessible to anyone interested in them. The internet has been described by Olivier Roy and other authors as an instrument of deterritorialisation and deculturation of religion – even one of de-ethnicisation. Religious messages tend to lose their distinct cultural features as they adapt to global trends such as individualism, and they are increasingly separated from their cultural matrix, often rejected as superstitions.⁵ Those messages also tend to circulate without considering physical or political boundaries. Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity are now globalised. Copts are no exception to this, with faithful living all around the globe, mainly in North America and Australia, as well as in the Persian Gulf and Europe.⁶

Coptic diasporas communicate in Arabic with their historical centre in Egypt, but Arabic is also used between the diaspora communities, though increasingly English is being used. Coptic webpages do refer to other Coptic sites, and more broadly to other Christian websites, created in other countries, even on other continents. Coptic diasporas around the world are thus in contact with each other. Digital practices of Copts have been the object of a certain number of studies, mostly focusing on Coptic activism, that is, the activity of lobbying the American Congress to influence its stance towards Egypt and the way the country treats its minorities.⁷ Other studies have addressed the role of satellite channels

4 See among others, Wendi Bellar, Heidi Campbell (eds.), *Digital Religion: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2022); Heidi Campbell (ed.), *Religion and the Internet. Critical Concepts in Religious Studies* (London: Routledge, 2018).

5 Olivier Roy, *La sainte ignorance* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

6 Among other research, see Michael Akladios, “Heteroglossia: Interpretation and the Experiences of Coptic Immigrants from Egypt in North America, 1955–1975,” *Social History* 106 (2020): 627–650; Benjamin Daniel Crace, *Pneumatic piety: a sociotheological study of the Coptic orthodox diaspora in Kuwait* (PhD, diss., University of Birmingham, 2018); Matija Milicic, “The Coptic Orthodox Church in the Netherlands,” *Egypt Migrations* (July 30, 2021), online: <https://egyptmigrations.com/tag/copts-in-the-netherlands/>, and Matija Milicic, “Preserving, Adapting and Self-inscribing: The Case of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Italy (2 parts),” *Egypt Migrations* (March 11 & 18, 2022); Nora Stene, “The Challenge of the Diaspora as Reflected in a Coptic Sunday School,” *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 1 (2002): 77–89.

7 Elizabeth Iskander, *Sectarian Conflict in Egypt Coptic Media, Identity and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2011); Donald Westbrook, Michael Saad, “Religious Identity and Borderless Territorial-

and, more broadly, new media, which have developed primarily in Australia and North America, where communities have founded TV channels, printing houses and even seminaries to train their clergy.⁸ Other investigations have shown the importance of the Internet in connecting sometimes very small groups scattered all around the globe.⁹ However, no studies have really attempted to address the religious content of those websites and the effects of the translation and circulation process of religious texts and ideas.

Online content circulates, is borrowed, copied, and reinterpreted by believers, who will probably never meet in person. This is, of course, not totally new, as people, books, and ideas have been circulating for a long time, at least since the 1960s.¹⁰ For example, one famous “traveller” was Bishop Samuel (1920-1980), who used to visit diasporas worldwide during the 1960s and 1970s. He was, for instance, used to celebrate a religious service two or three times a year during the 1970s in Switzerland, a country he had to visit regularly due to his participation in the World Council of Churches in Geneva.¹¹ Many monks and priests were sent to serve Coptic communities around the world, and Copts living in the diaspora increasingly felt confident enough to express their opinions publicly and even to try to intervene in their country of origin’s affairs.¹² This trend of internationalization has now reached new dimensions. From approximately 2004, since the access to the internet generalized in Egypt, Copts outside Egypt have been able to comment on the country’s situation. They did so in 2009, when during the infamous episode of the “swine-flu” all pigs were killed. While the Church and most Coptic elite members were publicly supporting the decision, Copts in the diaspora were criticizing it as persecution against Christians.¹³ Social media and YouTube increased those distant interactions. YouTube allowed certain Coptic preachers to gain inter-

ity in the Coptic e-Diaspora,” *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 18, no. 1 (2017): 341–351; Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, “Digital diasporas and governance in semi-authoritarian states: the case of the Egyptian Copts,” *Public Administration and Development* 25 (2005): 193–204.

8 See Febe Armanios, *Satellite Ministries: The Rise of Christian Television in the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

9 See for example Heleen Murre-van den Berg, “Voice of the East: The Transnational Messenger of the Assyrian Church of the East,” in Mirella Cassarino et al, *Diaspore nel vicino oriente. Melodie Ebraiche in Benedetto Marcello* (Milan: Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 2022), 59–89.

10 Earlier, the circulation was more unilateral, with textual productions entering the Middle East through Christian missions.

11 <https://egliscopte.ch/eglise-copte-orthodoxe-en-suisse-romande/>, accessed September 2022.

12 Here I refer above all to the activity of Coptic lobbying. See Nadia Marzouki, “The U.S. Coptic Diaspora and the Limit of Polarization,” *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 14, no. 3 (2016): 261–276; Grégoire Delhaye, “La réponse des états à la dissidence diasporique. Le cas de l’Egypte face au militantisme copte aux États-Unis,” in *Loin des yeux, près du cœur, les États et leurs expatriés*, eds. Stéphane Dufois, Carine Guerassimoff, Anne de Tinguy (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2010), 323–342.

13 See Iskander, *Sectarian*, 150.

national fame, which led some of them to undertake speaking tours around the world. Daoud Lamei is one interesting example of those itinerant preachers, and it is probably no coincidence that he is also an ardent promoter and organiser of Coptic missions abroad. Lamei has, for example, 304k (on 12-09-2022) followers on his YouTube page. He preaches in Arabic and English, and he is present on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Soundcloud. Lamei also published numerous books, the PDFs of which can be found on Coptic websites. To give a striking example of his fame, one London church that offers access to videotaped sermons presents material from only three preachers: the current pope, the late one, and Daoud Lamei.¹⁴ Another example of the role of the Internet as an amplifier of fame and outreach is the members of the “charismatic trend,” with priests like Abuna Samaan (1941–2023) and Abuna Makari (1934–2022), both linked to Egyptian and foreign Charismatic Evangelical movements. Their discourses and exorcisms were broadcast through satellite channels like SAT7 and others, and they themselves circulated outside their country to participate in religious meetings.¹⁵

