Only a century ago, few people would have approved of me for bringing the monks of Syria and Egypt to your attention. For, until recently, we had all tended to be heirs of the great British historian, Edward Gibbon, the first volume of whose monumental *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* first appeared in 1776. Gibbon spoke with the sonorous and confident voice of the eighteenth century Enlightenment. For him monks were unpardonable. They were drop-outs. They were fanatics. He wrote of them, with ill disguised contempt, as

Those unhappy exiles from social life . . . impelled by the dark and implacable genius of superstition.

And yet, nowadays, our attitudes have changed. To put it very briefly, we see the early monks who emerged in Syria and Egypt no longer as "unhappy exiles from social life." We have come to see that, far from being weird and wonderful drop-outs, the monks acted as a catalyst for the social imagination of an entire society. Like many other extremist movements in other ages, early Christian monasticism was a sort of social seismograph. We can trace, often in exaggerated forms (like the abrupt up and down movements of the needle on a seismograph) the more silent earth tremors of the normal, Roman society from
which the monks broke loose. Furthermore, we can see how those who supported
the monks, did so because they saw their own social dilemmas writ large (again,
as in the dramatic high lines of a seismograph) in the persons of the monks.

What happened at this time was like what happened in the middle ages, when the
extremist poverty of Saint Francis and his followers arose as a comment on the
boom and bust economy of the Italian cities of the thirteenth century, or when,
nowadays, the mission of Mother Theresa in the slums of Calcutta focusses, in
dramatic, personal form, the anxieties of privileged nations in the face of
the seemingly limitless poverty of much of the rest of the world.

In the same way, from the third to the sixth century AD, monks were very
much part of the life of distinctive regions of what is now the Middle East and
Africa. At that time they were the eastern provinces of a Roman empire that was
already half a millennium old.

At a time which Gibbon described as the period of the Decline and Fall of
the Roman Empire in the West, no such thing was happening in the East. In the
East, the Roman Empire was still alive and well. Seen from the East, the end
of the western Roman empire in 476 was a non-date. This was because the eastern
half of the empire was backed by a buoyant economy. A world which we now
associate with dry deserts dotted with ancient ruins was thriving. It was the
westernmost economic hub of a world system which reached across Eurasia, along
the Silk Route, to the great cities of China, and which, reached down through
Egypt and East Africa, into the Indian Ocean. By comparison, western Europe,
on which Gibbon lavished so much attention, in tracing the "awful revolution"
of the end of Roman rule in the West, was a peripheral and underdeveloped
region, perched on the far tip of Eurasia.
Last but not least: The discovery of ever increasing numbers of papyri preserved in the dry sands of Egypt and of other parts of the Middle East enable us to look inside the communities of monks and of similar ascetics. We can follow their daily life in a manner which Edward Gibbon (perched among his books in London and in Lausanne on the shores of Lake Geneva in modern Switzerland) could never have done.

Because of all this, we can enter into the minds of the monks on issues which were crucial for the nature of the society around them. And this is what I want to talk about this evening. I want to talk about a muffled debate on the nature of wealth, on labor and on the care of the poor which echoed throughout the monastic communities of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, from Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) to the east to southern Italy in the West.

Let me tell you why I have been led to this theme. In recent years, I have worked on the issues of wealth and the care of the poor in the Christian churches of late antiquity. I found myself asking who, actually, were "the poor"? And I realized, somewhat to my surprise, that, in the eastern Christian world of the later third and fourth centuries, there was, as yet, no simple answer to that question.

My surprise deserves to be stressed. We now tend to take for granted that the principal duty of good Christians in the disposal of their wealth has always been to show mercy to the "real" poor. We assume that this view already went without saying among the majority of Christians in around 300 AD. It was from this definition of "the poor" that the charitable ventures associated with later Christianity derived. Yet, around the year 300, there were many Christian regions and forms of Christianity where a different attitude was
equally prominent. Many thought that Christians should give mainly to the "holy poor" -- to the "poor among the saints" to use the phrase of Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans (15:26) when describing his collection for the poor "saints" of the community of Jerusalem. These "holy poor" claimed to give the ethereal benefits of "spiritual" blessing, advice and prayer, in return for being entirely supported by the "earthly" offering of daily sustenance, as if they were beggars -- indeed, as if they were the only beggars that mattered.

