

## ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ THE EARLY YEARS ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

Born in Lower Egypt, St. Theophilus and his sister lost their parents at a young age. An Ethiopian servant woman, who had been responsible for their upbringing, took them to Alexandria to continue their education.

One Sunday, this pious woman took St. Theophilus and his sister to attend the Holy Liturgy celebrated by His Holiness Pope Athanasius the Apostolic. At the end of the Liturgy the Holy Patriarch asked to meet them. Upon discovering they were orphans, Pope Athanasius took it upon himself to take personal care of them.

He entrusted the sister to a devout woman to be educated. The sister then married a righteous man and had a son whom they named Kyrillos. Kyrillos was destined to become one of the greatest men who occupied the throne of St. Mark, Pope Kyrillos I, the Pillar of Faith, who succeeded her brother, Pope Theophilus.

As for St. Theophilus, he became a disciple of St. Athanasius the Apostolic. Endowed with wisdom, grace and zeal St. Theophilus learned from his teacher and father who ordained him a priest.

## ✦ ✦ THE 23<sup>RD</sup> PATRIARCH OF ALEXANDRIA ✦ ✦

When Pope Timotheous reposed in the Lord the Holy Synod of Alexandria elected and enthroned St. Theophilus as the 23<sup>rd</sup> Patriarch of the Holy Apostolic Throne of St. Mark. Pope Theophilus shepherded the Church of Alexandria for 28 years, fully conscience of the important role that his See had played in both the early Church and the empire. Theophilus means 'Friend of God' (Theo = God, Philus = Friend). Indeed, guided by the Lord, his pontificate was marked by great harmony and unity in the Church. During his pontificate one Christian man denied the faith and went to work with a wealthy Jewish merchant called Philexinos in Alexandria. Philexinos took the man to the Synagogue and he declared before the Jewish congregation he denied Christ. They made a Cross and requested he spit on it, pierce it with a spear and say, "I pierce you O Christ". Tragically the man did so and immediately

blood and water flowed forth and the man died instantly. Great fear fell upon all.

When informed of this, Pope Theophilus took several Metropolitans, Bishops and priests and headed to the Synagogue. The Pope wiped the blood and water and placed them in a vessel, blessed the people and ordered the wooden Cross be taken to the Church. Those present confessed their faith in Christ and were baptized. This is known as a great miracle during the Papacy of Pope Theophilus.

## ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ THE BUILDING OF CHURCHES ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

### ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ AND MONASTERIES ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

When he became Patriarch, Pope Theophilus remembered the words of Pope Athanasius, "If I find time, I will clear away these hills and build a Church in their place for St. John the Baptist and Elisha the Prophet." In the city of Rome the husband of a woman died and left her with two sons. This man was exceedingly rich. The woman took her two sons, all her money and an icon of Archangel Raphael and went to Alexandria. When she heard about the interest of the Patriarch in removing the hills, she went to him with true zeal and gave him enough money to fulfill his desire. After the work was done, a treasure appeared under the hills and was covered over with a slab of the stone engraved in Coptic with the three characters of theta, **Θ**. When Pope Theophilus saw them, he knew, guided by the Holy Spirit, the secret of these three letters and said, "Behold, the time has come for this treasure to be uncovered because these three thetas were gathered together at the same time and they are: Theos, that of God, and Theodosius the Emperor, son of Arcadius, son of Theodosius the Great, and Theophilus the Patriarch, meaning himself. He found that this treasure dated to the Era of Alexander, the son of Philip the Macedonian which was seven hundred years earlier.

The Patriarch sent to the Emperor to inform him about it and asked him to come. The Emperor came and saw the treasure, and gave a large sum of money to Pope Theophilus. He built many Churches. He began by building a Church by the name of St. John the Baptist and Elisha the Prophet and he transferred their relics to

it. That Church was known at that time by the Demas. Then he built a Church by the name of our Lady the Virgin Mary, then a Church by the name of Archangel Raphael at El-Gizira (consecrated on 8<sup>th</sup> September) and seven other Churches.

As for the two sons of the woman who came from Rome, he ordained them Bishops. When the Emperor saw the love of Pope Theophilus for building Churches, he gave him all the houses of idols and the Patriarch transformed them to Churches and lodging houses for strangers.

