

Popes of the Coptic Orthodox Church

Objectives

To learn more about the rich history of the Coptic Orthodox Church by glancing at the lives of its spiritual guides (the past Patriarchs); also to see God's hand in choosing the Patriarchs and His approval of the way they guide the Church.

References

1. E-Katmarous 1.3 Software from St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church (Troy, Michigan USA, www.StMarkMi.org)
2. "Christian Egypt: The Coptic Church Through Two Millenia." By Massimo Capuani; Otto F. A. Meinardus and Marie-Hélène Rutschowskaya,

Scriptural Verse

"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me." (Luke 10:16)

Lesson Guidelines

I. Patriarchs are chosen by God Himself

Patriarchs are chosen by God both explicitly and implicitly:

EXPLICITLY

12th Pope Demetrius (ordained about 189 A.D.) – see Babah 12 Synaxarium

- The angel of the Lord appeared to his predecessor Pope Julian and told him that the person who would bring him a cluster of grapes would be the next pope. When he was ordained he became enlightened and was able to read and write. A great miracle occurred to show the people that he was married yet living with his wife as a virgin (see Baramhat 12 for that miracle).

39th Pope Agathon (ordained about 661 A.D.) – see Babah 16 Synaxarium

- The angel of the Lord appeared to the previous pope (Pope Benjamin I) and commanded him to ordain Abba Agathon (a monk at the time) as Patriarch of Alexandria.

41st Pope Isaac (ordained about 686 A.D.) – see Hatour 9 Synaxarium

- When the departure of the previous pope (John) drew near, he asked the Lord Christ to let it be known to him who would be his successor. In a vision, he was told that his disciple Isaac would sit on the chair after him.

102nd Pope Matthew (ordained about 1661 A.D.) – see Misra 16 Synaxarium

- After the previous pope departed, this monk (named Guirguis) was chosen to become pope, but he refused. Some time passed until they sent a government soldier to physically remove him and bring him to Cairo. In the meanwhile the people chose another priest named John to become Pope. There arose a conflict in determining who to ordain Pope, so the governor threw both of them in jail. While there, the bishops cast lots on the altar before the congregation; meanwhile the soldiers cast lots too. Every time lots were cast, the lot fell on Father Guirguis. Moreover, one night the soldiers of the governor saw a burning candle hovering over Father Guirguis' head while he was in prison.

IMPLICITLY

48th Pope John (ordained about 775 A.D.) – see Tubah 16 Synaxarium

- This saint (Father John) was nominated among several monks to become Pope. These nominees' names were written on a piece of paper. After celebrating the Divine Liturgy for three days in a row, the bishops brought a child to draw one of those pieces of paper. The name chosen was Father John. They returned that sheet of paper and brought another child who drew the same paper. This was repeated a third time. They were sure that God wanted Father John to become the Patriarch of Alexandria.

52nd Pope Joseph (ordained about 822 A.D.) – see Babah 23 Synaxarium

- After the departure of the 51st Pope, the Bishops heard about Abba Joseph and went to the monastery where he was. They asked God to show them whether he should be Pope, saying “We beseech You, O Lord, if You have chosen this father for this honor, let the sign be that we find his door open upon our arrival.” When they arrived they found his door open, for he was bidding farewell to some visiting monks.

64th Pope Zacharias (ordained about 1004 A.D.) – see Hatour 13 Synaxarium

- The bishops asked God to choose the person who was fit for this honor. While they were discussing this subject, Abba Zacharias came down the stairs of the church carrying a vessel. His foot slipped and he fell and came tumbling down the stairs to the floor while still holding the unbroken vessel in his hand. The bishops and the priests marveled at this and they asked the opinion of the people of Alexandria. They all agreed, along with the bishops, to ordain him Patriarch.

II. Various methods by which Patriarchs have been chosen

1. Nomination and appointment of the candidate by his predecessor. During the first few centuries, it was customary for the patriarch to nominate and prepare his successor.
2. Nomination by consultation and election by members of the clergy and the laity. The majority of the patriarchs between the second and twelfth centuries were nominated this way.
3. Nomination by consultation of the clergy and the laity in conjunction with the government. After the Arab conquest, the Islamic government became increasingly involved in the administrative affairs of the church. By the middle of the twelfth century, its influence in the internal affairs of the church had increased so much that at the time of the election of Pope John V (1147–1166), the episcopate, priests, and elders met in the government center in Alexandria.
4. Nomination and/or election by means of a dream or vision of a devout Christian. This usually happened when a dispute concerning the candidate arose among the electors. In some cases, the dream or revelation served as a divine confirmation of the electoral deliberations and consultations.
5. Nomination by consultation and election by casting the altar lot (see Acts 1:23-26). The names of all candidates are written on small sheets, which are placed in the sanctuary. Then a young child draws out one of the sheets and the person who is named on that sheet is ordained Pope. This method was employed in only eleven out of the one hundred and seventeen elections!

