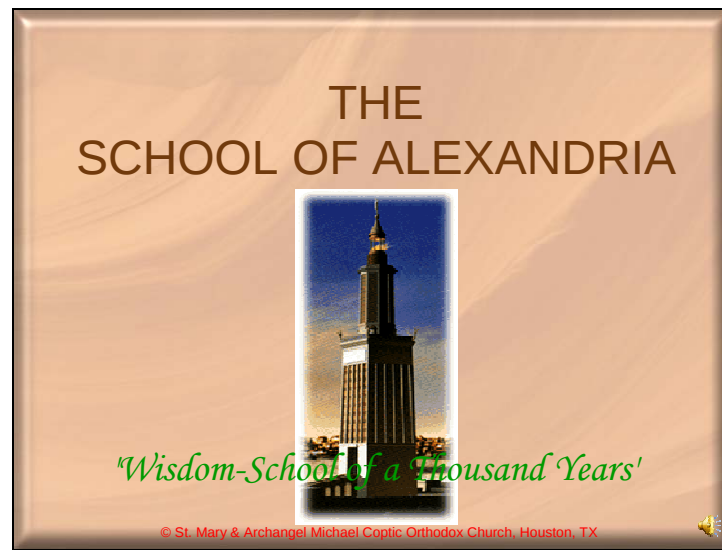


THE SCHOOL OF ALEXANDRIA

*'Wisdom-School
of a Thousand Years'*

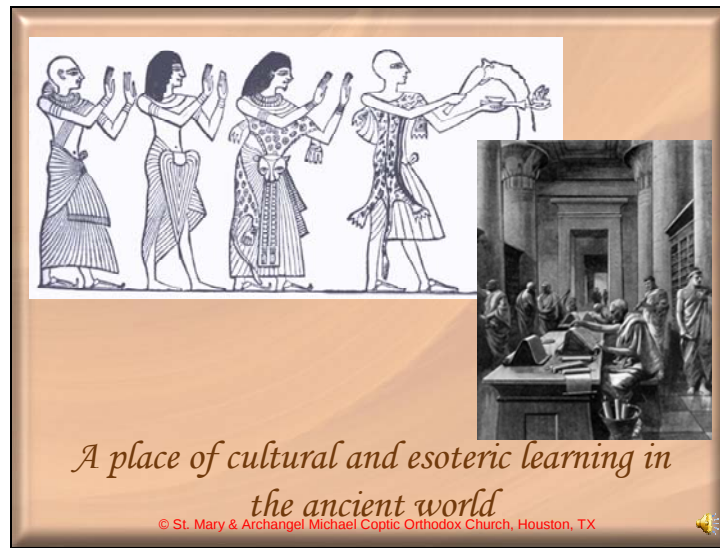




Long before the establishment of Christianity in Alexandria, the city of Alexandria was famous for its many schools.

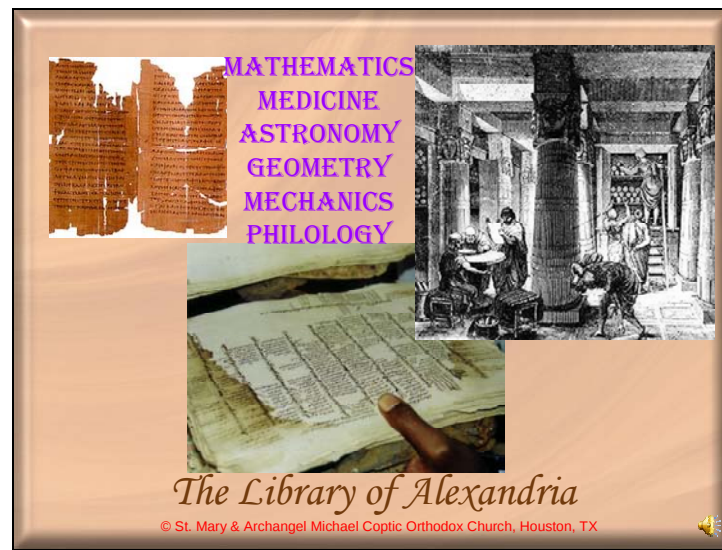
By far, the largest school known as the "*Museum*," was founded by Ptolemy Soter, and zealously pursued by his successor Ptolemy Philadelphus.

It became the most famous school in the East.



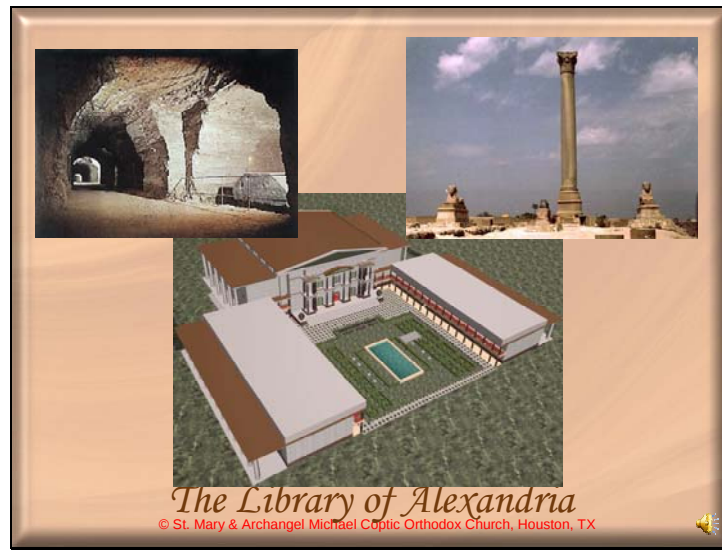
Alexandria, the cosmopolitan city, was chosen as a home for learning, and a unique center of a brilliant intellectual life.