## ✦ ✦ ST MARY APPEARS TO THE PATRIARCH ✦ ✦

Among the monasteries Pope Theophilus undertook to rebuild and expand was that of St. Mary El Muharrak in Assuit. Accompanied by Metropolitans and Bishops, Pope Theophilus headed to the monastery in preparation for consecration of the main altar of the ancient Church. On the eve of the consecration, St. Mary appeared to Pope Theophilus and said, "You cannot consecrate the altar as my Son and my Saviour, Jesus Christ my Lord consecrated it already by laying His holy hands on it during the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt. Pope Theophilus requested from the Holy Theotokos to tell him of the steps undertaken by the Holy Family in Egypt. The Mother of True Light, St. Mary told the Patriarch, who then recorded it onto a large manuscript, part of which is preserved to this day.

## ✦ ✦ THE ORDINATION OF MONKS & PRIESTS ✦ ✦

Pope Theophilus ordained Moses the Black priest. But prior to the ordination, Pope Theophilus wanted to test him, thus, he asked the fathers, "Who brought this black man here? Cast him out." When Moses the Black turned to leave, Pope Theophilus called him back and said, "Moses, all of you is white" and proceeded to ordain him. He also ordained John the Dwarf hegomen and it happened as he was placing his hands on him; the heavens chanted "Axiuous, Axiuous, Axiuous". Pope Theophilus also ordained St. John Chrysostom as deacon in Alexandria. He also ordained Bishop Hedra of Aswan. Pope Theophilus ordained Eksani, who came from Rome escaping marriage to be a nun (29 Toubah).

\*\*\* THE THREE YOUTH \*\*\*

Pope Theophilus built a Church for the three youth in Alexandria and he wished to bring their relics to it and place them in it. He brought St. John the Dwarf and asked him to travel to Babylon and bring the holy bodies. After much forbearing, he accepted to go on this mission. When he left the Patriarch, a cloud carried him away to Babylon. He entered the city and saw its monuments, rivers and palaces and found the relics of the Saints. When he started moving them from their place a voice came out from the holy bodies and said to him, "This is the will of God that they do not leave this place until the day of the Resurrection. Nevertheless, because of the love of Pope Theophilus and your labour, you should inform the Patriarch to gather the people in the Church and to put oil in the lamps without lighting them and we will appear in the Church and a sign will be made manifest to you." He then left and went back to Alexandria and told the Patriarch what the saints had said. It happened then that when the Patriarch and the people were in the Church, the lamps were lit up suddenly and they all glorified the Lord.

\*\*\* THE INFLUENCE ON ST CYRIL I \*\*\*

Throughout his pontificate, Pope Theophilus trained and disciplined his nephew Kyrillos (Cyril). He learned from his homilies and discourses, his humility and love, and his administration of the Church. It was Kyrillos who succeeded his uncle as the 24<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria.

\*\*\* THE PASCHAL LETTERS \*\*\*

Pope Theophilus composed a number of Paschal Letters, 26 at least that we know of. Three preserved in translation of Jerome's were issued in 401, 402 and 404 and have an anti-Origenistic tendency, although they also polemize against Apollinaris of Laodicea.

Some of his major works are:

- "On the Unity of the Person of Christ"
- "On the Holy and Consubstantial Holy Trinity"
- 29 Paschal Letters Between 414-442

\*\*\* THE HOMILIES \*\*\*

A homily on the judgment is preserved in its Greek text in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*. A homily on *Contrition and Abstinence* is extant in a Coptic translation. A homily on the *Cross and the Thief* survives also in Coptic. A homily on the *Institution of the Eucharist* is really a discourse of Pope Theophilus directed against the Origenist monks. Several homilies extant in Coptic and Ethiopic have not been edited as yet. Of others only fragments remain. The number of fragments preserved in Catenae indicates that Pope Theophilus had a name as an exegete as well.

\*\*\* THE SPIRITUAL WRITINGS \*\*\*

A large number of writings and articles are attributed to him. St. Theophilus calls Christ, "Priest and Sacrificial Lamb, sacrificing and sacrificed, recipient and distributor".

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**πιάσιος Θεόφιλος**

μαρ κς παπα της Αλεξανδριας



**St Theophilus**

23<sup>rd</sup> Pope of Alexandria

**Fr. Matthew Attia**