III. Notable Patriarchs

Most of the church's popes have suffered tremendously to keep the Orthodox faith for the See of Alexandria and the whole world. One of the popes who suffered most is Pope Athanasius, the 20th Pope of the See of St. Mark. Pope Athanasius was ordained about 328 A.D. and departed about 373 A.D. (see Bashans 7 Synaxarium). His life is characterized by the following:

- Was a disciple of St. Antony, and wrote his biography: “Life of Antony”
- He accompanied Alexander to the First Council of Nicaea in 325.

- He wrote the Nicene Creed, up to: "Whose Kingdom shall have no end."
- As a result of rises and falls in Arianism's influence, he was banished from Alexandria only to be later restored on at least five occasions.
- "*Athanasius contra mundum*" or "Athanasius against the world".
- Identified the same 27 books of the New Testament that are in use today.
- He wrote several books about the Arians, on the Incarnation, and other subjects.
- Abba Cosma (The 44th Patriarch) praised these publications by saying: "*I ask anyone who would find the books of Athanasius to write them on paper, and for those who could not find paper, to write them on their clothes.*"
- First Pope to wear the monastic tunic from the hand of St. Antony.
- He made it the uniform for bishops and patriarchs.
- He ordained St. Antony a priest, and then Archpriest.

CONCLUSION

At the end of "The Commemoration of the Saints" that is prayed by the priest, the deacon requests that those who can read to recite the names of the "Holy Fathers." There is hardly any deacon command that is less heeded in the liturgy than this one, since if you ask people they will hardly have any idea what they are supposed to do in response. In the early church days the deacons used to hold out a wooden plaque with each pope's name on it and the people who could read would recite the names in commemoration of the "Patriarchs who have fallen asleep." Some churches place a list of the Popes on the altar to be read by the deacons after this deacon response.

ACTIVITY

Provide the students with the list of the Coptic Popes found below and ask them to recite these names inaudibly in response to the deacon who says "*Let those who read, recite the names of our holy fathers, the patriarchs who have fallen asleep.*"

LIST OF COPTIC PATRIARCHS

TO BE READ INAUDIBLY IN COMMEMORATION OF OUR FATHERS THE PATRIARCHS

When the deacon says, "Let those who read recite the names of our holy fathers, the patriarchs who have fallen asleep. O Lord, repose their souls, and forgive us our sins."

The deacon here requests all those who can read to inaudibly recite the following Patriarchs to commemorate them before the Lord.

1. Mark
2. Anianus
3. Melyos (Milius)
4. Kedron (Kardonos)
5. Abriamus (Primus)
6. Justus
7. Eumenius
8. Marcianus
9. Cladianus (Celadion)
10. Agrippinus
11. Julian

12. Demetrius I
13. Heraclas (Theoclas)
14. Dionysius
15. Maximus
16. Theonas
17. Peter I
18. Archelaus (Achillas)
19. Alexander I
20. Athanasius I, the Apostolic
21. Peter II
22. Timothy I (Timotheos)
23. Theophilus I
24. Cyril I (Kyrillos)
25. Dioscorus I
26. Timothy II
27. Peter III
28. Athanasius II
29. John I (Yoannis)
30. John II
31. Dioscorus II
32. Timothy III
33. Theodosius I
34. Peter IV
35. Damianos
36. Anastasius
37. Andronicus
38. Benjamin I
39. Agathon
40. John III
41. Isaac
42. Simeon I (Simon)
43. Alexandros II (Alexander)
44. Cosmas I
45. Theodorus (Theodore)
46. Michael I (Mikhail) (Khail)
47. Mina I
48. John IV
49. Mark II
50. James (Yacobus)
51. Simeon II
52. Joseph I (Yousab)
53. Michael II
54. Cosmas II
55. Shenouda I (Sinuthius)
56. Michael III
57. Gabriel I

58. Cosmas III
59. Macarius I
60. Theophilus II
61. Mina II
62. Abraam (Abraham)
63. Philotheos
64. Zacharias
65. Shenouda II
66. Christodolos
67. Cyril II
68. Michael IV
69. Macarius II
70. Gabriel II
71. Michael V
72. John V
73. Mark III
74. John VI
75. Cyril III
76. Athanasius III
77. Gabriel III
78. John VII
79. Theodosius III
80. John VIII
81. John IX
82. Benjamin II
83. Peter V
84. Mark IV
85. John X
86. Gabriel IV
87. Matthew I (Mattheos)
88. Gabriel V
89. John XI
90. Matthew II
91. Gabriel VI
92. Michael VI
93. John XII
94. John XIII
95. Gabriel VII
96. John XIV
97. Gabriel VIII
98. Mark V
99. John XV
100. Matthew III
101. Mark VI
102. Matthew IV
103. John XVI

104. Peter VI
105. John XVII
106. Mark VII
107. John XVIII
108. Mark VIII
109. Peter VII
110. Cyril IV
111. Demetrius II
112. Cyril V
113. John XIX
114. Macarius III
115. Joseph II
116. Cyril VI