



## Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Council, 19 June 2014, Corrected Copy)

Extract from NSW Legislative Council Hansard and Papers Thursday, 19 June 2014.

### ST SHENOUDA COPTIC ORTHODOX MONASTERY (NSW) PROPERTY TRUST BILL 2014

**Bill introduced, and read a first time and ordered to be printed on motion by Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile.**

#### Second Reading

**Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE** [9.55 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I thank the House for the opportunity to introduce this important bill and to give the second reading speech prior to the debate being adjourned, in accordance with the usual procedure. I am pleased to introduce the St Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Monastery (NSW) Property Trust Bill 2014, which has been listed on the *Notice Paper* for a long time. The objects of the bill are:

- (a) to constitute a statutory corporation to hold property on behalf of the St Shenouda Coptic Orthodox Monastery, and
- (b) to specify the functions of the statutory corporation, and
- (c) to vest in the statutory corporation property held in trust for the Monastery, without the need to pay duty.

The monastery was purchased in 1993 and was presented to His Holiness the Coptic Pope as a gift from the people of Sydney. It is located at 8419 Putty Road, Putty. In recent years the monastery underwent a large transformation with the construction of a church for the monks and congregation, the construction of a seven-room retreat house to accommodate 35 people as well as a large dining room and commercial kitchen, the construction of a large workshop housing the many farming vehicles used to cultivate the lands, the construction of a large building which houses 12 new monastic cells for the monks, and the construction of a big private library for the monks, just to name a few of the accomplishments of the monastery.

The monastery regularly welcomes thousands of parishioners from New South Wales and other parts of Australia every year who come to worship at the monastery and spend time in spiritual prayer and reflection. The monastery currently owns five lots of land comprising a total of 350 acres. On 8 August 2009, His Grace Bishop Daniel was enthroned as the first ever Bishop and Abbot of St Shenouda's Coptic Orthodox Monastery in Sydney. His Grace Bishop Daniel is only the second bishop to be ordained over a Coptic monastery outside Egypt after the late Bishop Karas of St Anthony's Monastery in California. Bishop Daniel, as Bishop and Abbot of the St Shenouda's Monastery, is the spiritual father of all those who entered the monastery, including the current fathers of the monastery, Father Wissa, Father Shenouda, Father Theodore and Father Anthony.

Although the St Shenouda Monastery was established in 1993, it was during the meetings of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt in July 2009 that the St Shenouda Monastery in Sydney was officially canonised and now is officially recognised by the Holy Synod. This means that the St Shenouda Monastery is now considered an established monastery within the Coptic Orthodox Church and is able to ordain monks. Furthermore the current and future monks of the monastery can now hold the name of the patron saint of the monastery as their family name. The St Shenouda Monastery joins a small number of Coptic monasteries outside Egypt that have been canonised, including St Anthony's Coptic Monastery in Melbourne which also was canonised in 2009 under the leadership of His Grace Bishop Surriel. I was pleased to be present, with my late wife, when Father Daniel was consecrated as Bishop of the St Shenouda Monastery on Sunday 7 June 2009. It was a very inspiring service. My late wife and I were pleased to be able to attend as guests and to inspect the monastery grounds.

His Grace Bishop Daniel was born in Sudan in October 1952. He migrated with his family to Australia in 1970, finished his high school education in Australia and graduated with a diploma of accounting. In 1979 he went to

Egypt to be consecrated as a monk by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and entered St Anthony's Monastery near the Red Sea. Less than a year later he was ordained a priest and then a hegomen, and was sent by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III to Australia to serve in Melbourne. Since that time His Grace has served all over Australia. In the 30 years since his consecration as a monk, Bishop Daniel, then serving as Father Daniel, served in 26 different churches in six States and two Territories of Australia. More recently, Bishop Daniel was also serving in the newly established Coptic churches in the Fijian islands under His Grace Bishop Suriel, Bishop of Melbourne. He has also been actively involved in youth ministry and served as an executive member of the National Council of Churches Australia for about 10 years, representing the Coptic Orthodox Church.

In August 2006 Father Daniel, as he was then known, was appointed by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III to be the Abbot of St Shenouda Monastery in Sydney as Father Daniel Al-Antouny. On the Feast of Pentecost on Sunday 7 June 2009, His Holiness Pope Shenouda III and members of the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church laid their hands on Father Daniel Al-Antouny and consecrated him as Bishop Daniel, bishop of St Shenouda Monastery. Bishop Daniel was one of seven bishops ordained by His Holiness during the Holy Pentecost service that year.