Coptic diasporas between Egypt and World Christianity

This internationalisation of the Coptic Church generates tensions between its Egyptian ethnical dimension and the will to reach out to other Christians, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Still, this tension can also be seen in diasporic groups caught between their socialisation as church members and in their host societies. A typical case of this tension is the integration of Copts’ spouses who are most of the time Catholic or Protestants and sometimes feel excluded from the community for not being Egyptian.¹⁶ Religious communities in the diaspora greatly value their particularism, and this is certainly true for Orthodox Christians for whom preserving the ties to their historical roots is so important. These traditions have lot in common with other Christian denominations; however, their differences are real and have effects on the way Copts articulate the idiosyncratic and universalist aspects of their religious practices. Nonetheless, in the diasporic context, Copts need to build ties to other Christian churches. In the first moments

14 Saint Mary & Saint John, East London, <https://www.smasg.org.uk/videos>, accessed 15 September 2022.

15 Those priests were influenced by foreign and local Evangelical missionaries and are often criticized by high clergy members for being too Protestant. On this trend, see Gaétan du Roy, “Father Samaan and the Charismatic trend within the Coptic church,” in *Copts in Context. Negotiating Identity, Tradition, and Modernity*, ed. Nelly van-Doorn-Harder (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 2017), 66–79.

16 As shown by Rachel Loewen, “Strategies of Adaptation and Survival: The Introduction of Converts to the Coptic Orthodox Community in the Greater Toronto Area,” in *Copts in Context*, 124–133.

of their implantation in a new country, they generally needed to be supported by a 'broker church', that is a local church well established in the host society and able to provide or rent buildings for worship and gatherings, and to play the intermediary with state authorities. Copts are also willing to build alliances with other Orthodox (Oriental or Eastern) for the sake of ecumenism because they feel they belong to the same branch of Christianity, or sometimes more prosaically to obtain the organisation of religious courses in schools (when the state offers this possibility). These websites provide an excellent starting point to further explore the tensions between ethnicity and religion, between local and global dimensions of the life of Coptic diasporas.

The study of these websites allows us to follow the multiple connections linking local parishes to distant parishes, institutions, and individuals around the globe. It is also a way to show the limits of Roy's deculturation theory. Any diasporic group needs some sort of emplacement in their places of living. As David Garbin has shown in his ethnography of African Pentecostal churches in the UK, those groups make conscious efforts to anchor themselves in their local contexts of living, even when their discourse is clearly geared toward internationalisation and mission.¹⁷ Copts, too, try to carve a place for themselves in diasporic lands, articulating the various scales of their belongings in different ways. I will show in this paper how the Internet plays a role in that process.

The two cases considered involve three languages, French, English and Arabic, with very different influences and outreach capacities. One could assume that the English diaspora is more internationalised than the latter, as it can rely on the experience of the two largest diasporas, the North American and the Australian, which virtually provide them with all kinds of texts already translated and ready for use. Secondly, the choice of national websites allows for a combination of online and offline observations. This paper will mainly propose an exploration of online content, but it will be complemented with the results of fieldwork among Coptic communities in France.

In this contribution, I will propose reading these internet websites through the prism of tradition, its preservation and reinvention. Indeed, as could be expected, Coptic communities need, at the same time, to preserve what they perceive as their heritage and to adapt it to the contexts in which they live. I will thus propose to review some themes that will organise the comparison. The first one

¹⁷ David Garbin, "The Visibility and Invisibility of Migrant Faith in the City: Diaspora Religion and the Politics of Emplacement of Afro-Christian Churches," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 39,5 (2013): 677–696.

will address the general organisation of those websites: which categories are proposed? Which are those common to different web pages, and which are those differing? I will also suggest some explanations about the organization of the French and UK/Irish diasporas to contextualise my findings. The second part will propose a reading of the classical “who are we?” or “what is the Coptic church?” rubric to investigate if there is any recurring self-definition of the Coptic Church displayed online to the larger public. The third will offer a closer look at the texts downloadable on these websites. Along the way, I will pay close attention to the links to other websites and the connections to other contexts.

General presentation of the British and French churches and their websites

The websites I investigate in this paper can be described as institutional. Most of them are direct emanations of parishes or dioceses. It is, however, impossible to study them without considering the rich ecosystem of media that is fully part of Copts’ lives: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and smartphones are intrinsic to today’s religious life and have a real impact on it. For example, many parishioners are now used to following the liturgy on the small screens of their phones or on the larger ones displayed in most churches, which helps them to keep up with the complex liturgy in different languages. Some faithful also participate with “likes” and other emoticons in a celebration broadcast live on Facebook. This chapter will nonetheless focus on websites, even if some other media will be mentioned.

General description

Almost all websites offer a basic presentation of the Coptic church and often one of their local community. When it comes to churches or dioceses’ websites, most of them address practical matters like the localization of the parish, the schedule of services and a presentation of the church’s priests. In brief, they are at the heart of everyday religious practices and give access to indispensable information to organize a communal life. Many parishes’ websites propose tools to find one’s way in the liturgical calendar (an online version of the *Synaxar* is often accessible online, as well as a daily biblical reading) and in the complex Coptic liturgy, by giving access to liturgical books in pdf, calendars of feasts and fasts, or by proposing links to internet apps, which have the advantage of giving access to corpora that would have otherwise necessitated carrying several heavy books. These tools help the believers to find their way in the religious space-time. When and how to pray? With which texts and hymns? When and how to fast?, are some of the questions to which those sites try to provide an answer.

Websites also display discourses on more specific topics, addressing questions related to personal behaviours and morality, usually sermons or piety-oriented discourses. Those are presented in a written form, or as audio recordings and videos. Most churches also have a YouTube channel to present their own video production or to share content of interest to their parishioners. Some sites have a page giving the latest news, and including spiritual thoughts, and reactions to important events. Many churches in the UK, for instance, reacted to the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The diocese of the Midlands, like other Coptic sites, conveyed its condolences to the royal family and to the country on its homepage in the days following the announcement.¹⁸

All those internet pages propose a way to get in touch with them, but none give access to direct possibilities of reacting to the online content, like an open forum. This possibility is, of course, offered by FB pages and other social media, even if they can be restricted on certain occasions, notably when there is an ongoing internal conflict in one community.