In the School of Alexandria, Egyptian Priests, Jewish Rabbis, Magi from Persia, Brahmins and Buddhist monks from India, Gnostic Christians, Druids and Shamans, met in an atmosphere of inclusiveness and mutual respect. And thus, Alexandria became the birthplace of the Hermetic and Alchemical Arts and was a unique flowering of the cultural and esoteric learning in the ancient world.



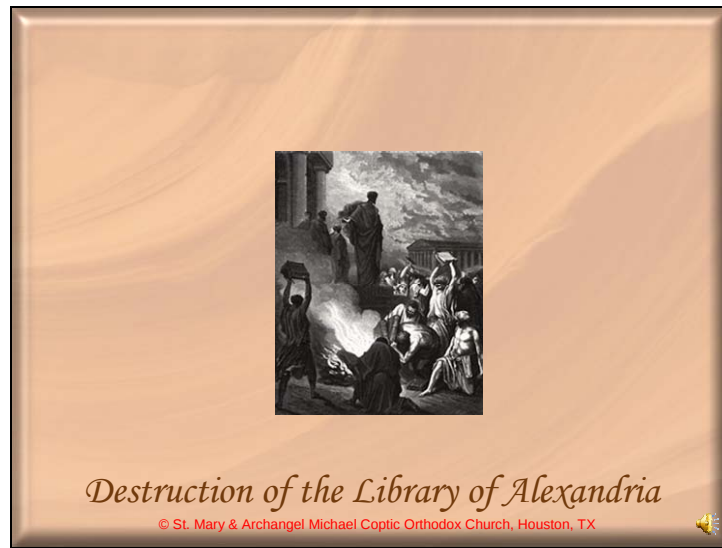
Ptolemy I entrusted Demetrius of Phaleron, who was one of the students of Aristotle, with the task of gathering books and scrolls, as well as appointing him to supervise a massive effort to translate other cultures' works into Greek. This process began with the translation of the Septuagint, the Old Testament, into Greek, for which he hired and housed 72 rabbis.

At the time of Demetrius, Greek libraries were usually collections of manuscripts by private individuals. Egypt's temples often had shelves containing an assortment of religious and official texts, as did certain Museums in the Greek world. It was Ptolemy's great ambition to possess all known world literature that pushed these idiosyncratic collections - the web sites of the ancient world - into the realm of a true library. It is recorded that the library cataloged scrolls and manuscript in the topics of mathematics, medicine, astronomy, geometry, mechanics, as well as philology (the study of language and literature)



The two principal libraries of Alexandria were in the Bruchium, the distinguished palace area where the Museum stood, and the Serapeum, the magnificent temple of Serapis, built by Ptolemy III.

The number of rolls or "books" is estimated to have numbered between 400,000 and 700,000.



The Bruchium was accidentally set on fire when Caesar burnt the fleet in the harbor, but many rolls were rescued. The Bruchium quarter was destroyed by Aurelian in 273; About 390 AD Emperor Theodosius ordered the destruction of the Serapeum Temple. The Moslem Caliph `Omar of Demascus finally destroyed the remainder of the library, because, as he said of the books: "They will either contradict the Koran, in which case they are heresy, or they will agree with it, so they are superfluous." So enormous was the volume of literature that it took six months for it all to be burnt to ashes.

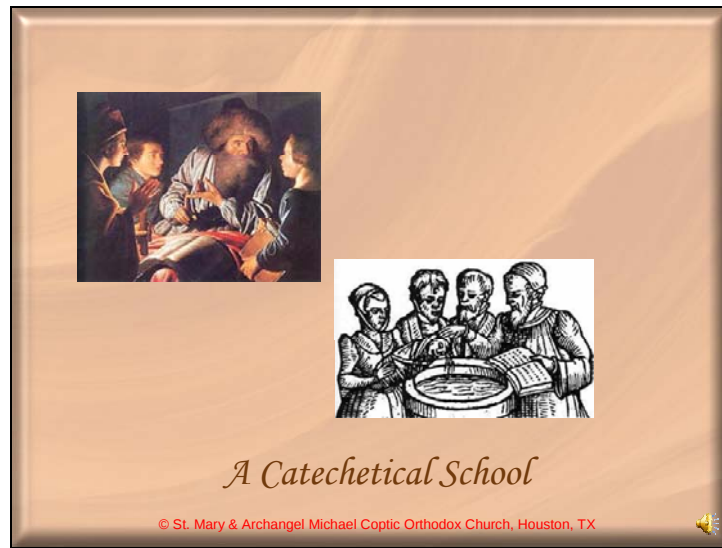


The Christian School of Alexandria

St. Jerome records that the Christian School of Alexandria was founded by St. Mark the evangelist himself.

He was inspired by the Holy Spirit to establish it to teach Christianity, as this was the only way to provide the new religion a solid foundation in the city.

