

Response to the Research done by His Grace Bishop Serapion Titled: “Choosing the Patriarch: Lessons from the History of Our Glorious Church”

The response I offer has taken on a general scope, not wading into endless details.

I will begin by saying that His Grace Bishop Serapion overlooked the correct translation of Apostolic Canon 14 in his statement issued on May 8, 2012, and in his research sent to us on July 12, 2012.

Overlooking the Apostolic Canon

The main issue in His Grace Bishop Serapion’s most recent research is that he overlooks Apostolic Canon 14 in its correct translation, which was graciously admitted by His Grace Bishop Youssef, and certified by a document endorsed by Dr. Morris Tawadrous, professor of Greek and Old Testament in our Clerical College, presented to a Holy Synod session (Appendix 1). His Grace Bishop Serapion dove into many endless historical details.

How the Apostolic Canon reached us

Here we need to clarify that Apostolic Canon 14 reached the church through **Clement of Rome**, the disciple of the Apostles, who was **bishop of Rome from 88 to 97 AD¹**, living and departing during **the first century**. The famous historian Hefele writes:

About the year 500 A.D., Dionysius the Less, who was an abbot in a monastery at Rome, translated a collection of **canons** from Greek into Latin, for Bishop Stephen of Salona, at the head of which he placed fifty canons, which according to him, proceeded from the apostles, and had been arranged and collected by their disciple **Clement of Rome**. Dionysius placed after them the canons of Nicaea, of Ancyra, of Constantinople, of Chalcedon.²

Apostolic Canon 14

| Translation of Apostolic Canon 14 used in our previous research, from the mentioned reference | Apostolic Canon 14 translation validated by His Grace Bishop Youssef of the Southern United States | Erred Translation of Apostolic Canon 14, relied upon by the synod of 1873 |
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| A bishop ought not to leave his own parish and leap to another, although the multitude should compel him, unless there be some good reason forcing him to do this, as that he can contribute much greater profit to the people of the new parish by the word of piety ; but this is not to be settled by himself, but by the judgment of many bishops, and very great supplication. ³ | A bishop is not allowed to leave his own parish and leap to another, although many urge him, unless being obliged to do this for some good reason, as that he can contribute much greater profit to the people of the new parish by the word of piety and guidance towards better worship ; but this is not to be settled by himself, but by the judgment of a number of bishops, and great supplication. | Any bishop who abandons his throne, duties, diocese, and responsibility to care for his people, and goes to a different country, even if in need and out of necessity of harm, should be exiled and divested of his rank, unless asked by the bishops to stay with them for a reason or for the benefit of the people of his country, asking him to remain with them until he fulfills his needs. |

¹ J. A. McGuckin, *The Westminster handbook to Patristic Theology*, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 68.

² C.J. Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils*, vol. I, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1894, Appendix p.449.

³ P. Schaff and H. Wace, *A.N.Fathers*, Vol. VII, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1979, p. 501.

Will a bishop go care for another diocese “**that he can contribute much greater profit to the people of the new parish by the word of piety and guidance towards better worship**” according to the correct translation to the Apostolic Canon, or will he go as a guest seeking help for the members of his diocese, then return **after “he fulfills his needs”** –according to the erred translation of this canon? It is a tragedy to overturn the truths and the apostolic canons this way. Then those who attack our research dive into unnecessary windings, but we will try to answer them in defending the upright church tradition “*once for all delivered to the saints.*”⁴

Overlooking the Faulty Translation in the 1873 Synod

His Grace Bishop Serapion overlooked that the Coptic Orthodox Church Synod held in Egypt 1873, attended by eight bishops and metropolitans in addition to Bishop Marcos who was nominated to the patriarchate, relied on a very faulty translation of this Apostolic Canon (see above table). They also did not accept a patriarch imposed on them by the ruler of Egypt at that time; this, His Grace confessed in discussing this Synod.

Concerning this Synod, we ask the following question, and leave the reader to judge: why was there no mention of this synod, its decisions, its excommunication in any authentic history books, such as *History of the Patriarchs* published by Sorian Monastery, or *Precious Pearls in Church Knowledge* by Bishop Isuzorus, or *History of the Coptic Nation* by Saleh Nakhla and Farid Kamel?

