

FATHER IBRAHIM LUKA

His Deeds, Programs, Struggle for the Renaissance of the Coptic Church and the Christian Unity

By Boulos Ayad Ayad

From the Beginning

Father Ibrahim Luka was born on January 19, 1897 in Isna (Upper Egypt). His pious mother had a great influence on him throughout his childhood. He was raised in a spiritual family of the Christian faith with the traditions of the Coptic Church.

Ibrahim Luka obtained the High School Certificate in 1915. Although he was accepted by the School of Medicine at Fouad I University, he preferred to join the Theological School in Cairo.

In fact, when he was in high School, he became a member of the Society of the Friends of the holy Bible, attending the religious meetings held by the Society in his school.

His religious activities had started when he was in high School, during the summer school vacation he went to Isna to preach and offer his religious services to the Christian families in the nearby villages.

We know that Ibrahim Luka, during his early years until the end of his life, attended the services of the Coptic Church, approaching the sacraments, fasting, reading the Holy Bible, praying, and chanting the hymns of his church.

Ibrahim Luka and the Theological School

Mr. Habib Girgis, who established the Theological School in Cairo, encouraged Ibrahim Luka to join the school.

After he joined the Theological School, Luka studied the following subjects independently because of his sickness, which took place from October 1915 to May 1916: Interpretations and history of the Holy Bible; decrees, laws of the Coptic Church; general history, Islamic religion; organizations of the other Churches; doctrines of the churches; Greek and Coptic languages ; and logic.

Ibrahim Luka continued his religious services after he recovered. He participated in the annual retreat of the Society of the Holy Bible, in the program

arranged to service the villages surrounding Armant (a village in Upper Egypt), and in the services offered to the workmen.

In April 1918 Ibrahim Luka graduated from the Theological School. His services to the Coptic Church and the Coptic communities and Societies increased, especially in the Church of Faggala in Cairo; and he preached in Cairo Churches.

Father Luka, the Priest at the Church of Assyut

After he graduated from High School in 1915, Ibrahim Luka decided to dedicate his life to serve the lord along with ten other youths; Hafez Daoud, Ibrahim Bisharah, shaker ghattas el-Maasarany, Halim Bisharah, Gendy Wassef, Younan Nakhla, Ryad Sorial, Bisharah Bastawros, Botros Rizkallah and Gayyed Gendy al-Fizi.

For his many religious services, in September 30, 1923, Bishop Macarius of Assyut ordained him a Coptic priest in the church of Assyut. The following year (1924), he was promoted to the rank of “Qommos” because of his significant services to the church and his effective preaching, which attracted many people to church attendance.

One of his great accomplishments while in Assyut was the establishment in 1924 of the Journal of al-Yaqza, which has been continued by his family even after his death in 1950.

Father Ibrahim Luka and the Church of Heliopolis in Cairo

Father Luka was instrumental in building Saint Mark Church of Heliopolis in Cairo in 1922. On July 14, 1925 Pope Kyrillos V, the Coptic Patriarch, agreed that Father Luka should leave Assyut and serve in this new church, where he supervised the church construction and arranged for icons and decorations. When Father Luka left Assyut Bishop Macarius and the Christians of Assyut disagreed.

Father Luka and his other buildings and churches

In addition, he built a cemetery within which was a church that served the Coptic people in Almaza, a district of Heliopolis. He erected a wall surrounding all the area, to protect the tombs and their belongings from thieves and animals. Ironically, the first person to be buried in that cemetery was Father Luka.

Father Luka was instrumental in building other churches: St. George Church at Almaza, the Church of Manshiat el-Bakri, and St. George Church in Heliopolis. He tried to build a church at Sarayet el-Kubba, but the project failed. He also bought a villa near the church of St. Mark, Heliopolis, which was added to the church property.

Father Ibrahim Luka and his programs

Father Luka's church and the Coptic Society were engaged in many activities such as a charity program, society for women, Christian preschool, a Sunday

library, services for workmen in Heliopolis, and a society for the general services, in addition to the regular religious services and special spiritual services held throughout the year which included services for Passion Week and the Feast of St. Mary. Father Ibrahim was successful in both his religious and social services.