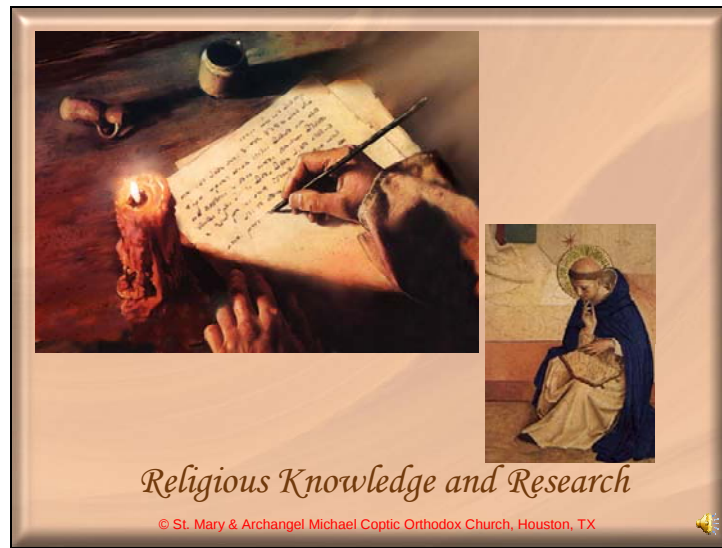
The School became the oldest center for sacred sciences in the history of Christianity.



We should not, of course, assume that teaching took place in the typical school buildings, or even church buildings, of our modern world. Instead, instruction was conducted in the teacher's private house.

This Christian School started as a Catechetical School, where candidates were admitted to learn the Christian faith and some Biblical studies to qualify for baptism. The deans were in fact catechists or teachers of the faith.

Origen describes the catechist's functions in more than one of his books. He was entrusted with both teaching doctrine and providing instructions on the Christian life.



Admittance was open to all people regardless of culture, age or background.

By the second century, the school became quite influential on church life for many reasons:

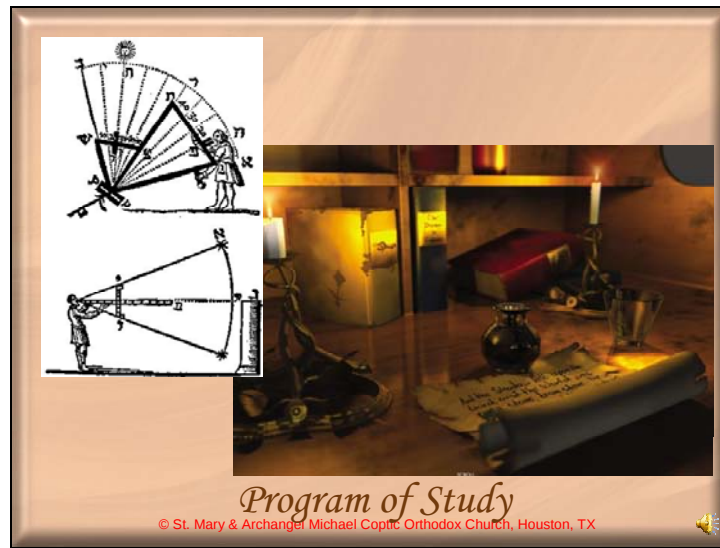
It was able to satisfy the thirst of the Alexandrian Christians for religious knowledge, encourage higher studies and create research work in a variety of fields.

Through its missionary zeal, the School was able to win many souls to Christianity from Egypt and abroad.

In a true ecumenical spirit, it attracted students from other nations, many of whom became leaders and bishops in their own churches.

It offered the world the first systematic theological studies.

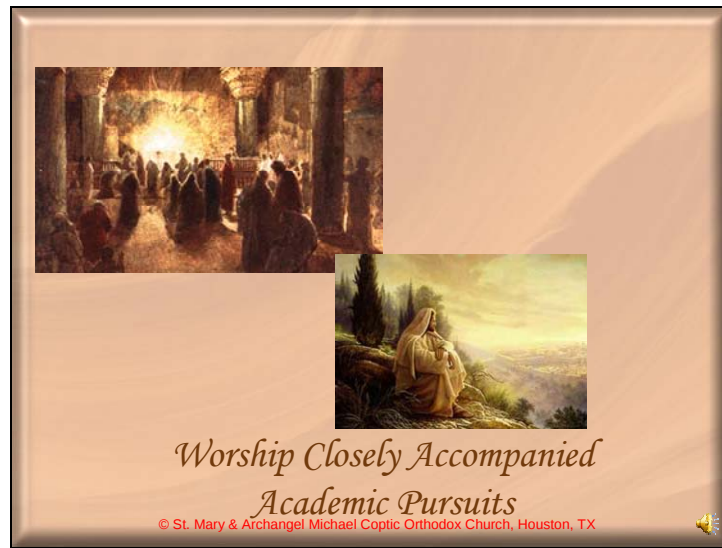
It used philosophy as a weapon in dealing with pagan philosophers, and thus defeating them at their own game.



It would have been a grave error to have confined the School's activities to theology. Its teaching was encyclopedic; first presenting the whole series of secular sciences, and then rising to moral and religious philosophy, and finally to Christian theology, as set forth in the form of commentaries on the sacred books.

