Press Release

Print
Print

International Conference on Spirituality

MATTHEW THE POOR
A Contemporary Desert Father

21 - 22 May 2016
Monastery of Bose

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the passage of igumen Matta el Meskin from death to life, the Monastery of Bose, in collaboration with the Monastery of Saint Macarius in Egypt is organizing the first international and ecumenical conference dedicated to one of the most important figures of modern Coptic monasticism, to be held on 21–22 May 2016.

Matta el Meskin (1919–2006) was a monk and igumen of the Monastery of Saint Macarius in the Scete desert from 1969 until his death. Considered by many as an extraordinary charismatic person of great human and spiritual profundity, he is one of the most luminous representatives of the Christians of Egypt and father of an important spiritual, monastic, and cultural renaissance in the Coptic Orthodox Church. He is a figure not yet fully discovered, and the conference seeks to shed light on him in all his complexity.

If it was the love of God that led father Matta to leave the world for an extremely poor monastery of Upper Egypt, the monastery of Saint Samuel the Confessor, he was not spared the cross of not being understood and of being marginalized by the church hierarchy. Yet today, with the pope Tawadros II, patriarch of the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Christians of Egypt are beginning to gather the fruits of father Matta's profound spirituality, and his work continues to spread.

All of abuna Matta's monastic life was characterized by radically living the Gospel, remaining physically separated from the world, but united to all men through prayer, love, hospitality. With his writings Matta el Meskin created around him a real theological and spiritual school. Today his disciples are scattered not only in Egypt, but through the whole world, thanks to the diffusion of his works by their translation into fifteen languages.

Matta el Meskin is able to speak to today's men and women, wherever they may be, with the force of language and of the spirit of the ancient fathers of the desert.

Father Matta's particular spirituality consists of a mystical and intimate way of ruminating on the Scriptures and the fathers. The monasticism as lived by Matta el Meskin is austere and profoundly rooted in the spirituality of the desert fathers, yet at the same time cultured and open to the contemporary world. In the monastery of Saint Macarius abuna Matta began an important rebirth by reforming community life and undertaking an immense work of renovation and expansion that lasted many years and gave work to numerous workers. In ten years the number of monks grew from ten at the beginning to about eighty (today there are about 140). About a thousand hectares of land were reclaimed from the desert and transformed into cultivated fields, gardens, orchards, and pastures. providing work to about 700 dependents, who still today live in a small village next to the monastery. The small Eden of the Monastery of Saint Macarius has become a model for many other monasteries.

Matta el Meskin unwearyingly supported Christian unity; he is the author of numerous writings and of an large oral corpus, which as yet is known little.

The first part of the conference, on Saturday, 21 May, will be dedicated to the spirituality of Matta el Meskin. After the opening of the conference by the prior of Bose, Enzo Bianchi, bishop Anba Epiphanius (Wadi el Natrun, Egypt), abbot of Saint Macarius and successor of Matta el Meskin, will begin with an ample panorama on the human and spiritual inheritance of abuna Matta. Anthony O'Mahony (London) will follow with a synthesis of Matta's biography. Fouad Naguib (Cairo), spiritual son of Matta el Meskin, will give a portrait of a man whose existence was consecrated to freedom in Christ. The coptologist Alberto Elli (Giussano) will offer a reflection on the relations between Matta el Meskin and the Coptic church leaders. Saturday afternoon the theologian Hani Hanna (Cairo) will give an overview of father Matta's Scriptural theology. Matta el Meskin's disciple, brother Wadid el Makari, a Catholic monk of the Monastery of Saint Macarius, will talk on monasticism as it was lived by his spiritual father, thus offering new aspects on a little-known topic. The patrologist and coptologist Samuel Rubenson (Lund, Sweden) will examine the role played by Matta el Meskin in rediscovering the fathers and how this influenced the reform movement within the Coptic Church. The coptologist Mark Sheridan (Jerusalem) will give a synthesis of the many writings of this contemporary desert father on prayer. The final talks on Saturday will be by the Copt Aida Nassif on the political and social thought of father Matta and by Domenico

Luciani (Treviso), who will present an architectural tour of the monastery of Saint Macarius. On Sunday morning a Coptic Orthodox eucharistic liturgy will be celebrated by anba Epiphanius and the Coptic metropolitans and bishops present at the conference. This will be followed by an ecumenical round table discussion on Matta el Meskin. The participants, Raouf Edouard (Toronto), Peter Halldorf (Bjärka-Säby, Sweden), Nikolaos Kouromenos (Athens), Gwénola Le Serrec (Pierrefiche d'Olt, France), Adel Sidarous (Evora, Portugal), and Ugo Zanetti (Chevetogne, Belgium), come from various Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Churches. It will be chaired by brother Guido Dotti of the Bose Monastery, who will also conclude the conference.

The Sunday eucharist of the Monastery of Bose at noon will be the liturgical thanksgiving to the Lord for this event in the Spirit.

Bishop Gabriel Mana of Biella will greet the participants.

Monks and nuns of the East and of the West will be present.