Other Programs Related to the Renaissance of the Coptic Orthodox Church

Father Luka established many other programs to improve the situation of the Coptic Church during his lifetime. These included the programs relates to the election of the Popes of Alexandria, the committee for improving the situation of the Copts; his representation of the Coptic Church in the Conference of Life and Work, Faith and Discipline held in England. He intervened to solve the severe conflict among Pope Macarius of Alexandria, the Bishops, and the congregational council in the problems related to the properties of the Church.

When Pope Youssab the second became the Head of the Coptic Church, father Luka was appointed by the Pope to be his deputy. Father Luka established many committees to increase the activities of the Coptic Church, such as: the legislature Committee, the Committee of Programs, Committee of Propaganda, the Financial Committee, and the General Fund for the program of the Coptic Church. Father Luka was concerned with the importance of the relationship between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Church. He worked hard with the other Christian churches for Christian Unity among all the churches.

Father Luka and His Publications

He published the following books: Research in the reality of Truth, 1922; Chosen Religious Songs, 1949, reprinted five times until 1946; different pamphlets from the Moral Reformation Society, reprinted in 1922; Flee for Your Life, 1923, 1931; Approaching the Holy Sacrament, 1927, reprinted several times; Dangerous Illness, 1932; The Purity, 1932, 1933, 1935; Spiritual Meditation in the Gospel of Matthew, 1935; General Messages about the Coptic Church and its Creed, 1937, translated into English and reprinted several times; Christianity in Islam, 1938, 1948, 1952 (reviewed in Coptic Church Review Vol. 9, No. 1); A Declaration to be Judged, 1939; Guide to United Worship, 1940; To the Depth, 1944, 1952; The Popes, Chosen from What Group of People, 1946; Did you Return to Yourself, 1947, republished more than once; Guide to United Worship and Chosen Songs, 1946; The Day of the Lord, 1950; and Awakening Bulletin 9al-Yaqzah), 1924-present, which is considered one of the oldest Coptic Bulletins. The family of Father Ibrahim Luka, after his death, found many manuscripts in Luka's Library which have not been published.

The Library of Father Luka

His Library was a very valuable one, and included many volumes in the following fields: World History; History of Egypt; History of Christianity and its

Sects; History of the Coptic Church; History of Islam; the Islamic Culture; the Interpretation of the Holy Bible and of the Holy Quran; the sayings of the Fathers of the Churches; the sayings of the Prophet of Islam; Judaism; the Greek, Coptic and Modern languages; Geography; Literature; dictionaries; and journals. Many of these books are now out of print.

Father Luka established another library for the Sunday School of SAINT Mark Coptic Church of Heliopolis, which included more than 2000 books in 1950.

Father Luka and the Renaissance of the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Christian Unity

He struggled to save the church from anarchy and established many societies and committees to solve various problems facing it, especially in the manner of choosing Popes and clergy. He also attended many conferences within the Coptic Church as well as in other Christian churches both in and out of Egypt. In these conferences he worked to establish a close relationship among the various Christian churches, hoping to allay the enmity which had existed for generations. Such attempts of Father Luka to bring strong programs to his church resulted in false accusations that he was trying to separate from the Coptic Church and unite with the English Church. This caused many church members to turn their allegiance from him, for they did not want to accept these programs. Some of his enemies believed he had a lack of faith and was not sincere in his acceptance of the Coptic Orthodox Creed. However, authorities of the Coptic Church confirmed that they were in favor of his programs and activities.

Father Luka and the Result of His Activities

Pope Kyrillos VI and Pope Shenouda III accepted the various activities and the many programs of Father Luka. The Coptic Church gained socially and spiritually from the struggle of Father Luka, which started in the early twentieth century.

Father Luka and the Late Emperor Haile Selassi of Ethiopia and the Ethiopians

He also aided the Ethiopian Church and people, especially during the Second World War, when Italy occupied Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Selassi fled to England. Many of the members of the emperor's family, the dignitaries of Ethiopia, high officials of the Ethiopian Government, monks, priests, and the general population left Ethiopia during the war and fled to Egypt. Father Luka welcomed many of these Ethiopians in his house and offered to all of them apartments and shelters.

Father Luka supported all the Ethiopians in their daily life and with their needs. The Ethiopians found in father Luka, the good shepherd, the excellent priest and wonderful Father for all of them, not only during the Second World War but during his life.

