

Women and the Sacrament of Holy communion

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First: Their Message

I received the following message written by a female servant in a neighboring Coptic Orthodox Church. I felt obliged to write the true Orthodox teaching to save our children from stumbling and falling into these worldly and newly spread heresies. I learned that many women and even men are encouraging this false teaching without learning the true teaching and canons of the Church. They even go the distance of publishing their false teaching and views in church meetings and on the internet and social media without consulting with the mother church or with their fathers of confession, that is if they still believe in the sacrament of repentance and confession.

I will not mention names of anyone who spread such false teaching, hoping that my explanation below will touch the heart of the meek and humble, who truly seek the right teaching of our Coptic Orthodox Church.

The message was written in two parts. The first part says:

“I am truly amazed, and deeply sorrowful, when I hear priests preventing women from taking Communion while they have their monthly period, or after childbirth, considering them sinful and unholy. Sinful?! Unholy?! My God! After all that Christ did to make woman holy and sanctified, as a member of His Body! In Christianity, she is considered a Church begetting children to Christ. So how can her infant, when only eight days old, take Communion while she herself is deprived for forty days (or eighty days if the baby is a girl)? Is it more appropriate to return to the old covenant, which has become so old and obsolete? This is to blaspheme against the baptism, which has made a woman spiritually and physically holy. Has the priest not read in the Bible how the woman with the flow of blood touched Jesus, yet He did not forbid this but rather encouraged her, after healing her and forgiving her sin? How can this woman with the flow of blood touch Jesus Himself and yet the priest forbids a woman to take His Body and Blood? Shall we destroy what the Gospel and Christ built up and shall we choose to follow or re-impose the old covenant?”

The second part says:

The Didaskalia or Didache (Teaching of the Apostles) does not prevent the woman from taking communion during her menstrual cycle, citing the following as addressed to women:

1. “You must pray at all times to partake of thanksgiving... Eucharist... and be enriched with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon you”.
2. The true Biblical Orthodox Teaching says that the menstrual cycle is a physiological and natural process that God created, like other bodily secretion, so should we forbid anyone from partaking of the Holy Communion because of their sweat or saliva or tears, etc.?
3. The Lord did not reject the bleeding woman when she touched His cloth for the sake of ‘salvation’... On the contrary, He healed her and said: “Your faith has ‘saved’ you”.

Note: Before we start, please note that God never said, “salvation...saved you”. He said “your faith has made you well”; as will be discussed later.

First: An Introduction To Our Reply

Before I reply to the message, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to all of those who faithfully and sincerely wrote about this subject including, but not limited to, H.G. Metropolitan Bishop of Demiat, H.G. Bishop Aghathon of Maghagha, and Mr. Mina Asaad Kamel, teacher of Apologetic Theology. This article is nothing more than a humbled effort to summarize their great efforts.

1. The Position of Women in the Church

Our Coptic Orthodox Church is known for honoring and respecting of women over all the ages. As an example, our church loves and adores St. Mary, commemorate her on the twenty-first of each Coptic month, honors and glorifies her during the whole month of Kiahk and calls it “The Miriam Month” where we sing and praise her with all beautiful hymns. We also offer special glorification to the Mother of God, called “Theotokia”, every day of the year during midnight praises.

- ❖ Our Holy Bible teaches us that the woman is “a helper comparable” to the man (Genesis 2: 18), where the two unite together in the holy matrimony and become one flesh (Matthew 19: 4 – 6).
- ❖ Women were the first to go out with our Savior at the beginning of His ministry (Luke 8: 1-3).
- ❖ Women were the ones standing at the cross while His disciples ran away (Mark 15: 40-47).
- ❖ Women were praised by God for their strong faith; as we learn from the story of the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15: 22-28, Mark 7: 24-30).
- ❖ Women were praised by God for their love and almsgiving, to the extent of giving their whole livelihood (Mark 12: 43-44).
- ❖ Women were the first to preach the resurrection of The Lord and were giving the first preaching duty (Matthew 28: 10).
- ❖ Women were praised for praying unceasingly (Acts 1: 14).
- ❖ Women were going along with the apostles in their missions (1 Corinthians 9: 5).
- ❖ Women were prophetess like Miriam (Exodus 15: 20), Deborah, a prophetess and a judge (Judges 4: 4), Huldah the prophetess (2 Kings 22: 14, 2 Chronicles 34: 22), the great Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4: 12-36), St. Mary the new Eve and her relative Elizabeth (Luke 1: 36), Priscilla (Acts 18: 2-26), the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21: 9), Phoebe the servant (Romans 16: 1), Tryphena and Tryphosa and Persis (Romans 16: 12), Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4: 2) ...etc.
- ❖ The Synaxarium (Book of Saints and Martyrs) is full of women saints whom we love with all our hearts and consider them to be great examples of the love of God and how to hold strongly unto our faith even unto death, like the great martyr St. Demiana.