In the late third and early fourth centuries, this division of opinion was particularly acute throughout a distinctive geographical area -- hence the latter part of my title: Between Egypt and Syria.

In order to understand why this was so, we have to place our conventional image of the rise of Christianity against a wider geographical background than we are accustomed to. We tend to think of Christianity as belonging largely to the Greco-Roman world and, eventually, to Europe. But this is to ignore the success of Christianity in regions far to the east of Europe. These regions formed an extensive Third World of Christianity. Its dominant languages were not Latin and Greek, but Coptic, the ancient language of Egypt, and Syriac, the last and eventually the most widespread form of the Aramaic which Jesus of Nazareth had spoken. In this period, Syriac developed into a Christian language of unusual expressive power. It was both a language of religion and a language of commerce. As a result, by the year 600, Syriac speakers were dotted across all of Asia, from Antioch and Syria, across Iran and Central Asia to the Chinese western capital of Xian. It is to this great Third World that we must now turn. Its central axis was defined by the sweep of the Fertile Crescent.
The Fertile Crescent joined Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean in a great, northern arc which stretched (through what are now unhappy regions) from southern Iraq to Antioch, and southward as far as the Delta of the Nile. As far as Christian monasticism was concerned, the Fertile Crescent and not the Roman territories of Greece and Europe was where the action was.

I will be dealing with three main groups of monks and missionaries who moved up and down the Fertile Crescent at this time: the wandering Christian monks of Syria, the missionaries of the Manichees from Mesopotamia, the more sedentary but equally vocal monks of Egypt.

Already in the 270s the Fertile Crescent was criss-crossed by extreme religious groups of Christian origin. They expected to be supported entirely by the alms of those to whom they ministered. They were a striking lot. A letter that was written in the late third century to direct the behavior of one such group warned them that, when they passed through pagan villages, they should not burst out into singing the Psalms (which they usually did, to hearten the local Christians), lest they be mistaken for a troupe of traveling musicians!

Other charismatic wanderers came from yet further to the East, from central Mesopotamia. They were the messengers of a new prophet, Mani, who had died as a martyr at the hands of the Sasanian king of kings, in 277. Though vehemently rejected by other Christians, Mani saw himself as the reformer of Christianity. He wished to be the Paul of his age. He sent his emissaries as “Apostles”, to establish his “Holy Church” in all regions of the earth – from the Roman Empire in the West to the Kushan kingdom of Central Asia in the East. He had the sweep of vision of a man who knew that, in Mesopotamia, he stood at
the cross roads of Asia:

The Lord Zoroaster came to Persia .. The Lord Buddha, the wise, came to the land of India .. Jesus the Christ, in the lands of the Romans, came to the West.

And Mani would come to them all.

Mani’s missionaries soon established themselves as the “Elect” of his Church. They ministered to local Manichaean communities, called "Hearers". When they arrived in Syria and Egypt, in around 300, the Manichaean Elect seemed less foreign to local Christians than we might think. For they modelled their behavior on exactly the same pattern of extreme poverty combined with ceaseless mobility which the radical Christians of Syria of Mani's own time had come to see as the distinctive mark of all true disciples of Jesus. In the words of a Manichaean Coptic Psalms of the Wanderers, discovered in Egypt:

...... they went from village to village.  

They went into the roads hungry, with no bread in their hands.  
They walked in the heat, thirsting, they took no water to drink.  
No gold, no silver, no money, did they take with them on their way.  
They went into the villages, not knowing anybody.  
They were welcomed for His sake, they were loved for his names sake.

Yet these dramatic groups of wandering, mendicant monks were soon met by an alternative version of the monastic life, primarily associated with Egypt. In the Fayum oasis (just south of the Nile Delta around Alexandria) in around 270 – that is, less than a decade before the death of Mani in 277 and well over
a generation before the conversion of Constantine in 312 — Anthony, a young Coptic-speaking Egyptian and a comfortable farmer (the owner of an estate of some 200 acres) — decided to move out of his village. He had been converted by hearing, in the village church, the crucial passage from the Gospel of Saint Matthew:

Just then it happened that the Gospel was being read, and he heard the Lord saying to the Rich Young Man:
If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. (Matthew 19:21)

We should note that the steps which Anthony was represented as having taken at the time of his renunciation differed significantly from the pattern established by his contemporaries, the holy wanderers of Syria and the missionaries of the “Holy Church” of Mani. Anthony did not take to the roads. He took to the desert and he stayed put. He became known as the first "hermit" — a herémitikos (from the Greek word herémos, desert). He was a man of the Desert, not a man of the open roads. His renunciation was accompanied by a dramatic act almsgiving to the real poor:

Selling all the rest of his portable wealth [his house, furniture, silverware and clothes], when he had collected all the cash realized by this sale, he gave it to the poor.