Three main courses in Christian knowledge were available:

1. A special course for non-Christians, which introduced candidates to principles of Christianity.
2. A course on Christian morals.
3. An advanced course on divine wisdom and sufficient knowledge for the spiritual Christian.



Worship closely accompanied academic pursuits at the School.

Teachers and their students observed prayer, fasting and diverse exercises of asceticism.

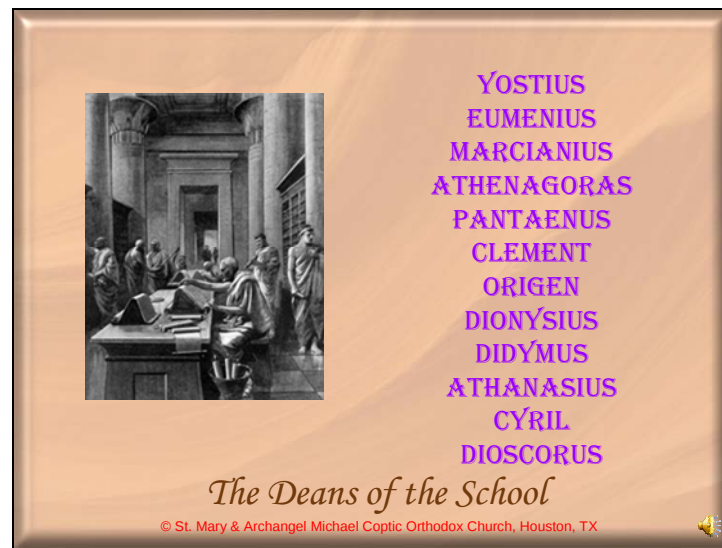
In addition to moderation in food and drink, they were also moderate in earthly possessions. In purity and integrity their lives were exemplary. Celibacy was a recommended ideal, and was observed by many.

At that time, philosophers were not so much teachers of theory as masters of practical wisdom.

Philosophy meant ceasing to bother much about temporal affairs, such as politics and professional matters, and putting matters of the soul first.

The philosopher's ideal was the quest for the perfect life.

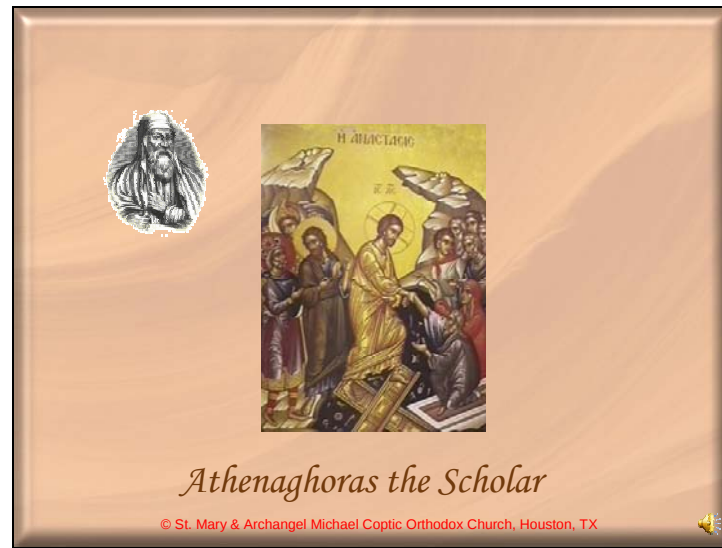
Conversion, in the ancient world, meant conversion to philosophy.



A quick glimpse over the names of those who headed the Christian School of Alexandria provides self-evidence of the history of the school and its rank among similar institutions. This honorable list includes Athenagoras, Pantaenus, Clement, Origen, Dionysius, Didymus the Blind, as well as Pope Athanasius the Apostolic, Pope Cyril of Alexandria, and Pope Dioscorus .

Not much is mentioned about Yostius, Eumenius, and Marcianus, the first three deans of the School of Alexandria, for the following reasons:

1. Since the pastoral care of the Fathers kept them quite busy, especially with non-Christians, they either had little opportunity to write or their writings were lost.
2. The learned philosopher Athenagoras, who followed them, influenced the School greatly due to his philosophical ability which brightened his star over his predecessors. Hence, the beginning of the School was related to him, especially that his writings were universally interchanged from the first century. Many historians consider Athenagoras as the first dean of the School.



Athenaghoras the Scholar

Athenaghoras was a philosopher who was anxious to write against Christianity.

He read the Holy Scriptures in order to criticize them more accurately, but he was so powerfully seized by the Holy Spirit that he became a defender of the very faith he was intending to discredit.

Not only was he converted to Christianity (c. 176 A.D), he also became one of the most famous deans of the Christian Theological School

He wrote a treatise "on the Resurrection of the dead".

It is probably the best early Christian treatise on the subject. It reflects a skillful understanding, and is regarded as the first attempt ever made by a Christian writer to prove this dogma by means of philosophical arguments and not by revelation and the biblical texts alone.



St. Pantaenus

Pantaenus embraced Christianity at the hands of Athenaghoras.

In (181 A.D) he succeeded his teacher as the dean of the Theological (Catechetical) School.

He introduced philosophy and sciences into the school to gain the educated pagans.