King Fouad’s Position in the 1928 Synod

As for the 1928 Synod which was attended by fifteen metropolitans and bishops in addition to the nominated metropolitan to the patriarchate, who accepted this nomination, there is a rebuttal to His Grace Bishop Serapion’s claim that the synod was under pressure from King Fouad. Although the synod had decided to nominate metropolitans and bishops only, at that time the nation preferred placing a Bylaw permitting the nomination of monks and deacons, in a very detailed election process which included more lay voters (24 representatives and members of the General Denomination Council and 48 notables = 72 voters) than clergy (metropolitans, and bishops heads of monasteries 15 + 7 = 22 voters). This took place, and Metropolitan Youannis of Beheira and Menoufia, and the patriarchal vicar clearly won the most votes (70 votes). Three monks and Archdeacon Habib Gerges were nominated with him; one of them departing before the election and the others were voted on.

Where is His Grace Bishop Serapion’s claim that there was pressure from King Fouad to nominate a specific diocesan metropolitan, Metropolitan Youannis? Where is the credibility in this claim against one of the great patriarchs of our church? Why insist on severing the chain of apostolic succession with excommunications that contradict Apostolic Canon 14? We have proven that His Grace Bishop Serapion’s attempts, and the eternal excommunications inappropriate for all other generations, which he persistently declares these days, lead to severing the apostolic succession of our church today, including his own ordination into the priesthood ranks and likewise our ordination.

Pope Khaeel I, Forty-Sixth Pope (744-767)

In the eighth century, the Greek translation of Apostolic Canon 14 was not available, or the fathers of the Antioch Synod, Pope Khaeel and two clergy of his supporters did not take note of Apostolic Canon 14,

⁴ Jud 1:3.

but relied only on Canon 15 of the Council of Nicaea, in a literal sense, since it is the very council which allowed the transfer of two bishops: Eusebius of Nicomedia, who had been Bishop of Berytus, and Bishop Eustathius of Antioch (patriarch of Antioch), who had been Bishop of Berrhoea in Syria, applying the Apostolic Canon correctly. They did not notice that St. Gregory the Theologian in 382, after the Council of Constantinople, personally considered, **“This law among those which had long been abrogated by custom.”**⁵

Where is Apostolic Canon 14, which was not mentioned in the opinion of the Antioch Synod and the alleged Alexandrine Synod?

Why did His Grace Bishop Serapion not research the faulty translation, on which perhaps the Antioch Synod and Pope Khaeel of Alexandria relied, which claims that a bishop goes to another diocese only to seek help and aid in meeting the needs of his country and returns to it, while the Apostolic Canon permits for the sake of good reason to move to another diocese to contribute much greater profit by the word of piety?

Attacking His Holiness Pope Shenouda III’s Opinion Regarding Pope Khaeel’s Opinion

We mentioned, in our response to His Grace Bishop Youssef, that Mr. Ashraf Sadik published in the Ahram Newspaper on March 22, 2012 an interview with His Holiness Pope Shenouda III concerning the objection to ordaining a bishop as patriarch, in which His Holiness said, **“Those who rely on this point rely on the statement by Pope Khaeel (one of the popes) in which he mentioned this, yet it is a personal statement and not a church canon.”**

We assumed that what His Holiness said would be considered by everyone as sufficient reference, so we did not go into details. This, considering everyone’s knowledge of His Holiness’ erudition, scholarship, the Spirit of God working in him, and all our trust in him as a faithful father who led the church for forty years. We were greatly amazed at His Grace Bishop Serapion’s response to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III’s published opinion stating that: **“The declaration issued by Pope Mikhail was not his own personal opinion only, but rather, the result of a Holy Synod of bishops who gathered for a whole month to research the Canons of the Holy Church.”** Also, **“Thus, the anathemas of Pope Khaeel I were not personal ones, but rather, were issued from the Synods of the Church of Antioch and the Church of Alexandria.”** Is this not considered attacking the opinion of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, which aches all our hearts? We will respond to this from the history books.