Furthermore, once he had divested himself of this wealth, he
refused to receive alms for himself. Although established in the
desert, Anthony was believed to have maintained himself by the
work of his own hands. His followers imitated him with studied
intensity. The words of Paul at his most anxious to avoid the
accusation of being, himself, a charismatic "free-loader" became
the mantra of the monks of Egypt:

For even when we were with you, we gave you this command:

If any one will not work, let him not eat. (2 Thessalonians
3:10).

And so, by the time that Anthony died, in 356 AD, the debate
between Syria and Egypt, as to the correct form of monasticism,
which had already rumbled for generations between Mesopotamia and
the valley of the Nile, was brought into the open.

And what was the debate about? It was not only about who
should receive alms from Christians -- the "holy" poor or the
"real" poor: wandering charismatics or indigent local beggars. It
was swamped by a much larger issue. How much was human society
defined by the obligation of all humans to work for a living? How
many members of this society could claim to be called by a
religious vocation to live without patterns of work that
characterized the lives of the majority of their fellows? And,
last but not least, what claims if any did those who did not work
have on the generosity of lay persons who supported them through
pious alms?

These were truly basic questions. They brought to the
surface, in Christian form, millennial arguments on the nature of man and society. Different regions and different Christian groups answered them in very different ways. Their different answers revealed markedly different attitudes to society as a whole.

It is in the light of their differing attitudes to the meaning of work that I would like to interpret the various ascetic currents that flowed so vigorously between Mesopotamia, Syria and Egypt in the late third and fourth centuries.

Let us take the Manichees first. And, with the Manichees, we begin with a stunning, recent discovery. A little over a decade ago, a house was excavated in what had been known in ancient times as the village of Kellis, in the Dakhleh Oasis of the western desert of Egypt. In it was found a complete cache of Manichaean works, including a set of personal letters from Manichaean "Elect" to their many "Hearers". Kellis lay over 600 miles to the south of the Fayum. But we now know that, in around 340 -- in exactly the same years as Anthony was reaching the zenith of his fame in northern Egypt -- the Lady Eirene, a "Hearer", that is, a lay disciple of the Manichaean Elect, was being praised by the local Elect for putting treasure in Heaven in the manner distinctive to her sect. She was praised by the local Elect for offering them material support. In so doing, she was following the command of Christ in the Gospels:

But lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where no moth or rust destroys and where thieves do not dig in and
steal (Matthew 6:19-20)

It then adds an explanation:

which [treasures in Heaven] are the Sun and the Moon.

(PKC 32.1-13, p.214)

It was only this last, tell-tale reference to the Sun and the Moon as active agents in a cosmic drama of salvation, which identified the writer of the letter as a Manichee rather than as an ordinary Christian.

This newly-discovered exchange of Manichaean letters shows, with the crispness of an X-ray photograph, one path by which (in circles adjacent to mainline Christianity) “treasure on earth” might flow directly upwards to become “treasure in heaven”. The Elect needed Eirene and her fellow “Catechumens”:

You being for us helpers and worthy patrons and firm unbending pillars [of the church cf. Galatians 2:9]; while we ourselves rely upon you .... I was very grateful to you, ten million times! [Whether] we are far or [we are near]; indeed, we have found remembrance among [you].

Now, therefore, may it stay with you: this Knowledge and this Faith [which you have] known and believed in.

Therefore, [I] beg you, [my] blessed [daughters], that you will [send] me two choes [two large jars] of oil. For [you] know yourselves that we are [in need] here; since we are afflicted. (Pap. Kellis Copt. 31.17f, p.210-211)
It is a very oily letter. But what did Eirene gain from this exchange, and what views of the world were implied in it?