He introduced the Coptic Alphabet, by using the Greek letters and adding seven letters from the ancient Demotic letters.

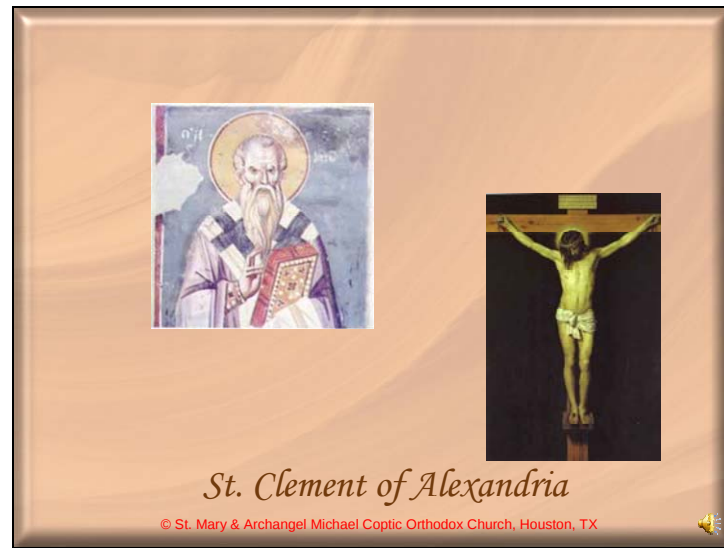
The Holy Bible was translated into the Coptic language under his guidance, assisted by his disciples, Clement and Origen.

Most of our Christian literature was translated into this language as the last phase in the evolution of the ancient Egyptian language.

In 190 A.D, Pope Demetrius assigned him to preach in India.

On his journey, he found the Gospel of St. Matthew written in Hebrew by his own hand.

He wrote commentaries explaining all the books of the Holy Bible.



St. Clement of Alexandria

St. Clement is the father of the Christian philosophy of Alexandria, and was well versed in the Holy Scriptures.

He was born around the year 150 A.D, and he was searching unceasingly for God. After converting to Christianity, he traveled extensively to Southern Italy, Syria, and Palestine.

His purpose was to seek instruction from the most famous Christian teachers.

At the end of his journeys, he reached Alexandria where Pantaenus' lectures had so attracted him that he settled there and made this city his second home.

He became the pupil and assistant of Pantaenus.

He was ordained a priest in Alexandria and succeeded Pantaenus as head of the School.

Among his pupils were Origen and Alexander, bishop of Jerusalem.

In the time of severe persecution by Septimius Severus about (202 A.D), he was forced to leave Alexandria and took refuge (probably in Palestine and Syria). In (215 A.D), he died without seeing Egypt again.

St. Clement is the first Christian writer who brought Christian doctrine face to face with the ideas and achievements of the time.

He believed that the very constitution of the Church and Holy Scriptures was not incompatible with Greek philosophy.

He believed that there is no enmity between Christianity and Philosophy.

The difference was this: while the ancient philosophers had been unable to obtain more than glimpses of the truth, it was left to Christianity to make known in Christ the perfect truth.



ORIGEN

"The School of Alexandria reached its greatest importance under St. Clement's successor, Origen, the outstanding teacher and scholar of the early church, ...a man of encyclopedic learning, and one of the most original thinkers the world has ever seen."
(J. Quasten)

The Coptic Church was compelled to excommunicate him because of some faulty ideas that he adopted, such as the salvation of the devil, and the universal salvation of the whole human race, besides his acceptance of priesthood after making himself eunuch. After his death, other churches excommunicated him and his followers in the Council of Constantinople in (553 A.D).

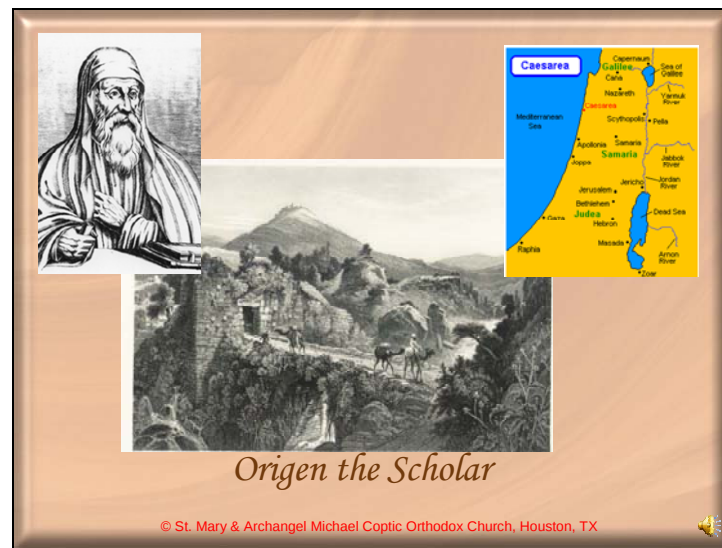
Origen, was born probably in Alexandria, in or about (185 A.D).

His father, Leonides, was very careful to bring him up in the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures.

His father was arrested and thrown into prison.

Origen ardently desired to attain the martyr's crown, and when he was prevented by his mother, he strongly urged his father to accept martyrdom by writing to him "Do not dream of changing your mind for our sake."