French and British churches and their websites

Many websites, particularly those belonging to dioceses, deliver information and give access to links to the diverse “satellite” associations, dedicated to religious outreach, youth activities – like scouting groups or sports competitions – and to diverse charities related to the parish. In this regard, examining these parallel associations provides some insight into the level of activity of Coptic communities in various locations. If we have a look at the Bishopric of Paris and the North of France, we can see a link to a project targeting poor Copts in Egypt and to another called “Coptic Maraude”¹⁹ (in English in the text), dedicated to helping homeless people in France. These social services clearly raise the question of the Copts’ relationship with their country of origin and their host country.

Compared to Paris, the internet page of the London diocese displays much more information on its activities: youth activities – religious and sportive – charities (another “maraude” called “Coptic City Mission”²⁰). There is also an “Art and Film Award,” football tournaments and a “Joint Youth Committee” meant to “provide joint spiritual and social service for Coptic youth at a general level through the coordination of the efforts of youth servants nationally, and along-

¹⁸ <https://ukmidcopts.org/>, on their first page, accessed 9 September 2022.

¹⁹ In French, Maraude refers to wandering through the streets to find homeless persons and help them; see https://www.instagram.com/coptic_maraude/ (accessed 10 June 2025).

²⁰ <https://copticcitymission.com/>, accessed 5 May 2023.

side each church's localised service.”²¹ Thus, the London diocese seems far more active than the Paris one. Parish activities are generally local and may not be listed on websites that are not intended to provide a comprehensive account of what parishioners do daily. The coordination level and initiatives depend largely on the bishops' actions and personalities.²² Indeed, Angaelos, London's Archbishop, is a prominent and hyperactive member of the Coptic church. Born in Egypt, he spent his childhood in Australia. Angaelos has been serving the UK for a long time. He became a monk in 1990 in Anba Bishoy's Monastery (Wadi Natrun, Egypt) and a parish priest in London in 1995. In 1999, he was consecrated general bishop for the UK, by Pope Shenouda and ordained Archbishop of London in 2017 by the latter's successor.²³ Bishop Marc, born in 1970, has served in Vienna, where he taught at the Coptic seminary, before being appointed first as a general bishop in 2015 (still based in Vienna) and later as a bishop of Paris and the North of France in 2017.²⁴ The anchorage of Bishop Marc in France is thus recent compared to the long experience of Angaelos in the UK, and the former did not know French when he was nominated to his new position, which was certainly a disadvantage and led him to deploy more efforts to establish his legitimacy.

The legacy of Pope Shenouda's governance

We see how the situation of different Coptic diasporas can greatly vary in relation to the personality of the bishop in charge and the local history of each community. To get a clearer view of the origin of these differences, we need to take into account the governance of the late Pope Shenouda. During his 40 years of reign between 1971 and 2012, Shenouda had the occasion to consecrate many prelates, which helped him to reinforce his power and his centrality in the church's governance.²⁵ He could impose his vision over the years, and though he reinforced the institution, he did so essentially based on personal relations rather than by applying standardized procedures and collegial decisions. Shenouda consecrated many general bishops during his long patriarchate, a clerical position directly

21 <http://www.copticorthodox.london/youth-mission/joint-youth-committee/>, accessed 13 September 2022.

22 A fact that is also true for Egypt. See for some examples, Sana Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims in Modern Egypt. The Century-Long Struggle for Coptic Equality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

23 London is a patriarchal diocese depending directly from the pope while the two other dioceses are “regular” ones depending on the Bishop. Information taken from Bishop Angaelos' personal website: <http://www.bishopangaelos.org/about-Bishop-Angaelos>, accessed 2 January 2023.

24 <https://copte.fr/notre-%C3%A9v%C3%AAque/>, accessed 13 September 2022.

25 About this see Dina El Khawaga, “The political dynamics of the Copts: Giving the community an active role,” in *Christian communities in the Arab Middle East: The challenge of the future*, ed. Andrea Pacini (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 172–190.

depending on the patriarch. This “role” of bishop without territory had been created by Pope Kirillus IV in the 1960s to integrate reformist monks among whom Shenouda himself. The future pope, who acted as general bishop for religious education under Kirillus, would later nominate many general bishops. Some oversaw sub-parts of Cairo, normally a papal district; others were “secretaries of the pope” or in charge of a domain like Bishop Mussa, responsible for the bishopric of youth. In the diasporic context, consecrating general bishops who could be easily removed offered more flexibility in a complex situation where parishes were recent and sometimes very isolated. Tawadros II seems to be adopting the opposite strategy as he is currently stabilizing diasporic bishops by giving them a full ordination, which is then normally irrevocable.²⁶ This trend will probably lead to greater autonomy in the future for the diasporic communities. In the meantime, it sometimes creates conflicts with parishes which had benefited from great autonomy and which can rebel against the authority of the new bishops. In this case, the pope would sometimes stay personally in charge of parishes, refusing to submit to the new prelate’s jurisdiction.

France is a very particular case which shows the kind of freedom Shenouda took with the procedures when dealing with bishops’ nominations. The first stable bishops to be nominated were a Dutch and a French convert who became the head of the French exarchate in 1974 – Bishop Marcos (d. 2008) was made bishop of Toulon-Marseille and Bishop Athanasios (d. 2023) became chorbishop. In 1994, an “L’Eglise copte de France” was distinguished from l’“Eglise copte en France.”²⁷ The priests of the second one were first kept under the authority of Pope Shenouda, whereas in 2017 the diocese was into two, with bishop Marc as the head of Paris and the North of France and bishop Luka, bishop of Francophone Switzerland and South of France, since 2017. The first was led by Anba Marcos, who was then made metropolitan of the eparchy of “Toulon et toute la France”, and Anba Athanasios then became bishop and was meant to be a French church, targeting converts, while the other was meant to represent the “classical Egyptian” Coptic church.²⁸ Nevertheless, if we take the case of the Villejuif (north of Paris) parish, the only one depending on the Eglise copte de France in the Paris region, most faithful are of Egyptian origin even if most of them are probably French citi-

²⁶ There is a recent counterexample with Bishop Suriel, who left his Australian diocese to become responsible for the Los Angeles diocese.