Therefore, speaking about women and the real meaning of purity and necessary precaution and preparation for receiving the Holy Communion does not underrate women in any way or disregard their position in the church or show any disrespect whatsoever. As we will see, precaution and preparation are required of all people, men and women alike.

2. Why This Topic Now

Why the topic of women and their secretion has now become the talk of the hour; as if we have understood all the issues related to human salvation and we are left up with women's menstrual cycle and their bleeding. Where is the teaching of the church and the church fathers?

The only one reference of the church fathers that they forcefully use is the letter of St. Athanasius to the monk Amun. They completely misunderstood the letter and how it was addressed to male monk; which has absolutely nothing to do with women. They highlight the following points of the letter:

1. All things made by God are beautiful and pure, for the Word of God has made nothing useless or impure.
2. What sin or uncleanness there is in any natural secretion,—as though a man were minded to make a culpable matter of the cleanings of the nose or the sputa from the mouth?

We certainly have no objection whatsoever to these points. Again, they are ignoring the fact that the letter was addressed to a male monk who was so worried about any bodily secretion that could be sinful and hence requiring repentance and confession. Therefore, St. Athanasius was explaining that these are “natural secretion”, where man has no control over it. This is different than a sin that a man commits, e.g., adultery.

The question again is: where in his letter, did St. Athanasius ever speak about women? How can we relate this letter to women's menstrual cycle and allowing them to take communion because bleeding is natural secretion! Please do not just pick and choose words that you're your desires. In case you don't know, the word “heresy” means “pick and choose”!!!

So, here I emphasize again that the body is pure in its nature; as created by God and nothing defiles the body except sin. Although natural secretion is not a sin, there are things that forbid us from taking communion; not matter how holy they are; e.g. marital relationship before communion, women's menstrual cycle, eating before communion, etc.

A simple question now relates to eating: If I eat any kind of food before communion, I should not take communion. Should we now treat food as something impure that defile our body???

3. Why do we accept any opinion that we hear without real understanding or examination?

I wonder about those people who accept and support any view against the right teaching of the church. I cite here the teaching of St. Paul about those who confuse the minds of the faithful people”

- † “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Romans 16: 17-18)

Moreover, he clearly warns:

- † “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any

other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (Galatians 1: 6-10)

I wish that people don't get deceived by high-ranking professionals or scientists or even servants who could easily disturb your peace and spread false teaching using the internet and social media. For example, the topic of how and when can women partake of the Holy Communion is not a matter that would be addressed and receive prescription from a physician; as the priest cannot prescribe any medication to someone having physical illness.

We must watch and examine all views to see if they are from God or not; as the Bible says:

- ✠ “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4: 1)
- ✠ “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5: 21)

4. Where is our privacy?

The period of time that our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to not take communion is supposed to be a personal and private matter. No one should know whether you are tired or not or the reason for your tiredness that could forbid you from taking communion. It is a personal matter between you and God. For example, how could any man or woman go and tell people that I will take communion even though I am bleeding, or not ready for communion or have eaten in the morning or have a private relationship with my spouse overnight, etc.

For women to take communion during normal times or not taking communion during their menstrual cycle, will not reduce or add to the portion of communion for men. So, holding unto this teaching does not mean any discrimination against women or demeaning of their place because men want to be in control, or degrading the position of women in our church, or any of these strange sayings that we hear about nowadays.

