

assigned to Gregory are available in the excellent translations of Michael Slusser, *St. Gregory Thaumaturgus: Life and Works* (Catholic University of America Press, 1998); Celia, in fact, often uses Slusser's translations. Celia's engaging book makes a strong case that Gregory's writings deserve more attention, and his critical summaries and extensive arguments are very helpful for trying to look behind the images of Gregory of Neocaesarea so carefully constructed by Eusebius, Basil of Caesarea, and, especially, Gregory of Nyssa.

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***At War in Prayer: The History of the Practice of the Arrow Prayer.* By Fr. Anthony St. Shenouda. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020. xv + 105 pp. \$85.00 hardcover; \$80.50 e-book.**

*At War in Prayer* is a welcome, fascinating, and very concise analysis of how St. Paul's admonition to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) in the early church developed into what the author calls "Arrow Prayer" (AP). Fr. Anthony St. Shenouda in particular argues that this happened in early Christian monastic and lay practices amid an influential "social backdrop" of ancient Roman and Byzantine cultures (x). Surprisingly, the author finishes up his main arguments midway through the book on page 58. The second half is a lengthy appendix, which is mainly a presentation of primary texts, some of which have not previously been translated into English and which are only briefly touched on in the first part of the work. This reader wishes the appendix had been integrated into the body of the text a bit more; however, this minor quibble aside, the book is a compelling, if short, examination of the development and use of AP over the centuries, especially in the Coptic Church.

St. Shenouda defines AP as a fluid variety of biblically inspired, short, formulaic, personal prayers that are called upon throughout the day in order to counter specific temptations that arise. Such prayers could be spoken in any context, such as rising from or going to sleep, at work or at play, at meals, or when "drawing water, running away from barbarians or wild beasts, or [by] those who are taken as prisoners of war" (x). AP, thus, was seen as a righteous response that repelled the temptations of demons.

The specific term "Arrow Prayer," the author points out, can be traced to a twentieth-century scholarly label "under the Arabic name *al-salat al-sahmiyya*" (xii). However, he suggests that the earliest direct mention of the concept of AP originated in the third century when Origen wrote, "[Such a prayer] goes forth from the soul of the one praying like an arrow shot from the saint by knowledge of reason and faith. And it wounds the spirits hostile to God to destroy and overthrow them" (xii). AP imagery, says the author, gained in popularity thanks to Athanasius's fourth-century *Life of St. Anthony*, which tells how the saint sent demons into retreat when he called upon the name of Jesus in prayer. Perhaps the most interesting written illustration of AP comes from a story in the *Life of St. John of Scetis*, who lived in the sixth century. The text mentions an elder, Youanis, who sees a boy—in reality, a demon in disguise—with arrows sticking out of his body. Youanis asks how this happened, and the demon

explains that each prayer of Youanis is like an arrow that has been shot to repulse the demon (76–78).

The structure and argument of the book is straightforward. Chapter 1 shows how AP early on combined the name of Jesus with brief biblical passages, especially the Psalms, in order to develop formulaic prayers that countered daily temptations. The author specifically illustrates how war imagery, such as flinging arrows at demons, flourished around APs.

Chapter 2 looks at the cultural setting of the late Roman Empire and explains how AP naturally arose out of secular and religious oral cultures, which were both fond of developing systematic sayings or prayers that could easily be memorized, called to mind, and eventually taken to heart in order to aid people in their quests for honorable habits.

Chapter 3 discusses how early secular education catered to the wealthy but that their teachers expected students to memorize short maxims, which in turn shaped personal behavior. Religious education slowly overcame the oral emphasis, especially in monastic rules, like that of St. Pachomius, to urge literacy so that, upon entering the religious life, monastics might learn to read scripture, which in turn fostered godly lifestyles. Such education was easily adapted to AP.

Chapter 4 notes that early secular and religious educational systems employed a variety of metaphors and artistic representations that suggested information was stored in the mind, remembered, and eventually made manifest in good deeds. Storage rooms, dovecotes, wax tablets, buildings (like churches), or rooms (like monastic cells) were common images that were quite agreeable with the practice of AP.

In chapter 5, in many ways the most engaging part of the book, St. Shenouda examines the threefold goals of secular educational programs—that is, to learn something (*mathein*), to imprint it by means of mental exercise (*meléte*), and to put that into practice (*áskesis*). In religious contexts, monastics eagerly adapted this methodology so that monks and nuns could determine for themselves which scripture could be used in AP and in what situations to employ them (44).

The most fascinating part of chapter 6 is when the author explains how in early schools of rhetoric students were taught to adapt *Chreia*—that is “a statement or symbolic action that is either spoken or performed by a teacher or role model”—by using *Ergasia* rhetorical tools—that is, specific “defined techniques”—to “cast and recast” upright principles in a way that they shaped morality (52). Monastic education borrowed such skills for APs.

Finally, most readers will especially be interested in the last part of the appendix, which delineates how AP and the Jesus Prayer (JP) fit broadly within the Byzantine tradition. The author passionately and convincingly argues that it was AP which gave rise to the JP (“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me a sinner”), which became famous in the popular nineteenth-century Russian Orthodox book *The Way of the Pilgrim*.

The author in the introduction states, “Prayer has played an integral part in human history” (ix). Indeed. St. Shenouda also has effectively shown how an early historical context proved integral to the development of the rich and widespread tradition of AP. Scholars have generally little noticed AP’s deep significance in history, that is until now.

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