

BOOK REVIEW

Fr Morkos Fakhry (MLitt, 2018) *The Book of Revelation and the Church of Alexandria*.
(Fairfax, Virginia: Eastern Christian Publications, 2018.)

Reviewed by William P. Hyland

This new book by Fr Morkos Fakhry, based on his thesis at the University of St Andrews and now published by Eastern Christian Publications, is a ground-breaking study on the liturgical use of the Book of Revelation in the Coptic Orthodox Church. Fr Morkos provides us with a fascinating and detailed treatment of his subject, scholarly but likewise evocative and accessible.

The analysis of the use of the Book of Revelation in the Coptic liturgy, especially the Apocalypses Night on Friday and early Saturday morning of Holy Week, is of extraordinary interest to all who desire a deeper knowledge of this aspect of a celebration which is unique to the Coptic rite, with ongoing relevance for the Coptic faithful.

An engaging introduction makes clear that this study grew out of Fr Morkos' own experience of the Liturgy, from childhood through his continued work as a priest today. The formative effect of this powerful liturgy of Apocalypses Night in Fr Morkos' own life necessarily points toward its ongoing relevance for the Coptic faithful. The book then proceeds with the following sections of analysis: a survey of the early history of the Alexandrian Church; the reception of the Book of Revelation in the Coptic Church; the contemporary rites of the Apocalypses Night; detailed descriptions of the liturgical readings; the history of the Apocalypses Night rites; the Book of Revelation and Coptic iconography; and the Book of Revelation in the Coptic Liturgy.

The historical background is very helpful and suggestive, as is the excellent description of the physical setting and rituals of the liturgy. The impact of Apocalypses Night is brought out through a highly original discussion of the relationship of the Book of Revelation to the placement of icons in the church. The other liturgical uses of the Apocalypse, particularly in the Eucharistic context of the whole congregation facing East together and looking at the icon of Christ reigning in glory with the martyrs and confessors, is thought-provoking and moving in its implication of the formative power of Liturgy. This section is complemented by the inclusion in the appendix of photos of ancient and contemporary icons.

The relationship of the Book of Revelation to iconography represents a major insight here, and is profound and convincing. The other liturgical use of the Apocalypse in the Coptic Rite, particularly in the Eucharistic context of the whole congregation facing East together and gazing upon this icon, is well presented and also very significant. There is fertile ground for comparison here with other liturgical rites, as well as the ancient homiletic tradition.

Finally, the bibliography is a very useful tool for those interested in further study. Fr Morkos, in light of the varied approaches to the Apocalypse throughout history, makes the keen observation:

What is attractive in the Coptic Orthodox Church's handling of and communicating the Book of Revelation is that she did not focus on the fearful imagery within the book outside the full context of the story of salvation, love of God and the eternal justice, but rather used the book in a context which at the end leaves a deep, lasting, and spiritually-positive effect on her congregation.

This study likewise has such an effect, and for this we should be grateful to Fr Morkos.

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