People who disturb others by these sayings are acting as tools in the hands of Satan who wants nothing but to divide the one church of God. For someone to deliver the true teaching; as I am doing now, I need nothing from anyone except to watch for your salvation and to stay away from Satan and to rebuke him and his followers; as God told him during the temptation on the mount:

- ✠ “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship The Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matthew 4: 10)

Simply because Satan is:

- ✠ “A murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8: 44)

Therefore, I wish that women do not get so excited about any views that are foreign to our church and are led by people who are forgetting their own salvation and the salvation of those

who listen to them. These people only care about their personal fame and recognition. In so doing, they refuse to hear the right teaching; as St. Paul described them saying:

✠ “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears (*ears that are hard because of the continuous itching and hence loses its feeling*), they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4: 3-4)

They forget the fact that they are causing many people to stumble and hence require the judgment of The Lord; as He said:

✠ “Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes” (Matthew 18: 7, Luke 17: 1)

Third: Our Reply To The Message

1. Annulment of the Old Testament that has “become obsolete and growing old and is ready to vanish away”

Sadly, those critiques underestimate the holiness and importance of the Old Testament forgetting that God of The New Testament is the Same God of The Old Testament. Let me recite some of the verses from The New Testament that shows that we hold unto the Old Testament and all its teachings.

Let me start by reminding everyone that:

✠ “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13: 8)

They mistakenly cite the following verse from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Hebrews without understanding its real meaning:

✠ “For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God” (Hebrews 7: 18-19)

To understand the words of St. Paul, let’s read what he said to the Galatians:

✠ “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain” (Galatians 4: 8-11)

Here, St. Paul speaks to the Galatians who were worshipping idols before their preaching about The Lord Jesus Christ. Since they didn’t know about the true God before, nor even the prophecies of His incarnation, they were enslaved to the idols and their rituals. Therefore, St. Paul was reminding them that God has visited them with His salvation; as he said “you are known by God”, so how can they so quickly turn again from the Godly teaching to the weak and beggarly elements, as if they like to be slaves and in bondage.

He is emphasizing the fact that they must not be slaves to forbidden laws and idol rituals, where they “observe days and months and seasons and years” of idols’ feasts and rites. This has

nothing to do with The law of Moses. Therefore, he says “I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain”, meaning I am afraid that Satan deceives you and turns you again to your old laws and habits of worshiping idols.

And he emphasized this meaning by saying to the Romans:

✠ “Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law” (Roman 3: 31)

And he continues and clarifies that his sayings are targeting the Jewish traditions and idols’ rituals; not The Law of Moses; and says:

✠ “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead. I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And the commandment, which was to bring life, I found to bring death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me. Therefore, the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good. Has then what is good become death to me? Certainly not! But sin, that it might appear sin, was producing death in me through what is good, so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful” (Romans 7: 7-13)

He also explained that God asked us to fulfill The Law in love:

✠ “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law” (Romans 13: 8 – 10)

In his talk about priesthood, he compared the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ and the priesthood of Aaron and his descendants. This talk was directed only to priesthood and has nothing to do with The Law and The Ten Commandments. He says:

✠ “For He testifies: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God. And inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath. For they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: The Lord has sworn and will not relent, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Hebrews 7: 16-21)

Here, he explains that priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ is not according to an earthly commandment, meaning not according to the Law that was emphasizing bodily purification and other external factors. But, the Lord Jesus became priest by the power of the Father and His own power, which is an eternal living power that cannot die. Through this power, we will not worry about earthly inheritance and materialistic gains, but have hope in eternal joy. This can now

easily understood because our high priest, the Lord Jesus, is eternal and His priesthood is forever according to the order of Melchizedek, for no Levitical priest will live forever; as they are all humans and will definitely die.

So, when he said “For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness”, he was not speaking about The Law and The Ten Commandments. He was only talking about the rites of the Levitical priesthood that was annulled because it was a symbol of the true priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ and because priests were just humans who could sin according to their weak human natures and cannot justify all humanity. But the Lord Jesus Christ is God who can justify all of us.

Finally, let us not forget what the Lord Jesus Christ said:

✠ “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill” (Matthew 5: 17)

2. Commandments of the Holy Bible that God and His Mother Followed

Let me recite here some of the verses for our benefits.