²⁷ Alessandra Fani, “Les coptes orthodoxes,” in *Les minorités religieuses en France. Panorama de la diversité contemporaine*, ed. Anne-Laure Zwillig (Paris: Bayard, 2019): 346–347.

²⁸ A similar attempt to create a Parish targeting non-Egyptians has been made in Toronto, see Loewen, “Strategies”.

zens. This kind of tension can be found in other diasporic contexts. For example, a church for Coptic converts was founded in Toronto, and a recent debate arose in the United States about the language that should be used in liturgy.²⁹ In the second case, the generations born in the USA and their relationship with tradition are at the heart of these controversies.

Both cases, France and the UK, show that the church's territorial organisation in diasporic lands is a complex story full of tensions between the different layers of migrants and between the different clerical actors involved in the church's life outside Egypt: monks, bishops (general or regular ones, papal legates), priests, deacons and laypeople. Regarding the transmission of the religious heritage, choices also have to be made: in which language to pray and sing? How and what to translate? What parts of the rite cannot be changed, and what needs to be adapted?

Visual aspects

Visually, French and British websites adopt different strategies to illustrate their religious belonging, on a scale ranging from the local parish, the Coptic Church and Orthodoxy, to Christianity as a whole. Many pictures of church buildings are displayed. For instance, the websites of the dioceses of Paris and London show a picture of their cathedral as a synecdoche of Coptic communities. The French site presents a photograph of the church interior, focusing on a Coptic icon painted in the neo-Coptic style,³⁰ counterbalancing the very Catholic aspect of the church (which it was initially). The British internet page of the London diocese offers a more complex narrative through a succession of pictures automatically scrolling in a determined order. It starts with a view of the cathedral building, and then it moves to a picture of the church's interior. Thereafter, we see a picture of bishop Angaelos sitting with various interlocutors, including (the then) Prince Charles and some Muslim and Christian clerics. After showing the Cathedral and the bishop, we move to a bird's-eye view of the (young) faithful gathered outside the church. To highlight the links between the bishop and the faithful, we have a group picture presenting a smiling Bishop Angaelos surrounded by many young people standing on the steps of the church. The last two photos are two group pictures, one of Angaelos among Christian clerics from various denominations and another showing Pope Tawadros surrounded by his bishops in Cairo. This

²⁹ Loewen, "Strategies"; Shira Telushkin, "The Americanization of an Ancient Faith," *The Atlantic*, March 31 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/coptic-church/555515/>, accessed 4 May 2023.

³⁰ A style launched by Isaac Fanous from the 1960s, and which he wanted to revive the authentic Coptic and even pharaonic iconic tradition.

small narrative underlines many important themes: the Coptic Church – both the local diocese and the mother-church-, social involvement, ecumenicism, the faithful and particularly the youth among them. The whole narrative puts on the forefront the person of Bishop Angaelos who is really portrayed as the pillar of his diocese. He is indeed very active and visible not only in his church but in British society. He has, for instance, created an advocacy group for minority/ies, and he travels a lot around the world to give conferences. He was recently nominated as a Special Legate to Australia by the pope, in addition to his role as archbishop of London (he is the only bishop in charge of this large diocese). Angaelos has his own website distinct from the one of the diocese, which shows the special place he occupies in the Coptic diaspora and the Church as a whole. The archbishop's webpage, www.bishopangaelos.org, includes the schedules of his conferences, his talks and press releases.

On other pages, we can see diverse ways to refer visually to the Coptic Church: Coptic crosses, details of churches' interiors, Coptic scripts, neo-Coptic style icons, and photographs of clerics. We see in the choice of religious images a real eclecticism. The Coptic church has indeed a versatile visual tradition with many layers appropriating Catholic and Protestant iconography, which have been part of Copts' religious practices since the end of the nineteenth century and are considered by many as fully part of their daily religious life even if these "foreign" images are rejected by others who would like to purify Coptic art from Western influences.³¹

"What is our faith?" – presenting the church to a general audience

The self-presentation texts found on those websites are very similar in terms of content, even if they differ in the number of details displayed due to their length and particular layout. Some pages use the visual possibilities of the internet to present their history, like in St-Mark (London), proposing a chronological timeline presenting the important historical landmarks.³² Those texts often start with an explanation of the etymology of the word "Copt", referring to its original meaning "Egyptian." They also describe the origin of the Church dating back to Saint Mark's mission to Egypt, and by doing so, they insist on the apostolic character of the Coptic Church. The link with ancient Egypt is systematically mentioned but it can be articulated differently. The theological importance of Egypt is underlined

³¹ Even though the presence of these "foreign" images is criticized by some.

³² St Mark Church, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of London: <https://stmark.org.uk/history-of-the-church/>, accessed 10 June 2025.

both in terms of the sacredness of Egyptian lands – through biblical quotations mentioning Egypt in the Bible and the journey of the Holy Family – and in terms of theological debates. This latter aspect is underlined through the evocation of Egypt's major contribution to the ecumenical councils and the “miscomprehensions” or the “injustice” of Chalcedon. The martyr era is often but not always explained, as well as the invention of monasticism by Antony and Pachomius. When put forward, the invention of monasticism is described as a great contribution to Christianity as a whole and to Western Christianity in particular.

In those texts, we can see the will to present and valorise the role of Egypt in global Christianity, sometimes very clearly, on other occasions in more subtle ways. Besides the themes already mentioned, such as Egypt as a blessed land and the theological role of Egyptian church fathers, we also find some mentions of Coptic missions. Regarding this last aspect, the role of Egypt as a precursor is underlined and even the role of the Coptic Church in evangelizing Europe, through the story of the Theban Legion in Switzerland and a few others, like the alleged role of Egyptian monks in founding the church of Ireland. In the case of Switzerland, this aspect is emphasised, and the members of the Legion are presented as the ancestors of the contemporary Copts living in the country on Swiss Coptic websites. It is even presented as the source of all Christian presence in Switzerland, as the members of the Legion are described as the evangelists of Switzerland.³³ In the same vein, a French priest interviewed in a radio program started his history of Copts in France with a Coptic priest, Yuhanna al-Shiftishi,³⁴ who moved to France in the nineteenth century and helped Champollion to decipher the Egyptian language.³⁵ This shows how those communities use all possibilities offered by history and hagiography to affirm their place in the countries in which they settled during the last 50 years.³⁶

On other occasions, some apologetical elements seem more directly targeting the local audience, British or French, not only outsiders to the community but Coptic youth, socialised in those societies as well, who could potentially be in tension with some conservative positions defended by the older generations of Copts. For

33 <https://eglisecopte.ch/les-premiers-coptes-en-suisse/>, accessed 19 September 2022.