The Family of Father Luka

A. His Wife

He was married in 1920, Rojina Botros, a pious lady from a religious family. She had many virtues and activities: sincere, modest, an excellent mother, truth-loving, and an ardent reader of the Bible who prayed and loved Christ. She was also a lady of high moral character and always interested in aiding the poor of the area. The Luka's home life included Father Ibrahim gathering the members of his family together every evening for a Bible reading and time of prayer. Mrs. Rojina passed away on November 16, 1953, after a full life of good works.

B. The other members of His Family

Father Luka had three daughters. All of them completed their studies in the Coptic College for girls in Abbassiyah, Cairo. The three showed many talents: the art of painting, writing, and public speaking. Their lives have been examples of social and spiritual success. They studied the Bible, and the religious books about Christianity, attended the prayers of the Coptic Church and were accustomed to chant hymns in certain Festivals of the Church. They participated in the trips of the church to visit the old churches, monasteries and other historical places.

The three of them have been married: Lucy was married to the late Mr. Youssef Kamil who worked as a lawyer and then became a judge. Mary was married to the late Mr. Fayez Riyad who was an engineer and worked with the Egyptian Government until he became the head of one of the governmental departments. Suzanne is married to Mr. Farag Nashed who graduated from Engineering College, University of Cairo, then joined the Army and later became one of the leaders in the Egyptian Army until he retired.

All of the sons-in-law of Father Luka were very successful in their private, public and spiritual lives. All were university graduates and from famous families, very religious individuals who loved the Lord and His Church. The three of them published books and articles and have been editors of the Journal of Yaqza after Father Luka. They were good speakers and some of them were preachers.

The three families of the daughters of Father Luka undertook numerous activities in serving the Lord, His Church, and Egyptian Society as well as the Egyptian Government.

Father Luka and His Friends

The friendship of Father Luka had been extended to many individuals as well as the rest of his family.

As a witness of such friendship, I once visited Father Luka with my father, Archdeacon Ayad Ayad, one evening during the 1940's, when my father heard that Father Luka was ill. When we went to visit Father Luka in his cabin in El-Mandara, one of the districts of Alexandria, I met a huge number of visitors. Some of them

were leaving, some others were coming to visit, and a third group was speaking among themselves, A fourth group was singing hymns while yet another group was discussing the problems of the church. We stayed for two hours, and throughout this time other people came to ask Father Luka's health, but his personality drew them together. Since that time, I recognized that Father Luka had many friends and instilled prayers, discussions, thought, and action among others.

The Death of Father Luka

On December 19, 1950, following a short illness, Father Luka passed away. Many important people attended his funeral as well as from all the different classes of Egyptian Society. Others sent telegrams or wrote articles in his memory in newspapers. His death was noted in publications and in churches throughout the world. When the family held a memorial service one year later, there were many articles praising Father Luka in newspapers, journals, and books.

One of the best books written about Father Luka is by his son-in-law, Mr. Fayez Riyad in 1986, *The Struggle of a Priest: From the Library of Father Ibrahim Luka*. In this book, Mr. Riyad presented the history of the Coptic Church from the middle 1920's until early 1950. he supplied the book with the full details concerning the life of Father Ibrahim L, one of the great personalities of the Coptic Church in the twentieth century. The volume is written in Arabic and it will be useful to future generations of Copts in teaching of the Church's struggle to succeed in the face of adversity.

Those Who Wrote or Talked Highly About Father Luka

These included Archdeacon Ayad Ayad, the dignitaries of Ethiopia, Bishop Kyrillos of Qena, Bishop Youanness of Giza, Bishop Mikhail of Assyut, Mr. Kamel Boulos Hanna, Mr. Rafla Girgis, Bishop Bassilioos of Ethiopia, Father Marcus Daoud, the Coptic Society of Alexandria, the Society of El-Tawfiq el Qibtiya in Cairo, St. John Coptic church of el-Zaytoon, St. Mark Coptic Church in Heliopolis, Father Ibrahim Saied, Makram Ebeid Pasha.

The Memorial Hall of Father Luka

After the death of Father Luka, the responsible committee of the church of Heliopolis in Cairo decided to build a hall close to the church. This hall carries the name of Father Luka because of the great deeds he offered to the church and society.

On December 21, 1951 the foundation of this hall established by the hand of Pope Youssab II. On June 5, 1964, Pope Kyrillos VI opened the hall.

By erecting such a hall, we can see that one of the main goals of Father Luka has been fulfilled. The hall is the place for many of the social and spiritual activities for the Coptic people.

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