Familiar unbiased precise church references, such as *History of the Patriarchs*, write concerning Pope Khaeel:

Isaac [Patriarch of Antioch] also wrote a synodical letter in his own name to the blessed Abba Michael, patriarch of the city of Alexandria, and sent it, accompanied by gifts, by two sons of his, a priest and a deacon, who were his scribes, and two of the chiefs of the metropolitans, one of them being metropolitan of Damascus, and the other metropolitan of Emesa, that they might receive an answer for him. Therein he wrote salutations to the patriarch of Egypt and his bishops, requesting him to exalt his name among them according to custom and for the sake of unity. He also wrote a letter from himself to Abu

⁵ Hefele, C.J., *History of the Councils of the Church*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1894, Vol. I, p. 422, 423.

Aun, the governor, asking that, if the patriarch refused to comply, he might be sent to Abd Allah, the prince. When the letters reached Abu Aun, he sent to Alexandria and summoned Abba Michael, the patriarch, to Misr by himself; and when the letters and the decree were read to him, he answered, saying: «Do not force me to this, until I have assembled the bishops, and they have taken counsel upon this matter, according to our canons and laws». Then the governor conceded this to him, and allowed him a delay; and the patriarch took up his residence at Misr, and wrote to the bishops of the north and south and of the farther and nearer parts of Upper Egypt, bidding them all assemble to him, and look into this affair, and write him an answer, **When they arrived, they answered, saying to the patriarch : «He is thy equal, Father, and thy partner in the ministry; therefore do what seems good to thee with him; for, as for us, we have nothing to do with this matter.» And there was great trouble among them.** And there was with him Abba Theodore, the second bishop of Misr of that name, who had been hegumen of Al-Fustât, and priest of the church of Saint Sergius: he and my father Abba Moses, bishop of Wasîm, **alone.**⁶

Therefore, it was a personal opinion, as His Holiness Pope Shenouda III said, no one agreeing with him except two bishops. He persisted in his opinion, **which he handwrote**, until Isaac the patriarch of Antioch departed shortly thereafter. Is not the opinion of His Holiness correct, and the opinion of His Grace Bishop Serapion incorrect? Let the reader compare. Wishing that we would be released of the unsettlement raised in the Synod of Alexandria with Pope Khaeel, because of His Grace Bishop Serapion's insistence on this same opinion.

Attacking the three Patriarchs who had been Diocesan Bishops

Apostolic teaching says, "*Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking.*"⁷ Why attack and speak evil of the three patriarchs who had been metropolitans, noting that the attack and the claims of excommunication against nominating diocesan bishops and metropolitans was begun by His Grace Bishop Serapion on the internet in a statement issued on May 8, 2012, and in letters to us and to all the members of the Holy Synod on July 12, 2012.

Where is his neutrality as a member of the *Patriarchal Nomination Committee* where he can give his opinion inside the committee which consists of nine members of the Holy Synod and nine members of the General Denomination Council and the Coptic Endowments Board which is headed by his Eminence the Locum Tenens, instead of the many statements on the internet and elsewhere?

Inappropriateness of using the Expression *Fall of the Giants*

This expression is from Iris Habib El Masry and Bishara Bastawros. Laypersons might slight the fathers of the church and her patriarchs in some of their books, which we disapprove, but it is inappropriate for this to come from our current church bishops. The same applies to the expression *Fall to the Bottom* which His Grace Bishop Serapion wrote in his Arabic research on page 13.

⁶ Graffin, R, and F Nau. *Patrologia Orientalis*. Paris: Librairie De Paris, 1907, Vol. IV, 209-210.

⁷ 1 Pt 2:1.

Ceremonial Ritual of Enthroning Pope Youannis XIX

If they, at that time, were not alert to the adjustment to the ritual, this was looked into thereafter during the enthronement of Pope Macarius III, Pope Yusab II, and Pope Shenouda III as, a promotion, coronation, and enthronement ritual was prepared which does not include the laying on of the hands of the bishops (which should not be repeated). This is also what occurred in installing His Grace Bishop Serapion to his diocese seat of Los Angeles; having been a general bishop, the bishops' hands were not laid on him, but there was a special ritual at the hands of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III. Likewise applies to all the bishops who are promoted to the degree of metropolitan; the bishops and metropolitans share in a special ritual without laying on their hands (which does not repeat at their promotion). In original church tradition, and even today for the Armenian Orthodox and Ethiopian Orthodox, the metropolitan is considered and labeled 'archbishop', as he has under him cities having bishops, he being the bishop of the mother city, the capital city according to the meaning of the Greek word: Μητροπολιτης (metropolitis) meaning *metropolitan*, which is made up of μητερα (mytera) meaning *mother* and πολεως (poleos) meaning *city*.