34 <https://cdl.claremont.edu/digital/collection/cce/id/454/>

35 <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceculture/podcasts/chretiens-d-orient/presence-copte-en-france-avec-le-pere-joseph-stefanos-5998640>, accessed 16 September 2022, about Yuhanna Chiftichi see Anouar Louca, “Chiftichi, Yuhanna,” in *Coptic Encyclopedia*, online version: <https://cdl.claremont.edu/digital/collection/cce/id/454/>, accessed 16 September 2022.

36 A good example of this is given by Christopher Sheklian about Armenians in the Netherlands, “‘Their Compatriot St. Servatius’. Armenian Emplacement in Maastricht,” in *Europe and the Migration of Christian Communities from the Middle East*, ed. Martin Tamcke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verla, 2022), 111–124.

instance, in the following text, from the St Mary and St George Coptic Orthodox Church in East London, the separation between church and state is considered intrinsic to the Coptic historical experience. This can be read as a commitment to secular European societies and as a way to distance oneself from Islam, often described in mainstream media discourses as ignoring this separation:

Despite persecution, the Coptic Church as a religious institution has never been controlled or allowed itself to control the governments in Egypt. This long-held position of the Church concerning the separation between State and Religion stems from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, when he asked his followers to submit to their rulers: “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” [Mathew 22:21]. The Coptic Church has never forcefully resisted authorities or invaders and was never allied with any powers, for the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are clear: “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.” (Mathew 26:52). The miraculous survival of the Coptic Church till this day and age is a living proof of the validity and wisdom of these teachings.³⁷

This kind of statement could also be seen as a form of allegiance to the Egyptian state, known for having an eye on Egyptian communities abroad.

Theological texts online

Performative texts

Besides the *ad hoc* texts, mostly anonymously explaining aspects of the liturgy, or dealing with moral issues, the websites also function as an online library, giving access to texts that we can divide into two broad categories. The first is the texts that can be considered manuals,³⁸ that is, performative texts. Those texts mean to generate concrete action and accompany practices, they mainly concern the liturgy and appear under the format of book-length PDF’s, PowerPoints and audio recordings. They are conceived to serve as guides to perform a ceremony, to recite or sing the liturgy. They are in Coptic, Arabic or the local vernacular and often a mix of those different languages. We can also include the curricula of the Sunday

³⁷ St Mary and St George Coptic Orthodox Church in East London,

<https://www.smasg.org.uk/about-coptic-church>, accessed 14 September 2022.

³⁸ On this idea of religious texts as manuals, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

schools in this category. Sunday schools are at the heart of religious transmission. They are meant to inculcate children with the basics of the Coptic faith and to lead them to embody this rich tradition by adopting gestures, attitudes and feelings as part and parcel of their religious communal life. Sunday schools are equally a space of socialisation, perpetuating a sense of community, mixing different sorts of solidarities related to family, Egyptian origin, and religious ties.

What belongs to this category is largely uncontested. At least, it is presented as such – there are adaptations and translations, but the traditional corpus is said to be unique and stable. However, there are some exceptions and possible exemptions to the canon of the liturgy, as it is the case with the “Eglise Copte de France.” On a website called *Coptica*, emanating from one of its priests, we find the following explanation:

Excepté le texte de la liturgie complète de saint Basile, les autres textes des Offices liturgiques présentés ici ne correspondent pas toujours à l'ordo égyptien actuel.

Les textes variables n'ont pas reçus l'approbation formelle, pour chacun d'eux, de l'autorité hiérarchique. Toutefois, ils sont en conformité avec la bénédiction d'Abba Shénouda qui a «*accordé comme privilège à l'Eglise copte orthodoxe française, la célébration de la liturgie avec des chants liturgiques [parties variables] adaptés à l'Occident, ainsi que le synaxaire de l'Eglise indivise ajouté aux saints d'Egypte*» . – courrier d'abba Marcos, métropolite de Toulon et de toute la France du 16 mai 2005 – .³⁹

We must keep in mind that the liturgical material available online coexists today with smartphone apps, like *The Coptic Reader* created and administrated by North American Copts, *Eklisia* recently created by the Paris bishopric, and *Calendrier Copte* emanating from the Eglise copte de France.⁴⁰ These are powerful tools of homogenisation, as their usage is now widespread. This explains why church authorities are very careful about their content, as can be seen in this quotation from Bishop Youssef (Southern USA), in charge of the Mobile App *Coptic Reader*:

³⁹ http://coptica.free.fr/liturgie_et_rites_025.htm, accessed 14 September 2022.

⁴⁰ It is linked to Eglise Saint-Athnase et Saint Cyrille VI in Sarcelle. The same church website also gives access to the Hours' prayer in French.

As the Coptic Orthodox Church continues to grow in the diaspora, updates to inaccurate translations can be inconvenient. It is not easy to re-learn common hymns when the translations change, and the Coptic Reader team fully sympathizes with this dilemma. However, the very real translation errors need to be corrected to ensure that future generations are keeping the Coptic faith, prayers, and rites unchanged.⁴¹

We see here the potential conflicts that can arise from the tension between different “orders of worth.”⁴² One would correspond to the “scientific” exactitude of translations and transmission, while the other would refer to the bodily knowledge of the trained practitioners of liturgy, who are allergic to any changes in the content of religious texts.

The influence of North American diasporas

British and Irish Copts seem to strongly rely on the material translated and published in America. For example, the bishopric of the “Diocese of Ireland, Scotland, North East England and its Affiliated Regions” (DISNA) provides online access to four prayer books, all originating in North America: St Basil and St Cyril Liturgy, published by St Mark Church in Jersey City, and two deacons’ books with no mention of the publisher or translator but written in American English. The same can be said for the syllabuses for Sunday school classes. The DISNA gives access to thirteen e-books produced by the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Southern USA, while St Mary & Archangel Michael in London showcases a mix between the latter and its own production. For nursery and primary levels, this church gives access to schoolbooks prepared by the London Diocese, while for secondary school, the diocese is currently working on an adaptation of the Sunday school material published by the Diocese of Southern USA. We can read in the introduction of one of those books borrowed from the Southern USA Diocese:

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of London has opted to use the new Children of Light curriculum of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, with amendment to suit our children & society. A committee commissioned by His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos and the Clergy Council have worked for several months to prepare this curriculum.⁴³

⁴¹ <https://www.suscopts.org/pdf/CopticReader.pdf>, accessed 24 September 2024.