Leonides was beheaded and his goods were confiscated.



Origen's refuge was with a noble lady of Alexandria, who helped him for a time, but he did not feel comfortable there, because a heretic teacher, called "Paul of Antioch," had so captured this simple lady by his eloquence that she harbored him as her philosopher and adopted son, and allowed him to propagate his heresy by means of lectures, held in her house.

Origen felt no comfort, left the house and supported himself and his family by teaching secular literature and grammar.

Through his teaching to pagans, Origen often had occasions to refer to the theological position of pagan writers.

As a result, some pagans approached him for instruction in Christianity, and were later even martyred.

During the persecution, St. Clement left Alexandria, and Origen was appointed as the dean of the School when he was only eighteen years old. He devoted himself to studying the Holy Bible and Its allegoric interpretation in an ascetic spirit.

Because of the presence of women at his lectures, he wrongly castrated himself.

When he started to interpret the Bible before the bishops in Palestine, Pope Demetrius was angry that a layman teaches the bishops

When bishop of Caesarea ordained him a priest, Pope Demetrius was angry because he accepted the priesthood, while being a eunuch.

A council was held in Alexandria and Origen was exiled.

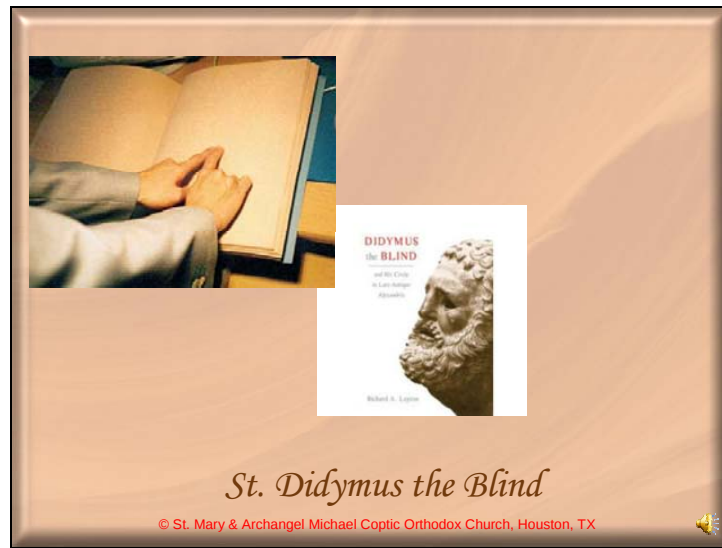


One of his main writings is:

The Hexapala (or six-fold Bible), arranged in six parallel columns from Hebrew and Greek texts;

Origen collected the texts and translations of the Bible and arranged them in six columns. In this way, if a verse was obscure, the scholar could refer to other translations to elucidate and further explain it. Thus, Origen in the second century - was dramatically ahead of his time.

His commentary works cover the entire range of Scriptures;



ST. DIDYMUS THE BLIND

He was born around the year 313 A.D

He lost his sight at the age of four.

He never learned to read in school, but through his eagerness for education he invented the engraved writing for reading with his fingers, fifteen centuries before Braille reinvented it.

He also used to learn by heart the Holy Bible and the church doctrines.

He excelled in grammar, philosophy, logic, mathematics and music.

After Macarius' death, he ascended to the head of the School of Alexandria.

He was a close friend to St. Anthony.

He defended Origen and defeated the Arians in his disputes with them.



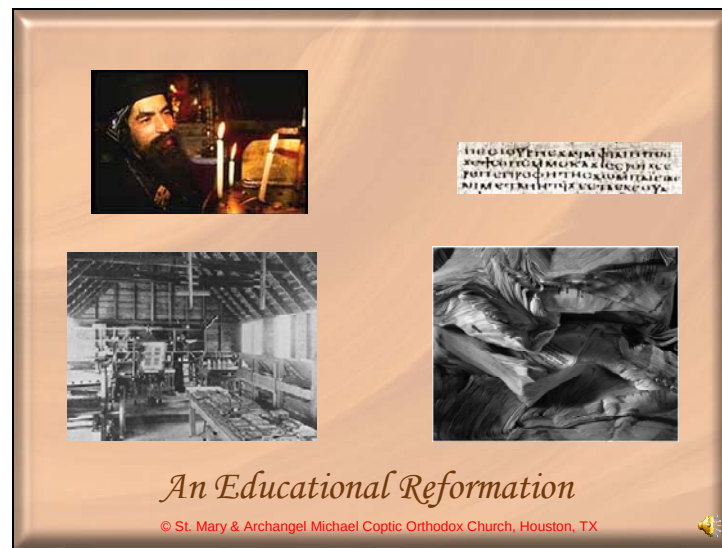
After Didymus, an obscure period in the history of the School followed.

Its greatest days were over.

After the first split of the Church which happened as a result of the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the emperor of Constantinople closed the School as an avenue of persecution against the Copts.

Nothing however can be taken away from the wealth of teaching and scholarship that the School of Alexandria offered to the early Church.

It is undoubtedly the earliest important institution of theological learning in Christian antiquity.



In the 19th century, Pope Kirollos (Cyril) IV, the 110th Pope of Alexandria, began an educational reformation for the Coptic Church.