Among the Manichees, it was the nature of the material world itself which was at stake. It was their view of the material world as a whole which gave a sharp flavor to their notion of almsgiving to the Elect as members of the "holy poor". For Manichees, the material universe was hopelessly corrupt. Matter was evil. The best that could be said of it was that it could be used (in the words of a later, Chinese catechism of the Manichaean faith) as an immense distillation plant. It was like one of the magical laboratories in which alchemists had sought, through a prolonged process of refinement, to wrench from base matter, in minute, etherial fragments, the unalloyed essence of gold and of similar time-defying substances -- a sort of 100% proof spiritual moonshine.

Eirene's gifts to the Elect were seen as a last, thin vestige of matter, painstakingly prized loose from an inherently evil world, and sent on its way (in the form of a solemn gift of food to the Elect) towards some final transmutation in "the treasuries in the heights." Such wealth, offered in this way, somehow carried with it the very souls of its donors.

These were the "alms" which Manichee lay persons gave to their Elect, and to the Elect only. For they were "saving" alms. They were offered to persons whose entire life had come to a stop.
The Elect were "sealed" on their mouths, their hands and their genitals. They were thus sealed off from process. They did not join themselves to fully "living" matter through unregulated eating. They did not contribute to the headlong pullulation of human flesh through intercourse and the begetting of children. Above all, they did not lend their hands to manual labor in the fields. With pale faces and soft, white hands, the Elect -- men and women alike, for, in this, they were indistinguishable -- had left "the world". They already lived on the threshold of the mighty "cessation" which would eventually fall upon the cosmos as a whole. They were what their lay supporters might yet become.

Such a view had palpable social implications. To cease to work was, somehow, to bring to a halt the demonic whir associated with the world of matter. This was how Mani himself was represented as a young man. He had annoyed his fellow-villagers by refusing to feed himself through tilling the ground and through plucking vegetables from the lush gardens that surrounded their settlement in southern Mesopotamia. Instead, he would stand outside the gardens and ask to receive his food as an act of almsgiving, as though he were a beggar. For the only relation to the world of which a "chosen" soul such as his own was capable was one of being as totally outside its sinister processes as a beggar was outside the normal processes of the economy.

The Manichees were not alone in confronting the issue of the relation between work, food and the human condition. Deep thought
on the drudgery of labor -- the *ponos* of work (to use the highly charged Greek term), of 'amlā' (to use the Syriac) -- was central to the radical tradition which became so prominent in Syria in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries. This is perhaps not altogether surprising. As we saw, we are not dealing with a bankrupt region. Rather we are dealing with a thriving agrarian landscape. Syria was a zone of dense agrarian settlement. The same surge of population which, in the fourth and fifth centuries, had covered the highlands of Syria with villages of unparalleled density, also cast loose upon the roads an impressive number of charismatic wanderers, who begged in villages which could afford to support them.

Furthermore, we should always remember that this world had roots which reached deep into the past. The zones associated Syria and Mesopotamia had produced the *Atrahasis* myth in ancient Sumer in the second millennium BC. They had produced the opening chapters of the book of *Genesis*, where Adam was condemned by God to labor "in the sweat of his brow". These great myths of the curse of labor, in turn, had spread across Asia Minor to influence the *Works and Days* of the Greek poet, Hesiod. The careworn inhabitants of these regions of intensive agriculture had long wondered why it was that human beings had come (in the words of the Sumerian *Atrahasis*) “to bear the drudgery (the *dullum*) [passed on to them] by the [toil-less] gods.” Seen against a truly millennia-long background, the exegesis of the fall of Adam and
Eve into toil (which became current in a vocal stream of Syriac Christianity) was only the last of a long series of sad ruminations, by means of which the settled populations of the Fertile Crescent had attempted to make sense (since at least the second millennium B.C.) of the social trauma created by the agrarian revolution of the Later Stone Age.