Members may be interested to know the background to the Coptic Orthodox Church. The word "Copt" is derived from the Greek word "Aigyptos". The modern use of the term "Coptic" describes Egyptian Christians as well as the last stage of the ancient Egyptian language script. It also describes the distinctive art and architecture that developed as an early expression of the new faith. The Coptic Church is based on the teachings of St Mark, who brought Christianity to Egypt during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero in the first century, a dozen years after Our Lord's ascension to Heaven. He was one of the four evangelists and the one who wrote the oldest canonical gospel: the gospel of Mark. Christianity spread throughout Egypt within half a century of St Mark's arrival in Alexandria. The Coptic Church, which is now more than 19 centuries old, was the subject of many prophecies in the Old Testament. Isaiah the prophet, in chapter 19 verse 19, says:

In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord at its border.

Although fully integrated into the body of the modern Egyptian nation, the Copts have survived as a strong religious entity and pride themselves on their contribution to the Christian world. The Coptic Church regards itself as a strong defender of the Christian faith. The Nicene Creed, which is recited in all churches throughout the world, has been authored by one of the Coptic Church's favourite sons, St Athanasius, the Pope of Alexandria for 46 years from 327 AD to 373 AD. This status is well deserved; after all, Egypt was the refuge that the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus sought in its flight from Judea.

The contributions of the Coptic Church to Christendom are many. From the beginning it played a central role in Christian theology, especially to protect it from the Gnostics heresies. The Coptic Church produced thousands of texts, biblical and theological studies, which are important resources for archaeology. The *Holy Bible* was translated to the Coptic language in the second century AD. Hundreds of scribes used to write copies of the *Bible* and other liturgical and theological books. Now libraries, museums and universities throughout the world possess hundreds and thousands of Coptic manuscripts. The Catechetical School of Alexandria is the oldest catechetical school in the world. Soon after its inception around 190 AD by the Christian scholar Pantanaeus, the school of Alexandria became the most important institution of religious learning in Christendom. Many prominent bishops from many areas of the world were instructed in that school.

Monasticism was born in Egypt and was instrumental in the formation of the Coptic Church's character of submission and humbleness, thanks to the teachings and writings of the Great Fathers of Egypt's deserts. Monasticism started in the last years of the third century and flourished in the fourth century. St Anthony, the world's first Christian monk, was a Copt from Upper Egypt. Saint Pachom, who established the rules of monasticism, was a Copt. Saint Paul, the world's first anchorite, was also a Copt. By the end of the fourth century there were hundreds of monasteries and thousands of cells and caves scattered throughout the Egyptian hills. Many of these monasteries are still flourishing and have new vocations to this day. All Christian monasticism stems, either directly or indirectly, from the Egyptian example. St Basil, organiser of the monastic movement in Asia Minor, visited Egypt around 357 AD and his rule is followed by the eastern churches. St Jerome, who translated the *Bible* into Latin, came to Egypt around 400 AD and left details of his experiences in his letters. St Benedict founded monasteries in the sixth century on the model of St Pachom, but in a stricter form. Countless pilgrims visited the Desert Fathers and emulated their spiritual, disciplined lives. There is even evidence that Copts had missionaries to northern Europe.

During my last visit to Egypt I was a guest of the Coptic bishops in Egypt who escorted me to visit a number of the monasteries that still operate in Egypt in those desert regions. I was fascinated to inspect those monasteries, to meet the monks who were there and to realise that, when the Coptics came under a lot of persecution in later centuries, those monasteries became a refuge for Coptic Christians and enabled the Coptic faith to continue in Egypt in spite of very militant periods of persecution. Many of the monasteries were built as fortresses. They often had an outer wall and a wooden gateway that led to the next part of the monastery. The monks and others

could retreat to the centre and pull up the wooden bridge so that others could not get into that part of the monastery, and they would have to store water and food there during that period of persecution. The monasteries played a more important part than one of only religious significance; they became defensive centres to maintain the Christian Coptic faith.

Members may be surprised to know that today there are still more than nine million Coptic Christians who pray and share communion and daily masses in thousands of Coptic churches in Egypt. During my recent visit I was privileged to be a guest of the Coptic Cathedral in Cairo, Egypt, which is hundreds of years old, to see the Coptic Church services conducted by the priests there. However, there are millions of Coptic Christians in other parts of the world. In fact there are 1.2 million immigrant Copts who practise their faith in hundreds of churches in the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Holland, Brazil and many other countries in Africa and Asia. I am pleased to introduce this bill.

I ask all members to pray for the Coptic Christians of Egypt, as well as Christians in other parts of the world, but particularly those in Egypt where there are still places of persecution and some Coptic Christians die because of their faith in Jesus Christ their Saviour and their belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. This bill contains a number of aspects that are normal for such a bill: part 2 sets out the constitution and functions of the trust, part 3 sets out the vesting of property in the trust, and part 4 sets out the particular powers of the trust. I commend the bill to the House.