✠ “Then The Lord spoke to Moses, saying; speak to the children of Israel, saying: If a woman has conceived, and borne a male child, then she shall be unclean seven days; as in the days of her customary impurity she shall be unclean. And on the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. She shall then continue in the blood of her purification thirty-three days. She shall not touch any hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are fulfilled. But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her customary impurity, and she shall continue in the blood of her purification sixty-six days. When the days of her purification are fulfilled, whether for a son or a daughter, she shall bring to the priest a lamb of the first year as a burnt offering, and a young pigeon or a turtledove as a sin offering, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then he shall offer it before the Lord, and make atonement for her. And she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who has borne a male or a female. And if she is not able to bring a lamb, then she may bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons -- one as a burnt offering and the other as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean” (Leviticus 12: 1-8)

Did The Lord Jesus Christ and His mother, Virgin Mary, apply the teaching of the Old Testament that has “become obsolete and growing old and is ready to vanish away”? Let’s see what The Lord of glory, The God of the Old and New Testaments, and His mother really did:

✠ “And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. Now when the days of her purification according to The Law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord; as it is written in the law of the Lord, ‘Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to The Lord’, and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of The Lord, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons’” (Luke 2: 21-24)

From these verses, we learn the following:

1. The Lord Jesus Christ, in His incarnation, obeyed The Law of Moses and was circumcised on the eighth day.
2. St. Mary, the Lady and Queen of us all, did not object to The Law of Moses and its teaching and exalt herself above The Law as being hailed as the Mother of God. She submitted to The Law; as it is written and clearly understood “when the days of her purification according to The Law of Moses were completed”, she brought Him to Jerusalem.
3. The Holy Family submitted to The Law and offered “a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of The Lord, ‘A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons’”.

Now, let me ask:

Do you think that the obedience and submission of St. Mary, the pride of women and all human race, to The Law and her waiting till the days of her purification were completed, is a degradation of her stature as the mother of God, or the stature and respect of any woman who follows The Law?

Do you think that the obedience and submission of The Lord Jesus Christ to The Law of Moses would degrade His stature as God who took flesh and became man to save us and teach us obedience and submission to The Law in meekness and humbleness as He taught us saying:

✠ “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29)

3. Commandments of the Holy Bible for Women and Men Alike

As we have seen from Leviticus 12, all commandments were giving to women **to get some rest from any painful bleeding and suffering during their menstrual cycle or after delivery where the mother needs paternity leave and the baby needs to feel love and bond with his mother.**

However, since women think that the church is against women, forgetting the real meaning of holiness of the Sacrament of Communion and being in the presence of the Holy God, let me share with you another biblical commandment that not only ask the women to be considerate of the Holiness of God, but also men. Please read all chapter of Leviticus 15. I will just cite here few verses:

✠ “And The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, ‘When any man has a discharge from his body, his discharge is unclean... If a woman has a discharge, and the discharge from her body is blood, she shall be set apart seven days; and whoever touches her shall be unclean until evening” (Leviticus 15: 1-32)

Similar commandment was given to men:

✠ “Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh” (Jude 1: 8)

Therefore, there is no distinction between men and women when it comes to the holiness of God and His sacraments, like the Holy Communion. We must be ready and sanctify our bodies and our spirits to meet with The Holy One where anything that is not holy, must be considered impure; as it is written:

- † “But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1: 15-16)

4. How About the Bleeding Woman Who Touched The Lord Jesus and He Did No Prevent Her

Let us read the Scripture:

- † “And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of His garment. For she said to herself, ‘If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well.’ But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, ‘Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well.’ And the woman was made well from that hour” (Matthew 9: 20-22)
- † “Now a certain woman had a flow of blood for twelve years, and had suffered many things from many physicians. She had spent all that she had and was no better, but rather grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came behind Him in the crowd and touched His garment. For she said, ‘If only I may touch His clothes, I shall be made well.’ Immediately the fountain of her blood was dried up, and she felt in her body that she was healed of the affliction. And Jesus, immediately knowing in Himself that power had gone out of Him, turned around in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched My clothes?’ But His disciples said to Him: You see the multitude thronging You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’ And He looked around to see her who had done this thing. But the woman, fearing and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, ‘Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your affliction’” (Mark 5: 25-34)
- † “Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped. And Jesus said, ‘Who touched Me?’ When all denied it, Peter and those with him said: Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’ But Jesus said, ‘Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me.’ Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before Him, she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately. And He said to her, ‘Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace’” (Luke 8: 43-48)

These verses do not need explanation or discussion to prove that The Lord Jesus did not touch the woman and hence, He did not break His own Law that was set in Leviticus 15. The woman is the one who came from behind Him and touched the border of His garment. So, the matter is much greater than a few days bleeding needing rest for women.