Iris Habib El Masry the Author

- 1) This historian, on whose books His Grace Bishop Serapion relied as a source, personally attacked the nomination of Anba Shenouda the Bishop of Education to the patriarchate, and she published this during his lifetime, while he was patriarch. His Holiness did nothing to her.
- 2) But, when she published an introduction to a book that attacks the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible, the Torah of Moses and the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle, titled *Between the Two Testaments* saying, "**If the Old Testament law was the law of the jungle, could it be by divine revelation?**" denying all the Old Testament laws in the Holy Bible, and therefore, the Moses' prophecy, His Holiness was compelled to pass a decree preventing her from teaching in the Coptic Orthodox Religious Institute. **Is it fitting, after all this, for His Grace Bishop Serapion to rely on her books as a main source in his research, and where is respect for His Holiness' history and respect for our Holy Bible?**
- 3) Habib El Masry, this author's father, was party in the struggle at the time of choosing Pope Macarius III. According to His Grace Bishop Serapion's research based on Iris El Masry, Habib El Masry, the Steward of the Denomination Council was party to the group which desired that the Patriarch be chosen from among the monks only. Another group, led by El Menyawi Pasha, supported choosing metropolitans, and supported the nomination of Metropolitan Macarius of Assiut. Metropolitan Macarius won with a great majority, was ordained patriarch, and the Copts received the appointment of Pope Macarius III with joy. At the following session of the Coptic Denomination Council, presided by Pope Macarius, El Meniawi Pasha –according to Iris El Masry– told Habib El Masry, "We previously discussed who is currently fit to be patriarch, and agreed that it is Anba Macarius, and **no one strayed from this agreement but you only**, so, since the winning patriarch is the one we supported, then he should be surrounded by his supporters to help him accomplish his reform program." Habib El Masry offered his resignation, which was accepted immediately, and he was replaced with El Menyawi Pasha. Moreover, since El Menyawi Pasha also aided Anba Yusab, she likewise attacked the nomination of Anba Yusab. Iris El Masry is not considered a neutral historian, because she doubtless sides with her father, whom she

honored and raised to the ranks of the saints, this is apparent in all her books, whenever he is mentioned.

Bishop Ghobrial of the Monastery of St. Antony

His Grace Bishop Serapion mentioned in his research an attack on Pope Yusab II, that Pope Yusab II passed a decree to dismiss Bishop Ghobrial the Bishop of the Monastery of St. Antony, who resorted to the Holy Synod. Most of the metropolitans responded and convened a synod in which they decided to dismiss the patriarch, which did take place; as if Pope Yusab was mistaken in his decree. What occurred thereafter, is that **Pope Cyril VI, in presiding over our Church's Holy Synod dismissed and banned Bishop Ghobrial of the Monastery of St. Antony for practicing magic.** Why does His Grace Bishop Serapion attack Pope Yusab's decision to dismiss Anba Ghobrial and **support the action of the Holy Synod in dismissing Pope Yusab II in reaction to his dismissal of Anba Ghobrial? Does His Grace Bishop Serapion now dare to attack Pope Cyril VI, who made the same decision as Pope Yusab II?** We seek non-bias in relating history, nor are we comfortable with excessive prejudice, seeking to distort the image of some patriarchs.

