

## **History of the Coptic Church V:**

### **Successor's of St Mark the Apostle**

Written by Dr. Medhat Ibrahim  
Seminarian Deacon, Theological College, El-Mina Egypt

Just as St. Mark the Apostle is the founder of the Coptic Church so he is also her first pope. Therefore all popes following St Mark on the See are his successors and carry the distinguished title of pope and "Successor of St. Mark." All popes since St. Mark's martyrdom form one connected and unbroken chain which has extended from St. Mark himself to His Holiness Pope Shenouda the Third, the 117<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of the See of Alexandria of St. Mark the Apostle. The next immediate successor of St. Mark was St. Ananias and he obtained the great honor of chief priesthood by St. Mark himself.

Each one of St. Mark's successors is called pope which means "father of fathers." Further, St. Ananias was the first to be referred to as pope which is well documented in the ancient manuscripts. The most important written evidence being the Divine Liturgy of St. Mark which was rearranged by Pope Cyril the 24<sup>th</sup> Patriarch in the Litany of Fathers "*Pray for the sake and safety of our father Anba (.....) pope, patriarch, master, and the chief of the bishops of the great City of Alexandria*".

It was a custom of the pope following his ordination to pray three Divine Liturgies, one in the Church of the Evangelists, the Church of Archangel Michael and the Church of St. Mark and then reverently carry the head of St. Mark and declare his vows for the congregation to follow in the steps of St. Mark. As St. Mark ordained St. Ananias as the head of Alexandria's priesthood he did not follow this custom which would become necessary to be followed by his successors.

"St. Mark ordained twelve priests along with St. Ananias and instructed the twelve after the departure of the patriarch to select one among them as the next patriarch and then ordain another righteous one to fill the vacancy of the one chosen as patriarch continuing the constant number of twelve priests. These instructions handed down by St Mark remained in effect until the time of Pope Alexander when this pope decided that patriarchs' should be set by bishops" (Ebin-El-Batrik).

St. Eusabius the Historian and the Martyr stated that "St. Ananias suffered a persecution in Alexandria, was beloved by the Lord and departed in the 20<sup>th</sup> of Hator 84 AD".

St. Melitios followed St. Ananias as the 3<sup>rd</sup> Pope of Alexandria and in his time the number of Christians greatly multiplied. He departed in 96 AD. St. Krozonos followed St. Melitios as the 4<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria and as mentioned by Bishop Yousab, Bishop of Foah, St. Krozonos was baptized by St. Mark and martyred in 21<sup>st</sup> of Bahona 106 AD.

### **School of Alexandria**

Prior to Christianity's emergence on the scene of history, Bitolmais Sootier founded the School of Alexandria in 323 B.C. when Bitolmais Philadlphos reigned in Egypt, 288 B.C. He extended that school to include philosophers and scientists from all varied parts of the world. He called 70 scribes and rabbi's from Jerusalem to translate the Old Testament from Hebrew to the Greek language and became the tool by which entire world knew what is today commonly known as the Septuagint. After Bitolmais Philadlphos, Bitolmais Evergitis step up to the throne and imposed a tax on every visitor to enter Alexandria. This taxation was to offer a book or more to its library. The Library and School of

Alexandria were of the famed Seven Wonders of the ancient world. During the time from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, Alexandria was the second greatest city in the world after Athens in culture, education and philosophy. In addition to the Greek culture, the Persian, Indian, Roman and Jewish cultures were very common in Alexandria. Nevertheless, Jewish culture was the second most prominent culture after the Greek which influenced the Alexandrians at that time as Jews were a great colony in Alexandria, one of their most famous philosophers was Philon.

Egyptians were very spiritual and would look for the highest rank of spirituality and philosophy beyond materialism and so Christianity settled in a fertile land to grow and multiply. Soon after Egyptians converted to Christianity, St. Mark founded the Christian Theological School of Alexandria which later replaced the existing Greek school and began to grow rapidly to become the most famous theological school in the world for that time. The renowned deans of the theological school contemplated and addressed the most complicated of theological problems for the Christians and became the first line of defense for Christianity against heresies.

The School of Alexandria remained for 6 centuries one of the main centers, or you can say the main center, for seminarian and theological education, in addition to philosophy, mathematics, physics, astronomy, medicine and science. With the invasion of the Arab Moslems of Egypt in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the school began to decline especially after the destructive burning of its library and museum by the invaders. However, Coptics never gave up and persistently moved their school to the monastery of St. Macarius the Great to continue its role in education and knowledge. No wonder most of Popes of Alexandria came from such a great monastery.

Athenagoras was a pagan philosopher in Alexandria and went one day to Athens which was the capitol of pagan philosophy during the reign of Emperor Hadrian who severely prosecuted the Christian believers. He attended a meeting for the believers where he heard humble, wise people talking about the Glorious Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and he began to contemplate upon these things, particularly after he read chapter 15 of the Holy Book of I Corinthians. He began studying Christianity to understand it; in time he converted to the faith and was appointed the first dean of the School of Alexandria by St. Mark himself. He wrote his famous Apologia to the emperors Luscious Komados and Marcus Orlious who were then convinced that they should deal fairly with Christians. He wrote a detailed Apology also about the Christian dogma of Resurrection and Eternal Life. Of his disciples were Youstos and St. Clement of Alexandria.

After the departure of Athenagoras, Youstos became the school's dean upon St. Mark recommendation. Later, Youstos became the 6<sup>th</sup> Pope of Alexandria. Omanios became the school's dean and after that the 7<sup>th</sup> pope, followed by Marianos in the school and patriarchy. This clearly delineates the role of deans of that school and the respectfulness of the church to that role.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Pantene became the school's dean and preached in India upon request from Pope Demetrius the 1<sup>st</sup> and so temporarily St. Clement became the dean of the school. In India, Pantene found many believers there whom obtained their faith by the preaching of St. Thomas the Apostle and a copy of St. Matthew's Holy Gospel written by the Evangelist himself. After that he returned to his home carrying that Holy Gospel to the pope and returned to his position as school's dean. With St. Clement, they translated the Holy Bible to the Coptic language and this assisted in the spreading of Christianity to all regions of Egypt.

After the departure of Pantene, St. Clement became the dean. St. Clement was a first class teacher and had the ability to gather all people of all social classes, Christians and pagans, around him

teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Bible. Through his efforts and teaching, thousands of pagans converted to the Christian faith and some would become martyrs. St. Clement and Origen the Scholar opposed the Gnostic heresy, where those heretics believed human can get the perfect knowledge by his own skills without God's grace, St. Clement and Origen taught concerning the true believer who gets the spiritual knowledge through God's grace that is declared in the Holy Bible, and the Orthodox tradition. St. Clement was the first who used the symbol of the fish as a recognized symbol of Christianity as the Greek word for fish which is "ΙΧΘΥΟΣ", is derived from the first letters of the Greek phrase "Jesus Christ is the Savior, Son of God". He wrote many books, with regret and sorrow, we lost most of them. After a life filled with glorified deeds he departed to the Houses of Light in the Kingdom of Heaven 194 AD.