The matter is related to the “healing” of a sick woman who was continuously bleeding for 12 years and suffering physically, psychologically and financially for she “spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any”. Priests in general never cease to visit sick people in hospitals and give them of the Holy Communion, whether they are bleeding or not. These cases are exceptions and not the norm. Women’s bleeding during their menstrual cycle are just suffering for few days and they have the rest of the month and the rest of their life after menopause to take communion. So, how can we ever compare illness to normal things.

I repeat, again, please remember that the Holy Communion requires preparation, whether you are a man or a woman, and this has nothing to do with long-term illness or the like. Don't forget how the Bible warns us:

✠ “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body” (1 Corinthians 11: 27 – 28)

5. Commandments and Canons of the Fathers Related to Communion

1) The Didaskalia or Didache (Teaching of the Apostles)

There are two copies of the Didaskalia, one translated by Dr. William Selim Kelada and the other is the Syrian copy. Each contains teachings that elevate the state of women against Jewish ideology. They declare that women can pray during her menstrual cycle and keep on doing what is godly during this period and during pregnancy. We certainly have no objection whatsoever to this teaching. However, with all sadness, some people falsify this teaching by adding words or changing the meaning of words like “communion”, to deceive the simple and meek people.

Here is an example; a citation from the Didaskalia with words changed in parentheses:

“If you think, woman, that you are stripped of the Holy Spirit during the seven days of your menstruation, then if you die at this time, you will depart thence empty and without hope... Now think about it and recognize that prayer is heard through the Holy Spirit; and the thanksgiving (Eucharist) is received and consecrated through the Holy Spirit; and the Scriptures are words of the Holy Spirit and holy. Therefore, if the Holy Spirit is within you, why do you isolate your soul and not approach the works (prayer – communion) of the Holy Spirit?”

As you can see, the words Eucharist or communion do not exist in the Didaskalia, they were added and changed to force the church to offer communion to menstruating women. The right words were “Thanksgiving - Aghapy” meaning a meal of love; as we offer in our Coptic churches.

2) The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus (20: 5)

Let those who are to be baptized be instructed that they bathe and wash on the fifth day of the week. If a woman is in the manner of women (in her menstrual cycle), let her be set apart and receive baptism another day.

3) Canon 18 of Hippolytus

The woman who has given birth stays outside the holy place forty days if the child, which she has given birth to is male, and if it is female, eighty days. If she enters the church, she is to pray with the catechumens.

4) Pope Timothy of Alexandria, wrote 18 Canons, also known as ‘The Questions and Answers’

Question 7 asks: If a woman finds herself in the plight peculiar to her sex, ought she to come to the Mysteries on that day, or not?

Pope Timothy's answer was: She ought not to do so, until she has been purified.

5) The Second Canon of St. Dionysius, the thirteenth Pope of Alexandria, states:

Concerning menstruating women, whether they ought to enter the temple of God while in such a state, I think it superfluous even to put the question. For I opine, not even they themselves, being faithful and pious, would dare when in this state either to approach the Holy Table or to touch the body and blood of Christ. For not even the woman with a twelve years' issue would come into actual contact with Him, but only with the edge of His garment, to be cured. There is no objection to one's praying no matter how he may be or to one's remembering The Lord at any time and in any state whatever, and petitioning to receive help; but if one is not wholly clean both in soul and in body, he shall be prevented from coming up to the Holy of Holies.

6. H.H. Pope Shenouda III teaching about women during menstruation time"

Pope Shenouda received the following question:

Is it allowed for a woman while menstruating to receive Communion, and if not, why not? Because after all, this is something natural, which she can't help. And if she just sits down at home, is she allowed to worship privately, to pray and read the Bible, etc.?

His answer was:

At home, she can worship God however she likes at this time of the month, but if she takes Communion in church, or outside it, this is absolutely not allowed. A person is not permitted to receive Communion if blood is flowing from his body, and this applies to both sexes, and it also applies to any secretion of a sexual nature: this is clear from the Bible.

There are many Biblical texts and many Church regulations, which confirm this point and have made it clear for people to understand.

But someone might plead that it isn't fair on women, since nothing comparable applies to men. For when men have wet dreams or if any discharge comes from their bodies, they can still enter Church and no one is likely to prevent them, and no rules can be enforced against them. So why should this happen to women?