Lessons from History

If we turn to the days of Pope Peter the Seal of Martyrs, we find that he excommunicated Arius the deacon who denied the divinity of the Lord Christ, and saw a vision in which the Lord Christ appeared with His clothes torn, Whom he asked, "Who tore Your clothes my Master," and the answer was, "Arius." Therefore, before his martyrdom, he commanded his disciples Archelaus and Alexander not to absolve Arius. Archelaus was elected patriarch of Alexandria, not being a diocesan metropolitan or bishop, and was deceived by Arius, so he absolved him and promoted him from deacon to priest. Arius continued his heresy, and Pope Archelaus departed six months after being enthroned. He was succeeded by his colleague, Pope Alexander, the nineteenth, the mentor of Saint Athanasius, his deacon, who held a synod in Alexandria attended by hundred bishops, excommunicated Arius and his teachings. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III said that it was due to God's mercy that Pope Archelaus did not remain on the throne more than six months. (He meant that because he did not follow the instructions of Pope Peter the Seal of Martyrs, **due to his kindness, he was deceived by the words of Arius who feigned the Orthodox faith.**) Did our church slander Pope Archelaus, as Iris Habib El Masry, and thereafter His Grace Bishop Serapion, slandered Pope Yusab II? His Holiness Pope Shenouda III's comment made on Pope Archelaus was to pinpoint the Lord's care for our church to prevent the spread of the Arian heresy and the loss of Christianity; this is an issue specific to the faith and not church organization. He did not stab into Pope Archelaus, as some stabs into some previous patriarchs: Pope Youannis XIX, Pope Macarius III, and specifically Pope Yusab II, attacking him without allowing him a chance to argue his case, as we just did, proving his defense concerning the issue of dismissing Anba Ghobrial. The church did not doubt the choice of Pope Archelaus as patriarch, nor did it lessen its respect for him as a kind-hearted patriarch. We do not believe in the infallibility of the pope. Pope Alexander, along with his disciple Saint Athanasius the Apostolic, his follower, fought to defend the Christian faith against Arianism, whether at the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 or throughout the life of Pope Athanasius until the time of his departure. Is it fitting to take the mistake of Pope Archelaus as proof of the unfitness of choosing the patriarch from among the deacons or celibate priests? We did not and will not do so! Our church history abounds with events, such as what took place in the days of Pope Cyril Ibn Loqloq the seventy-fifth (thirteenth century)

and other patriarchs... We do not prefer to dive into it, out of respect for our church patriarchs; this we do not note in His Grace Bishop Serapion's research. May he take note of this.

Conclusion

We continue to emphasize our desire for unity of heart and thought, keeping the peace of the church and resorting to prayer for the Lord to guide the honorable Nomination Committee, and the beloved voters in choosing the person who would follow in the footsteps of Pope Cyril VI and Pope Shenouda III, keeping the upright Orthodox faith of our glorious church, being chosen by the Lord in the altar lot, pouring on him the vast fatherly virtues and right judgment during the coronation ceremony as the successor to St. Mark. In any cases, we will continue to fulfill our mission as long as we live by God's will, grace and support to defend the true upright Orthodox faith.

Metropolitan Bishop

Of Damiette, Kafr el Sheikh and Barary
Head of the Monastery of St. Demiana

7 August, 2012

Commencement of the Fast of the Theotokos

القوانين الرسولية*

نص القانون ١٤

لا يحق لأسقف أن يخرج ليستولى على رعية ليست له، حتى وإن اضطره الكثيرون؛ إلا إذا كانت هناك أسباب صوابية اضطرته إلى ذلك.

مثلاً إذا كان في استطاعته أن يوزع هناك كلام التقوى بإفادة أكبر. ولا يفعل ذلك من تلقائه وإنما بمشورة كثير من الأساقفة وتوسل كبير.

Ἐπίσκοπον μὴ ἐξεῖναι καταλείψαντα τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παροικίαν ἑτέρα ἐπιπηδᾶν, κἂν ὑπὸ πλειόνων ἀναγκάζεται, εἰ μὴ τις εὐλογος αἰτία ἢ τοῦτο βιαζομένη αὐτὸν ποιεῖν, ὡς πλέον τι κέρδος δυναμένου αὐτοῦ τοῖς ἐκείσε λόγῳ εὐσεβείας συμβῦλλεσθαι· καὶ τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλὰ κρίσει πολλῶν ἐπισκόπων καὶ παρακλήσει μεγίστη.

A bishop ought not to leave his own parish and leap to another, although the multitude should compel him, unless there be some good reason forcing him to do this, as that he can contribute much greater profit to the people of the new parish by the word of piety; but this is not to be settled by himself, but by the judgment of many bishops, and very great supplication.

د. مرسى ماهر
٢٠١٢/٥/١٢

* مرجع الترجمة العربية:

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