He began by reviving the Coptic language, which has been mostly lost, and was used only in the monasteries.

He devoted all his efforts to disciplining the youth and educating them.

He established the first great Coptic school in the patriarchate, which taught Christianity, sciences, Coptic and even foreign languages, including English and Italian. He also established another school in Haret-El-Sakkayeen.

He paid great attention to the teaching of the Coptic language, and mandated it in the curriculums.

He also established a great printing house and printed many church books.

He established a library, and began to collect many of the lost and damaged books of the church.

He paid special attention to educating the clergy, and held weekly meetings and seminars with all the priests, and awarded those who excelled in the Coptic language and in preaching.

He also paid attention to the education of young girls, to equip them to support their husbands in the service, and be teachers of their children.

It is estimated that he spent roughly half a million Egyptian pounds on these educational projects, all of which reaped numerous benefits for the church.



During the papacy of Pope Kirolos (Cyril) V, the 112th Pope of Alexandria, and after 1400 years since the closing of the great school of Alexandria, it was re-established in 1875, as the Coptic Orthodox Theological Seminary.

In 1912, it was moved to Mahmasha, Cairo, where approximately 400 students were enrolled.

It has since produced many scholarly church leaders, including many deacons, preachers, priests, and bishops;

famous among them are renowned church pillars such as Anba Abraam, Bishop of Fayoum, and Pope Kyrillos VI.

Pope Kyrillos V appointed *the late Deacon Habib Girgis*, who was the first graduate of the seminary, as the dean of the theological seminary.

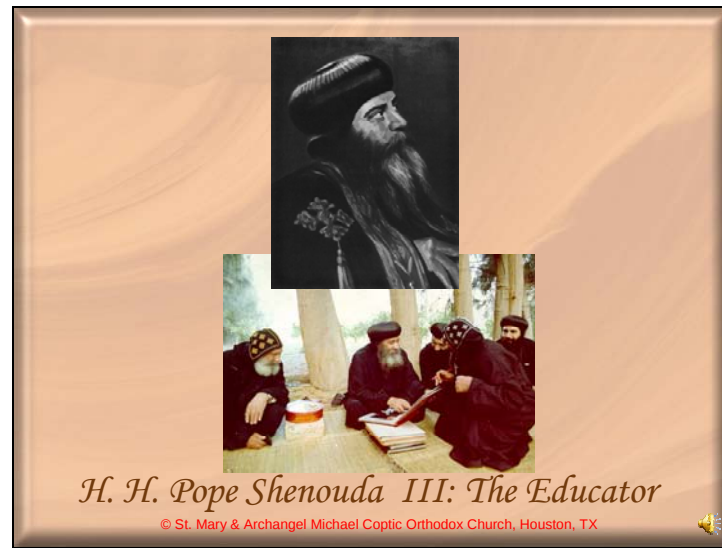
He dedicated his life to the seminary and its improvement. Deacon Habib Girgis assisted the Pope in expanding its buildings in Mahmasha.

Pope Kyrillos often visited the seminary and blessed its students.

This deacon was a skillful speaker. He accompanied the Pope in his pastoral visits to Upper Egypt and Sudan.

He translated many religious books from foreign languages to Arabic and published *El-Karma periodical*, to spread the facts of the faith in a positive way.

He published many books, among them were: *The Seven Sacraments of the Church*, *The Consoler of the Faithful*, *The Mystery of Piety*, and many others. He taught and nurtured many generations of clerical men who flourished in the church and filled it with their sermons and religious publications.



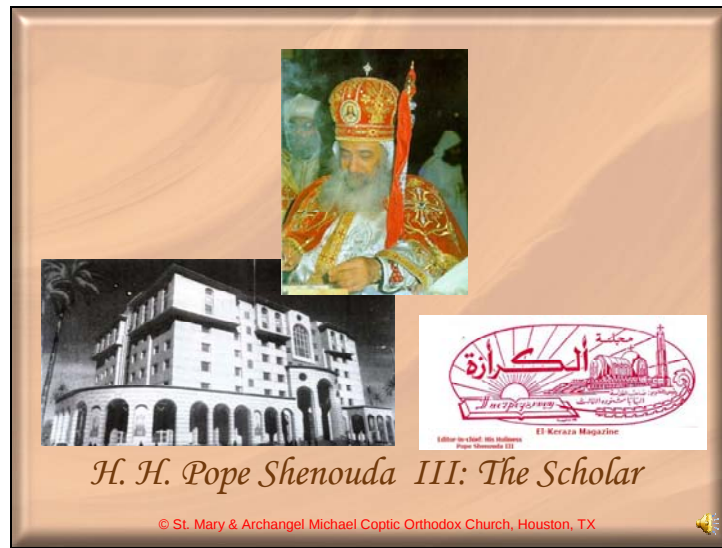
The School of Alexandria was one of the most important sources of theological knowledge of Christianity.

It became a center for evangelism and theological research.

Although it does not exist today in its original form, the idea of the School of Alexandria still exists in the modern mind of the Coptic Church and its leaders.

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the present Pope of Alexandria has taken special interest in the theological education and enrichment of the Coptic Church and the universal church in general.