⁴² Expression borrowed to Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). The book and the expression insist on the irrevocable plurality of social life that we can see in religious life as in other sectors of activity.

⁴³ <http://smaam.church/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Year8-Grade-7.pdf>, accessed 15 September 2022.

We see here a good example of the borrowing and adaption processes between Coptic diasporas sharing a common language. Various websites of the Coptic Church have created pages where books and other materials can be downloaded, though not all links are active.⁴⁴ A church servant has told me that the curricula were sent by email to the teachers as PDF documents by one of the Paris region's priests. A lot is also happening through Whatsapp groups, allowing teams of teachers to keep in touch and exchange practical information as well as teaching material. Liturgical and prayer books were progressively translated into French, mainly through the efforts of some priests and servants from one of the oldest and most active parishes, the church of the Archangel Michel and Saint George in Villejuif (Paris region). Many of those manuals were translated and made accessible to the faithful. Some of those texts are available on the Paris diocese website and were also downloadable on the church website. The latter is, unfortunately, inaccessible due to a conflict between the bishop of Paris and a part of the parishioners.⁴⁵ French websites distinguish themselves by the number of PowerPoint documents present online, which are now used in almost all diasporic churches. Those became important tools to help the faithful follow the liturgy easily by presenting the text in columns in different languages. This example shows the importance these electronic texts – necessary to find one's way into the complex multilingual liturgy – have taken in Coptic religious practices.

After the category of manuals, the second one is made of texts which can be attributed to a particular author, that is, spiritual or theological books. Several internet sites already provide worldwide access to Coptic texts in different languages.⁴⁶ We cannot thus consider parish websites independently from these other sources of religious literature. One phenomenon needs to be underlined first: the textual production of Pope Shenouda dominates the theological landscape of these online

44 https://www.egliscopte.fr/catechisme_enfants/college/ancien_testament, and <https://biblio.copte.fr/document.php?category=LS>, accessed 15 September 2022.

45 The conflict started in 2017 around the alleged use of Villejuif church funds by the new bishop to buy the land of the new cathedral, and later in 2020 around the exclusion of a monk/priest who was sent back to his Egyptian monastery. See the articles published online in *Yuwm al Sa'ba* (<https://www.youm7.com/story/2017/8/15/%D8%A3%D9%82%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B7-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7-%D9%8A%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B6%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A3%D8%B3%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%A8%D8%B3%D8%A8%D8%A8-%D9%86%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B9-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B3%D8%B9%D8%A9/3367900,15/08/2017>) and in the Coptic newspaper *al Watan* (<https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/5011157?t=-push,26/10/2020>).

46 St-Takla.org, <https://coptic-treasures.com/> (mainly in Arabic), and <https://e.copticbook.net/>, to take only a few examples.

libraries.⁴⁷ Many websites give access to the books written by the late Patriarch. The Diocese of Ireland, Scotland & North East England, for example, proposes 51 books of Shenouda, while St Mary and St George Coptic Orthodox Church in East London has a book section which consists only of the written production of the late pope. Other sites offer a more diverse selection of titles. The site of the Midlands diocese offers books written by Tadros Malaty (born in 1937), another ubiquitous author whose books are also available in French.⁴⁸ Many of his books were translated into English in the United States, such as those available on the Midlands' site, which originate from a New Jersey Church.⁴⁹

For some books, it is difficult to know who published and wrote them, as there is little or no paratextual information. The preoccupation with copyright questions and authorship (or translators) is not very present. Some of those books have probably been translated in Egypt at the time of their first publication.⁵⁰ Many translations were made by volunteers who are not professional translators: the typical profile would be a devoted servant⁵¹ (often a woman) who attended a Francophone or Anglophone school. There is thus an attempt to retranslate some books, particularly Shenouda's ones, which have mainly been translated in Egypt and then circulated in the different diasporas. Some of them need to be retranslated because of the dubious quality of the first translations. For example, the son of a Villejuif priest I met while doing fieldwork remade several translations of the Patriarch's publications in French. Yet, he prefers to sell them on Amazon for a moderate price rather than to offer them for free on the church website. The omnipresence of Shenouda's books raises many questions which cannot be addressed in this paper. Still, a brief overview of some central themes helps reassess the evolution of Coptic religious thinking in the last fifty years. In terms of content, we could think of the strong biblical literalism, supported by many Bible quotations, which denotes deep Evangelical influences despite the strong anti-Protestant

⁴⁷ This presence is also true in parishes' bookshops.

⁴⁸ The website also features Shenouda's books but fewer than those of Malaty. They also included texts by Daoud Lamei: <https://ukmidcopts.org/resources/bookstore/>, accessed 15 September 2022. On Malaty see <https://accot.stcyrls.edu.au/authors/hegumen-tadros-yacoub-malaty/>.

⁴⁹ Queen Saint Mary and Prince Tadros church in East Brunswick. <https://www.qsmpt.org/>, accessed 15 September 2022.

⁵⁰ Some of them need to be retranslated because of the dubious quality of the first translations. Comment made by bishop Suriel (Los Angeles) at the International conference for Coptic studies in Brussels.

⁵¹ The term servant here translates *khādim* (plur. *khuddām*). Those *khuddām* designate all faithful involved in the church at any level. They were at the heart of Pope Shenouda's reform promoting a kind of clericalization of the Copts, increasingly involved in parishes' activities, see El Khawaga, "The Laity at the Heart of the Coptic Clerical Reform," *Between Desert and City. The Coptic Orthodox Church Today*, ed. Nelly van-Doorn (Oslo: Novus Forlag, 1997), 143–167.

tone of many of his writings. However, this literature should certainly not be analysed only in terms of its content. During his forty years on Saint-Mark's chair Shenouda imposed his authority in different ways. When he took control of the Coptic Institute, he expelled many Coptic intellectuals, such as Aziz Atiya, who found refuge in a US University and would later edit the *Coptic Encyclopedia*.⁵² He also entered into a rivalry with his former spiritual, Father Matta al-Maskin, and ended up putting his books in the index. The omnipresence of Shenouda's booklets, but also of his poetry adapted into Coptic songs (*taranim*), was also a way to reinforce his hegemony on the church apparatus and strengthen his monopoly on the theological and spiritual production of the Church.

