

THE PATRIARCHAL ACCLAMATION OF THE ALEXANDRIAN PRIMATE

Heavy responsibilities, but also the rich heritage of an historic process of two thousand years are included in the title of each Patriarch of Alexandria: ***“Pope and Patriarch of the great city of Alexandria, Libya, Pentapolis, Ethiopia, the whole land of Egypt and All Africa, Father of Fathers, Shepherd of Shepherds Hierarch of Hierarchs, thirteenth of the Apostles and Judge of the Universe”***.

Perhaps it is now the most prominent title that a Hierarch holds and is almost equivalent to that of each Pope of Rome. Some of the definitions of the Patriarch of Alexandria show his absolute power outside of the areas of Egypt, others show the absolute power he had over all the Bishops in Africa and yet others his mediatory role which he played in certain difficult periods in history.

From the Patriarchal acclamation, let us stop on the historic origin of his concluding title, “Judge of the Universe”. This title was given to the Alexandrian Patriarch Theophilos II in 1019 because of his conciliatory mediation in order to overcome the crisis in the relations between the Byzantine Emperor Basil II Bulgaroctonus and Patriarch Sergios II of Constantinople. The Alexandrian Primate at that time was in Constantinople to escape from the relentless persecution which had been unleashed against the Christians by the Fatimid Caliph al Hakim.

The cause of this summit crisis was the refusal of the Patriarch of Constantinople to accept the application on church property of the so-called solidarity law, according to which the rich were obliged to pay the taxes of the poor who were not in a position to pay. The conflict reached extremes when Sergios attempted to block Basil from attending church

because he was supposedly tainted from the murders which had been committed during the Emperor's past campaigns. Not wanting to lose face, tried to take revenge on Sergios, who reacted by speaking rudely to the Emperor.

As the dispute threatened to take on unexpected dimensions, Patriarch Theophilos was called on to rule on the conflict in such a way that both sides would be satisfied. Theophilos created two wax statues and erected them opposite the assembly which was convened. Without expressing any opinion he showed graphically the serious impact that the huge controversy would have on the unity of the Byzantine Empire, by cutting off from the one statue its right hand and from the other its tongue. Realizing the gravity of the circumstances and the proved reciprocal concessions through Theophilos' clever contrivance, the rival parties reached a compromise. Feeling grateful to Theophilos for his saving intervention, Sergios gave him his stole and Basil placed on his head the royal diadem.

This explains the particular nature of the Patriarchal Vestments of the Alexandrian Primate, who wears two stoles and two mitres during the Divine Liturgy. Indeed, in the Prayer Book of the Sinaitic Code there is an order Regarding the Ordination of the Patriarch of Alexandria, according to which, apart from the other sacred vestments, he receives a second stole, over the Hierarchal vestment, called a "kirato" in commemoration of the awarding of the historic title "*Judge of the Universe*".