

A Brief History of Orthodox Evangelism and Missions (8), Contemporary Coptic Missionary Work By Victor Beshir

This article is a continuation of “Brief History of Orthodox Evangelism and Mission” (7), so please review it before beginning to read this one.

4- Characteristics of Bishop Antonius Markos' Missionary Work:

4. At the end of his conversation, you noticed he said: “And the same can be observed in all the nations where the Coptic Church is to be established.” 3

It is clear that **he thinks the same rules may be applied worldwide, and not only in Africa.**

5. **Using the language of the indigenous people is highly important in his agenda.** The first thing he did when he met a new tribe or visited a new country, is that he started learning their language in order to use it in prayers, sermons, and in communicating with the people, this is a great lesson that we need to understand.

6. However, **he left some parts of the original Coptic melody alive.** For example, in some places in Africa, he left the Holy Week prayers using the Coptic melody. **This tradition lived in the church for a long time.** When you visit a Greek Church in the United States, you would hear a few Greek melodies and hymns in the middle of all of the English melodies. Personally, I would prefer to keep some Coptic melodies in each of our services.

7. In the beginning of his missionary work **he adapted the wonderful example of St. Paul when he used to make tents to pay for his missionary work expenses.** He used his profession as a physician in making a living. Later on, he gave up using the medicine as a way of making living, however, when he visits any tribe, he examines the sick and gives them medical attention.

8. **He uses a wonderful introductions to attract the Africans to the Coptic Orthodox Church.** He always **tells them that the Coptic Church is the mother of all African churches, since it was the first to be established in the continent.** Then for those countries that are closer to the River Nile, **he tells them that we drink from the same water of the River Nile.** Finding a good introduction is very crucial to the success of any missionary worker. St. Paul, for example, uses the ‘Unknown God’ in his introduction in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), while our Lord Jesus Christ, always used parables and

stories that represent everyday experience of the Jewish people at that time. It is important to find some way to be able to relate to the people that you are speaking to.

9. When the indigenous churches grew, he was ready to ordain deacons, and priests from the local churches themselves. Others in similar situations could fear loss of control over the indigenous churches or fear of separation of these churches from the mother church. His apostolic manners were revealed in his actions. In South Africa, he chose deacons from different churches to enroll them in St. Athanasius Theological Institution, which he established in Johannesburg. Then later he sent them to a seminary in Egypt.

10. Soon after establishing these indigenous churches he realized how poor the people are. In order to remedy this situation he **started many social and educational projects to help these people to raise their economic levels.** For example, he established **vocational trainings** in Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. In addition, he built many medical clinics in many countries.

11. He made many trips to the USA and to Australia to spread the awareness of evangelism among the Copts and to ask for their support for evangelism in Africa. Then he opened the door for the Coptic youth from the USA and Australia to go to Africa to spend some time in order to serve in evangelism. This is a great idea.

12. In addition to establishing a **seminary in South Africa,** he built a **monastery in Zimbabwe and another in South Africa,** and a **convention center** in Johannesburg. This reflects a vision of building a church that covers all of the needs of its members, spiritually and educationally.

13. He **helped the other Orthodox churches in Africa** to make them stronger. He helped some in starting a church and others in getting tax exempt. The hierarchy of these churches appreciated his help. For example, he received a Patriarchal Award from H.H. Alexei II of the Russian Orthodox Church. He established a strong relationship with all Orthodox Churches. His vision is to have a strong Orthodox presence in the continent of Africa.

Conclusion:

November 1st, 2007 marked the 31st anniversary of Bishop Antonius Markos' successful efforts to evangelize Africa. He started alone and stayed alone for many years. He suffered a lot in the beginning of his service in Kenya. For many years he saw no fruits but he was patient. A good lesson in evangelism is patience. He offered himself as a good example of a Christian and an evangelist that attracts others. The one-man service resulted in a great harvest. Now the Coptic Orthodox

Church exists in nine African countries. H.G. Bishop Paul (Anba Bolus) helps in the service in Kenya, Tanzania, and Congo. In addition, there are many indigenous priests, and deacons. There are also Coptic priests and monks who serve in Africa. We need to support these churches with our prayers. Some of these churches are very poor and they need our financial support. We also need to encourage our youth to go to Africa to learn the basics of evangelism there.

In addition to his missionary work, H.G. Bishop Antonius wrote the following valuable books in Arabic and English: "Story of Our Coptic Orthodox Church in Africa In our present time," "Come Across and Help Us (Three parts), and "An Introduction to the Theology of Missions,"

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1- H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos, "Come Across And Help Us," and "The Story of Our Coptic Orthodox Church in Africa In our present time," book one, by, Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs, Cairo 1988, page 182

2- H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos , "Come Across And Help Us," book two, and "The Story of Our Coptic Orthodox Church in Africa In our present time," book two, Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs, Cairo 1996.