However, we also see a timid return in grace of Matta al Maskin, whose books had been banned for decades by the former Pope.⁵³ For example, the page of the Paris diocese gives access to some of his texts translated into French. It is particularly noteworthy that the French versions of Matta El-Maskin's books were translated by the printing press of a Catholic monastery and not by Copts.⁵⁴ We find very eclectic material on the same site. Besides the liturgical books and Power-Points, there are books translated into French originating from various places. Among them are two books on Pope Kyrilus and his miracles,⁵⁵ but also Pope Shenouda's books, and even some short texts by the late Patriarch with no mention of the translator. A young servant has told me that his bishop sometimes asked him to translate texts from Pope Shenouda or Tadros Malaty. The young translator admitted that he often used English translations instead of the original Arabic version, as he felt more comfortable in English than Arabic. This shows how central English is becoming for Coptic diasporas worldwide.

The themes covered in the various online bookshops include the systematic interpretation (verse by verse) of the Bible (Tadros Malaty) in the style of Matthew Henry, which was an important influence on Coptic theologians during the twentieth century.⁵⁶ In addition, spiritual, moral or societal themes, accompanied

⁵² This happened when Shenouda became General Bishop for Higher Clerical education in 1962, see Hasan, *Christians versus Muslims*, 88.

⁵³ For the conflicts between Shenouda and Matta al-Maskine, see Jacques Masson, "La divinisation de l'homme : les raisons de l'opposition de Chenouda III," *Proche Orient Chrétien* 57, no. 34 (2007): 279–290.

⁵⁴ Though the monks of Saint-Makarius are active in translating and spreading his work in different languages. But it seems that they've found an audience among a non-Coptic audience. Several books of Father Matta were translated by the Abbaye de Bellfontaine.

⁵⁵ Both are without dates but probably from the 1980s. One of them was published by a church in Quebec while the place of publication remains unknown for the other.

⁵⁶ Matthew Henry, a Presbyterian English theologian who published in 1706, a book called *Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, a commentary of the Bible verse by verse. It was translated

by many biblical citations, are well represented. Other texts discuss the several feasts and rituals of the church. The hagiographic domain is also widely covered. This last genre has known a remarkable revival since the 1950s which continues to this day.⁵⁷ Compared to the other oriental churches, the Coptic church has created a considerable number of contemporary saints and martyrs (the last ones being the fifteen Copts killed by Daesh in Libya).⁵⁸ Those saints represent real models to the faithful, and sanctify many aspects of the religious life of Coptic Christians through their life stories.⁵⁹ Their *vitae*, which often find their sources in old collections of texts like the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* or the *Synaxar*, are often extended and peppered with edifying stories.⁶⁰ Some saints also help emplace the communities in their new countries, like in the case of the already mentioned saints of the Theban Legion who are said to have evangelised Switzerland, thus offering a symbolic anchorage to the Coptic communities who settled in this country since the 1960s.⁶¹ We can also see some attempts to extend the themes addressed and to explore new spiritual ways, probably under the influence of other Christian denominations. For example, the website *Keep it Coptic* was created and is administered by young Copts for the UK as a whole. It offers categories that do not exist on parish websites (at least in Europe), like “practical spirituality,” “healthy relationship,” “contemporary issues,” “poem corner,” and “story corner”. Interestingly, *Keep it Coptic* does not hesitate to suggest links to Christian non-Coptic internet pages.⁶² Copts are not immune to the influence of globalised religious discourses in line with American Charismatic Evangelical and Pentecostal religiosity, praising self-development and social success.⁶³ Those discourses generally have a conservative tone but are fully compatible with a neo-liberal ethos centred on the individual and her achievements.

into Arabic in the 1900s. See <https://st-takla.org/bible/commentary/en/mh-index.html>, accessed 8 May 2023.

57 See Brigitte Voile, *Les Coptes d’Égypte sous Nasser. Sainteté, miracles, apparitions* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004).

58 The Armenian church has however recently canonized collectively the victims of the genocide.

59 Some of them perpetuating gender inequalities, see Febe Armanios, “The ‘Virtuous Woman’: Images of Gender in Modern Coptic Society,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 38,1 (2002): 110–130; Febe Armanios, Andrew Amstutz, “Emerging Christian media in Egypt: clerical authority and the visualization of women in Coptic video films,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 45 (2013): 513–533.

60 See the example of Saint Sam’an, in Gaétan du Roy, *Les Zabbalin du Muqattam. Ethnohistoire d’une hétérotopie au Caire (979–2021)* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

61 I have also been told by Coptic parishioners that Copts like to participate in Catholic Pilgrimages, particularly those dedicated to Mary, like Lourdes in France or Banneux in Belgium.

62 This website is not accessible anymore. Some snapshots are available on the website Wayback machine <https://web.archive.org/web/20220208231531/https://keepitcoptic.co.uk/>.

63 Patrick Haenni, *L’islam de marché. L’autre révolution conservatrice* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).