Like all narratives of the loss of a golden age, where human beings had once enjoyed freedom from toil, radical Christian accounts of the Fall of Adam and Eve presented human society as caught in the dull creak of *ponos*, of drudgery. Unlike the Manichees, Syrian writers in this tradition did not believe that the entire material world had been corrupted. But they did believe, in no uncertain terms, that human society as a whole had fallen. Adam and Eve and their descendants had lost a first moment of sublime leisure. They had declined into the present careworn state of society, by which human beings were dominated by the need to work so as to eat. Unlike the Augustinian tradition, with which we are better acquainted in the Latin West, the fall of Adam and Eve had not brought about a profound inner weakening of the will, which was shown in its most subtle and enduring form in unregulated sexual desire. Rather, the true fall – the fall which blotted out all others in the imagination of many Syrians -- had been a fall from the work-free abundance of Eden into the present world of toil. Work, dull work -- and not anything as interesting as sex -- was the true curse of a fallen humanity.
Syrian Christians looked back poignantly to the days of Adam and Eve before the Fall. This was the world they had lost. The Syriac author of the Liber Graduum (The Book of Degrees) explained, in the early fifth century, that (before their fall) Adam and Eve had not known drudgery in Eden. Wrapped in contemplation, their "labor" had consisted only in the "labor of angels" -- the pôlhana' de mala'kê. They had been fellahin, "workers", all right. But they had been workers of the spirit: their backs had not been broken, their hands had not been hardened by "earthly" toil. Their toil, instead, had been the weightless, ethereal toil of prayer, joining their voices with the angels in ceaseless praise of God, their bodies swaying gently, but without violent effort, as they bowed before Him. Those who admired -- and supported -- the monks of Syria did so because they saw in them a touch of the long lost "angelic" leisure of Adam come back to earth.

Thus, throughout Syria and other eastern provinces, the spread of Manichaeism coincided with a wave of wandering, begging monks who considered that they were fully entitled to the support of the faithful because, being freed from the shame of physical labor, they were engaged in the "weightless" labor of prayer on behalf of all persons. They lived in a symbiotic relationship with lay disciples in whose economic activities they shared in no way, and on whose generosity they depended entirely.

It is against the background of these presuppositions that we
should place the answer offered by the monks of Egypt to the Christian piety which had prevailed in Syria and Mesopotamia and which threatened to make its way up the valley of the Nile. In the mid-fourth century, the Christian regions of the East as a whole (Egypt and Syria alike) were poised between two great and evenly-balanced alternatives, represented by two conflicting wings of the ascetic movement. One wing, as we have seen, claimed to have risen above labor, and to be entitled to support through the alms of the laity. The other wing (of which we know more, because it came to be more fully represented in the monastic traditions of Western Europe) projected an image of ferocious self-sufficiency, in which sedentary monks were expected to feed themselves by the work of their own hands.

It was because of this wider debate that manual work came to enjoy pride of place in Egyptian monastic folklore. Precisely because it formed part of a counter-image to Syrian practice, the issue of work in the self-image of Egyptian monasticism was peculiarly charged — and charged in a manner diametrically opposite from that presented in the Syrian world. In the words of a Coptic translation of what may well be the original version of Palladius’ *Lausiac History*: along with the conquest of the desert, the *piḥōb ṣndjīd* — the “Work of the Hands” — was the glory of Egypt.

Why was this so? I would suggest that work was embraced
because it summed up the stance of the “true” monk to society and to the world around him. For work was a denotator of the monk's abiding humanity. Unlike the ethereal Manichaean Elect and the “angelic” wandering holy man of Syria, who seemed to float above the human condition because linked to society only by the thin thread of “alms” offered by the pious, the Egyptian monk put himself forward as a normal human being. And this was plain for all to see, in the most blunt manner possible. The monk was still linked to his fellows by the crude fact of work and by the need to sell the products of the labor of his hands -- and even (on occasions) of the labor of his own body, as a seasonal harvester in the fields of local landowners – in order to live.

As a result, the illusions of work free "angels" in the Syrian tradition were the stuff of humor in the hermitages of Egypt. There was to be no room, in Egypt, for "angelic" Wannabees:

It was said of John the Dwarf, that one day he said to his elder brother, "I would like to be free of all care, like the angels, who do not work, but ceaselessly offer worship to God". So he took off his cloak and went away into the desert. After a week he came back to his brother. When he knocked on the door, he heard his brother say ... "Who are you?" He said, "I am John, your brother." But he replied, "But John has become an angel, and henceforth he is no longer among men"... His brother did not let him in, but left him
there in distress until morning. Then, opening the door, he said to him: "You are a human being and you must work again in order to eat." Then John made a prostration before him and said, "Forgive me," and went back to his basket work. (John the Dwarf 2, Ward, p.73)

Thus, by around the year 400 (half a century after the death of Anthony of Egypt) a battle of the social imagination had been fought and won in one crucial region of the Christian world -- in Egypt. It was a battle about work, which involved the manner in which Christian monasticism would fit into society.