The answer is that the most the man is permitted to do is to enter the church after having cleansed himself bodily, but he is not allowed to receive Communion. There is a basic difference though between the kind of discharge coming from the man and the woman, which is that: the man's is incidental and temporary, whereas the woman's continues for several days.

The following point, however, would make them both equal and that is if the man's discharge were continuous, he would also be forbidden from taking the communion in exactly the same way.

But there remains the point that it is not the woman's fault, that it is something natural which she can't help.

No, it is nobody's fault: there is nothing wrong in it, and no one is being blamed but God just wants to always remind us of the first sin of mankind.

If we are mindful of that first sin, we are more likely to value the ransom paid out for us. The wages of sin is death, and even though Christ died for us, He still left us with a mark to remember this:

✠ “To the woman He said: I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children... Then to Adam He said: Cursed is the ground for your sake. In toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life” (Genesis 3:16-17)

In the case of pregnancy, the woman's menstruation stops, and she is reminded of Eve's original sin by the pains of pregnancy, birth and delivery. Outside the period of pregnancy, she recalls her sin at the time of menstruation and this makes her realize how much her sins forbid her from receiving holy blessings, not only those which are associated with Communion and the Church.

Men, on the other hand, are reminded of their first sin because they are supposed to labor throughout their lives on account of earning their daily bread. The remembrance of this is the aim, though the means might vary enormously.

It would be better for us to try and derive spiritual benefit from thinking more deeply about the meaning of these things rather than complaining about them.

His Grace Metropolitan Bishoy of Demiat, explains that this kind of uncleanness goes back to our inheritance of the original sin by saying:

If anyone dares to reject the concept of the original sin, he denies our ability to receive the righteousness of The Lord Jesus Christ; for Adam is the source of the old human race and The Lord Jesus Christ is the source of those who are redeemed for:

✠ “Of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (John 1: 16)

St. Paul explains how we inherited the sinful nature by saying:

✠ “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5: 12)

✠ “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15: 22)

H.H. Pope Shenouda III explains the meaning of “For as in Adam all die”, by saying that we were all in the loins of Adam when he committed the sin. Therefore, the sentence of death that fell upon him, has come down to all of us and we became under the same sentence of death.

St. Paul explains the meaning of what is called “loins”, when he spoke about the Levitical priesthood and Abraham their father:

✠ “Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him” (Hebrews 7: 9 – 10)

6. Would The Monthly Period Prevent Women From Reading The Bible?

As I explained earlier, the monthly period is not considered an impurity or unholy...etc., it only prevents women from partaking of the Holy Communion for all the reasons I detailed above.

The question now is: Would the monthly period prevent women from praying, attending the Liturgy or reading the Bible?

The Answer is: Women are allowed to attend the church, pray, and read the Bible at any time and at any place that is godly and suitable for understanding and contemplation. If all people, men and women, are allowed to:

- Attend the Liturgy, even if they will not partake of the Holy Communion,
- Pray the Agpeya at all times,
- Read the Bible at all times,
- Serve God in all capacities at all times,

So, why then should women be prevented from reading the word of God during the monthly period and hence prevent them from receiving these blessings and the blessing of praying for themselves, their families and all people who are in need of prayers?

The Lord Jesus Christ taught us to read the Scriptures at all times for they witness to His incarnation, death, resurrection and our salvation, when He said:

✠ “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5: 39)

He also granted blessing to those who read and hear His word:

✠ “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things, which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1: 3)

Also, The Lord taught us all, men and women, to pray at all times, saying:

✠ “Then He spoke a parable to them, that men always ought to pray and not lose heart...” (Luke 18: 1 - 8)

✠ “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21: 36)

Saint Paul also taught us all, men and women, to offer thanks and prayers at all times and for all people saying:

✠ “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6: 18)

✠ “We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (Colossians 1: 3)

✠ “Therefore, we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power” (2 Thessalonians 1: 11)

Saint Jude asks us, men and women, to build ourselves in faith through prayers in the Holy Spirit:

✠ “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1: 20)

Finally, how about the “Arrow Prayer” or “Jesus Prayer” that the fathers taught us all, men and women, to pray and recite at any time and at any place, saying; “My Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me a sinner”, “My Lord Jesus Christ help me a sinner”, “My Lord Jesus Christ ... me a sinner”, etc.?

Glory and honor be to our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ, now and forever. Amen.