Conclusion

This comparison gives a series of hints showing that the UK/Irish diaspora is more structured and more diversified regarding the range of activities in which its members get involved than the French one. Its online communication is also more systematic and “professional.” During his long presence in the UK, Archbishop Angaelos developed activities targeting Coptic parishioners but also those geared towards the general public. As already mentioned, the bishopric of London has recently created an advocacy agency called Refcemi (the Coptic word for advocacy), or the “Coptic Orthodox Office for Advocacy and Public Policy,” which addresses “a broad range of advocacy issues, especially that of Freedom of Religion or Belief, around the world.”⁶⁴ Rather differently, the French diaspora is still divided into the *Eglise de* and *en* France. This situation leads to the autonomous development of many local churches, mostly left to their own devices for decades. The conflict between Villejuif and the new bishop is illustrative of these dynamics, as Villejuif developed as an important centre for translation, social services, and plenty of other activities. However, their independence was contested by the new leader of the Paris region, who needed to establish his authority. The Coptic churches in France now rely on a considerable body of translations. Still, some members of the clergy think that it should be revised to rectify the mistakes and be more faithful to the Coptic original versions.⁶⁵ Interestingly, French Copts sometimes use texts produced by other Francophone diasporas like the Québécoise community. Perhaps more surprisingly, the French app *Eklisia* gives access to a book summarising the history of the Coptic church, written by a Congolese member of the Lubumbashi parish in the Democratic Republic of Congo.⁶⁶ Above all, those examples show that texts in French are still scarce (even if books in French were already produced in Egypt, such as the translations of Shenouda’s book). Quite differently, UK Copts can use the vast production emanating from North America and Australia, which includes Sunday school books, liturgy texts and apps, TV channels, and printed books for teens.⁶⁷

Regarding the content of the books and the theology which can be accessed through websites, it still bears the mark of Pope Shenouda and his social conservatism and Biblical literalism. To be sure, many Copts are happy with this type

⁶⁴ <https://refcemi.org/about-us>, accessed 19 September 2022.

⁶⁵ Discussion with a Coptic priest in France.

⁶⁶ About the development of Coptic missions in Africa, see Jacques Masson “La mission copte en Afrique noire,” *Proche Orient Chrétien* 55, no. 3–4 (2005): 294–308 and Hiroko Myokawa, “The Coptic Orthodox Mission in Kenya: An African Search for Identity and the Coptic Encounter with Africa,” *Sophia Journal of Asian, African and Middle Eastern Studies* (2021): 69–86.

⁶⁷ See, among others, the catalogue of Saint Shenouda Press in Australia.

of theology, which suits their vision of the world. However, things change, and not everyone agrees, and thus his hegemony on theological production is now contested. We can see it in the (still rare) public mentions of the rich body of work of Matta al-Maskin, probably with the approval of the new Pope Tawadros. We can also see it through the development of Coptic counter-narratives criticizing, often online, the conservatism of their Church: groups presenting narratives of Coptic LGBT, Coptic liberation theology's FB page, Coptic liberals, groups of Coptic women fighting to be allowed to sing in the church choirs or denouncing the sexual abuses committed by some priest. All this shows that the English-speaking Coptic diaspora has reached a "critical mass," allowing it to internally diversify and produce counternarratives, able to contest the hegemony of the higher clergy on theological discourses. France, on the contrary, is still a small diaspora in terms of the number of faithful and in terms of international connections. However, it has reached a certain size and is constantly developing. Regarding the production of new texts, those are mainly produced in Arabic and increasingly in English, while new productions in French are still very limited.

To summarise the empirical observations made in this paper, we can distinguish two aspects of the digital religion of Coptic diasporas, which correspond to the two principal ways in which the Internet and religion have been addressed so far by social scientists.⁶⁸ One of these research paths studies the uses of the Internet by religious communities, while the other focuses on "online communities," i.e., communities that formed and exist mainly online and in which religion sometimes emerged in the digital realm. This contribution mainly belongs to the first category as it investigates institutional websites, but the second approach would account better for the important Coptic groups that formed online, mainly in North America and Australia. However, those are not two separate worlds, as most members of those Facebook pages and blog writers also participate in parish life. Nonetheless, by using social media, they develop other approaches to the new challenges faced by Copts in the lands of immigration and formulate other theological visions that would be difficult to circulate in the more "traditional" forms we discussed in this chapter. To take but one example, many blogs and Facebook pages discuss food and fasting, a practice so crucial for the Coptic faithful. They propose recipes and exchange advice on how to stick to the very demanding fasting rules of their Church. This is also a way to propose practical advice away from the sometimes austere theology that can be found in books and which insists, above all, on normative behaviours and the repression of deviations from religious rules.

68 Olivier Servais, David Douyere, Andrea Castellani, "Religious and the digital: New conceptualizations in the French-speaking world," in *Social Compass* 67,4 (2020): 505–518.

Then, what is the impact of the digital era on the evolution of books and printed material? Books will certainly continue to be written and printed, as their symbolic value is still important for believers. Those books, read or not, do not only matter for their content but also for their iconic importance, representing a source of blessing – like those Bibles left beside newborn babies to protect them. People are also attached to some of their books because they remind them of good memories, be they linked to religion or not. I happened to open a liturgical book forgotten by parishioners on a church bench in Sarcelles in which a sticker commemorating a deceased relative had been pasted, which shows how it had been personalised with intimate memories.

What is at stake, particularly for the liturgy, is a new articulation between printed books and electronic devices. Electronic texts and PowerPoints are now broadly used in religious ceremonies, in diasporic lands, and in Egypt, and they are fully part of the religious experience. It is, however, more crucial in diaspora as an easy way to deal with the liturgical multilingualism of Coptic communities, even when they seem to slowly move to a form of monolingualism when it comes, for instance, to Sunday school classes. Indeed, the trend seems to be the adoption of the host countries' vernaculars, with a new role given to English as the diasporic lingua franca, besides Arabic, but gaining ground in transnational connections. That is even the case in non-English speaking communities, as shown by the example of the French servant using English versions instead of Arabic ones to translate Shenouda's books.

Finally, it is worth noting the possible disappearance, or at least the decline, of a genre that was incarnated by Pope Shenouda, that is of books originating in oral speeches and conferences. Those can still be found in the form of printed books and screen texts, but YouTube and podcasts have dethroned the old theological pamphlet popularised by the late Patriarch. That is not totally new, as the success of Shenouda already was multimedial. People used to come to his Wednesday meetings at the Cathedral and then listen to the recorded version on cassettes and, from the 2000s, on the Internet and satellite TV channels. Copts, like other religious groups, tend to reinvent their difference⁶⁹ by using modes of preaching and perpetuating their traditions, typical of the ongoing "formatting" of religion at stake in the globalisation process.⁷⁰ It is particularly obvious in the growing body of theological texts – exegesis, spirituality, social and moral questions – that develops beside the pragmatic texts centred on liturgical life and largely based on Western Christian models.

69 This expression was borrowed to Jean-François Bayard. See "L'Afrique dans le monde : une histoire d'extraversion," *Critique Internationale* 5 (1999): 108.

70 Olivier Roy, *La sainte ignorance* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), 241–243.

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