But, to conclude: We should not overlook the wider implications of this battle. If we do so, it is because we tend to take the victory associated with the monks of Egypt for granted. We have become used to the image of the Egyptian model of the industrious monk, permanently settled in his monastery, like a holy kibbutznik. It was this image which deeply influenced the Rule of Saint Benedict, which was drawn up for a monastery in southern Italy in the early sixth century. In later centuries, through the spread of the Rule of Saint Benedict, this version of monasticism became the model for the entire Christian West. We therefore assume that monasticism had always been like this.

But this was not the case. If we look out at the great Third World of Christianity in Africa and the Middle East, we find a very different social and religious landscape. We need to
appreciate the power and the sheer geographical extent of the alternative model represented by the Manichees and by the begging monks of Syria. For, when seen against the spacious background of Eurasia as a whole, the Manichees and the monks of Syria were the norm, and the self-supporting communities of Egypt and the West were the exception. Looking at the world from Mesopotamia rather than from Rome, it is quite possible to imagine the emergence of a Christian monastic landscape that closely resembled the spread of the sangha of Buddhist countries -- communities of ascetic virtuosi fed by their laity as part of an unceasing spiritual exchange, by which matter (in the form of food) was offered in return for the ethereal, spiritual goods of prayer and preaching.

In following the fortunes of Christian asceticism across the Fertile Crescent, from Syria to Egypt, we have the privilege of listening in to one end of a debate on labor and monks that was as wide as Eurasia itself. The outcome of this debate ensured that large parts of the Christian Middle East and Western Europe did not become what Eurasia east of the Pamirs -- northern India, Central Asia and western China -- became, in precisely these centuries. To use the words of the great Chinese Buddhist pilgrim of the fourth century, Fa Hsien, who walked all the way from China to India following the route of the Buddhist sangha, along a chain of monasteries, each one totally supported by the alms of the laity. Europe and Byzantium did not become what most of Eurasia did become. They did not become "Lands of the Begging Bowl"
But nor should we underestimate the consequences of the victory, in parts of Byzantine Christianity and in the Latin West, of the particular imaginative model of society implied by an emphasis on the labor of the monks. Put in a nutshell, human society, and the human suffering associated with real divisions between rich and poor, took on a density which was lacking in the "cosmic" option of the Manichees and even in the "angelic" option of the Syrian wanderers. For both these — Manichees and Syrian wanderers -- human society somehow lacked substance. Dwarfed by the majesty of a fallen cosmos, as with the Manichees, or overshadowed by the great sadness of Adam's fall into a world of labor, as with the wandering monks of Syria, the present-day organization of society itself, and its all-too-palpable divisions between rich and poor, represented but a thin sliver of the human condition. The division of rich and poor seemed insubstantial compared with the stark division between the freedom of a spirit-filled few and the dull servitude to material things in which the majority of humanity, rich and poor alike, found itself caught.

By claiming to live from the labor of their hands, the monks of Egypt asserted that they were not "angels". Rather, they were fully paid up human members of a human society characterized by sharp contours. They were linked by labor to the sufferings of that society. They were responsible for alleviating its all too real ills through real labor. They worked not only to support
themselves, but to fulfill a social duty by giving alms to others.

The monks of Egypt have all too easily been dismissed, as by the majestic Edward Gibbon, as no more than "unhappy exiles from social life". But, as we have seen, it is often those outside society who think most clearly about its ills, and who bring its tensions most vividly to the surface in dramatic and arresting forms. This is what happened between Syria and Egypt in the fourth century. Through their insistence on the necessity of manual labor and on the duty of the monk not to be supported as the "holy poor", but rather, to work so as to support the real poor, the monks of Egypt brought a quite distinctive flavor to the social imagination of their age. They contributed, in their own way, to an imaginative victory which, ever since that time, has placed at the very heart of our modern conscience a model of society divided between rich and poor, in which the rich have a religious and a moral duty to support the poor.

So let me end, in Egypt, with the little known words of the great Coptic monastic prayer to the Archangel Michael:

We find the intercession of Michael in the strenuous work of our hands .. in the quietness of the oxen and the growth of the lambs .. in the body of the vine and the gladness which is in the wine .. in the fatness and the savor of the
olives... And we find the intercession of Michael [also] when he is gentle towards those who are weary with toil and when he giveth them strength.