3- H.G. Bishop Antonius Markos, "An Introduction Into Theology of Mission," 1997, Coptic Bishopric of African Affairs, Cairo 1997

The Language of Love

Fr. Zakaria Al-Baramousy

By Suzan Hanna

Father Zakaria is from Al baramousy Monastery. He is a scholar of Coptic Antiquity who has published many papers and articles in international Coptic societies. He never wanted to leave his monastic life. However, when the bishop of the monastery told him that H.H. Pope Shenouda III wants him to go to Mexico, Fr. Zakaria knew in his heart that this was a calling from God and he agreed.

When Fr. Zakaria arrived in Mexico, the church building was not finished and there were no people attending church services. He was saddened to feel that he left his spiritual service in the monastery, taking care of about 4000 visiting youth every year to come to a church whose congregation consisted only of a couple of families.

Fr. Zakaria decided to go back to Egypt when he received a comforting message from St. Mary asking him to stay and witness the glory of God. On Good Friday of 2007, all the icons of the church started to pour oil, which attracted national attention. Realizing that God opened a door for evangelism, Fr. Zakaria didn't leave the church. He started his mission by offering love to each person he met. Soon, he attracted many to the church. He loves the entire congregation as if they are his own children. Even though he does not speak Spanish fluently, he uses the language of love. God used him to baptize many people, and the work of God is manifested in the miracles taking place in the church.

Father Zakaria's love touched each one of us in a special way. On our first visit, he welcomed us with roses from the church garden, but the love and the warmth he showed to us during our stay was more beautiful than the rose garden.

For the last five years we have been returning to our beloved Mexico Church and our beloved Father Zakaria, and in every visit we discover more of Father Zakaria's love, his dedication to the service and the love he pours on everyone of his own congregation.

One of the remarkable things about Father Zakaria is his gentleness and love in dealing with each one, however, when it comes to the Orthodox Faith and planting it in the hearts of his congregation, you can see the gentle firmness he extends to all.

The more we visited Mexico the more we became attached to father Zakaria because we saw his efforts in this very hard service. Father Zakaria travels to many other towns and provinces to reach out to those who live in areas that are not serviced by any church. He goes to the natives taking loads of supplies that could help sustain them through their cold winters and while offering them their physical needs he also offers them Christ and His word.

He also reaches out to the intellectuals through visits to a number of universities, talking to Mexican and international students and teaching them the Faith and the History of the Orthodox Church. And even those who live in remote areas and can't logistically be served on a regular basis are still served through Father Zakaria's online weekly bible study that is offered to the Egyptian students studying in a number of universities in Mexico.

Abouna Zakaria is simple in his ways. When he talks he uses very simple language so that everyone can understand. The stories he tells us on every visit glorify the Lord and His mighty hand that works in this foreign land to bring people to Gods' bosom with no regard to culture, language or any other differences.

Characteristics of Fr. Zakaria's Mission:

- 1- Love is his main characteristic that attracts everyone to him. Love is a language that is not only understood by each individual, but also touches every heart. Every child and adult feels that Fr. Zakaria is his/her own father. Love was the main characteristic of our Lords' evangelism and the apostles. One example is St. Paul's words, "**Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?**" (2 Corinthians 11:29).
- 2- His mission was supported by miracles. In fact, the apostles' missions were supported by signs and miracles that helped in opening the eyes and hearts of nations. St. Paul explained how evangelism and signs walked hand in hand in his mission, "**in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ**" (Romans 15:19).
- 3- He shows acceptance of Mexican culture without sacrificing the Orthodox faith. Visitors notice that he prays the Divine Liturgy in Spanish and allows Mexican hymns during partaking of the Holy Communion. He also respects the way people dress, considering it as part of their culture, although Egyptians might not accept it.
- 4- He is faced with many Mexicans who practice "ancestor worship," which allowed evil spirits to possess them and cause their lives unbearable pain. He prays on each individual and drives out demons from many.
- 5- While visiting some Catholic churches in Mexico, some may be shocked that some of the icons and statues are covered with blood. This has negatively affected many Mexicans. Fr. Zakaria always touches on the topic, ensuring the peace and grace God gives to comfort souls. He is a missionary who understands the Mexican culture, the people's life and their fears and hopes.
- 6- His academic studies of Coptic antiquity and history gave him a great understanding of the essence of worship and Orthodox spirituality that allow him to easily differentiate between the necessary and the unnecessary, the deep and the shallow, and the essential and unimportant.
- 7- His scholarly background helps him to know the difference between what is Christian and what is cultural, what is Orthodox and what is ethnic. In fact, as Copts, we will stumble on our missions and evangelism until we study our heritage and be able –as Fr. Zakaria does– to differentiate between what is Christian and Orthodox on one side and what is cultural and ethnic on the other side.