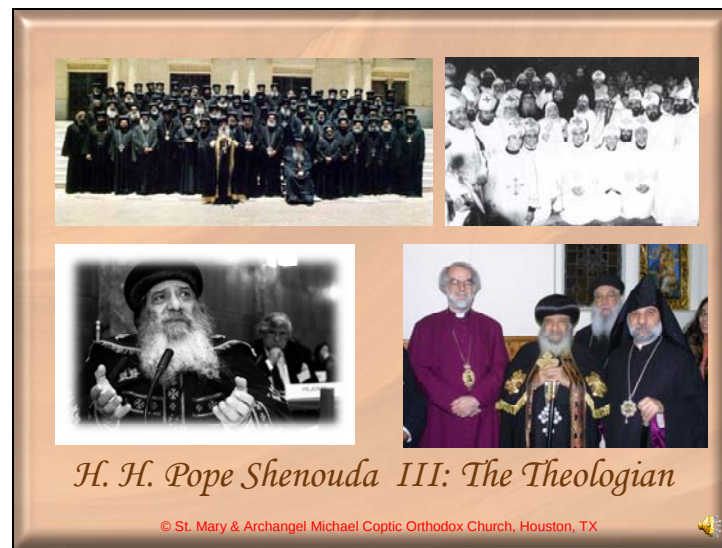
In 1962, he was ordained by the late Pope Cyril VI as Bishop of Ecclesiastical (Religious) Education and was named Dean of the Coptic Theological Seminary. He continues to lecture at the branches of the Seminary in Cairo, Alexandria, and abroad and the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies. This seminary today has many branches in Egypt as well as in America, Australia, and the United Kingdom; the latest branch added being St. Athanasius Theological Seminary in San Antonio, TX, under the auspices of our beloved Bishop Anba Youssef, the bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States.



Continuing from his literary past, Pope Shenouda published the first issue of "El-Keraza" (Preaching) magazine in Arabic in 1965, and he remains the Editor-in-Chief to this day.

His Holiness is the author of more than 100 books and a vast number of articles on a variety of spiritual and theological subjects, over half of which have been translated into English, French, German, Italian, and other languages.

His Holiness has started a public library for the Coptic Church, to house an enormous amount of books, Coptic Manuscripts, and many other books and media.



To care for the church and its education, His Holiness ordained more than eighty Metropolitans and Bishops, established general bishoprics, including the first Bishopric of Youth, more than six hundred priests, and countless deacons for Cairo, Alexandra and the Churches abroad.

This extended the pastoral care to every city, village and family throughout the See of St. Mark.

His Holiness continually holds meetings and seminars with the clergy to discuss any pastoral problems or needs.

His Holiness conducts a weekly meeting, which is attended by over seven thousand of the faithful, both clergy and laymen, at the Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo.

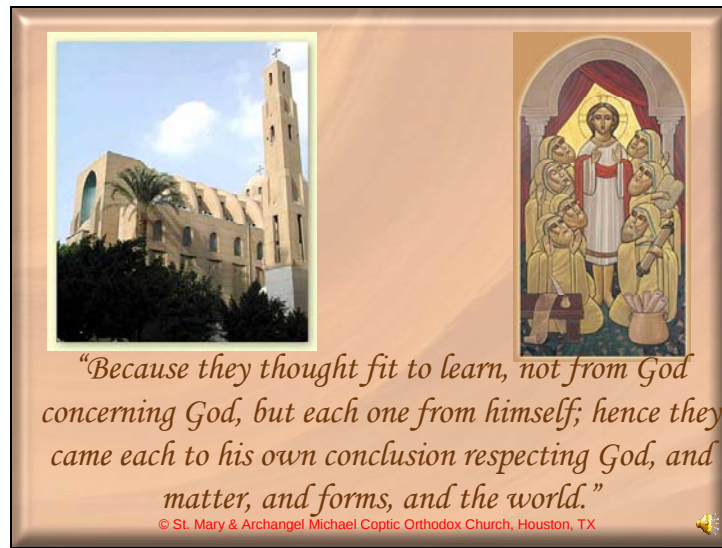
His Holiness also gives special attention to the service of women in the Coptic Orthodox Church, as well as the service of the youth.

As a Bishop for Christian Education, he had overseen the education of the Sunday School Curriculum, and during his papacy, he has continued to hold meetings for Sunday School teachers to establish a Sunday School curriculum for the churches abroad.

In June 1989, His Holiness opened the conference of the International Commission for Inter-Orthodox Theological Dialogue.

Until now, His Holiness initiates and closely monitors theological dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Swedish Lutheran, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. His Holiness is presently one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches.

Many of the world's church leaders consider Pope Shenouda as an ecumenical teacher of theology, and intently listen to his speeches as their predecessors listened to the homilies of St. Clement and Origen.



"Because they thought fit to learn, not from God concerning God, but each one from himself; hence they came each to his own conclusion respecting God, and matter, and forms, and the world."

© St. Mary & Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Church, Houston, TX

The Coptic Church is very rich in history, antiquity, art, music and many other areas. But it is also a church of knowledge, instruction, doctrine, and wisdom.

Athenagoras, in his treatise, "Superiority of the Christian Doctrine Respecting God", speaks of the Divine knowledge, saying:

"For poets and philosophers, as to other subjects so also to this, have applied themselves in the way of conjecture, moved, by reason of their affinity with the (inspiration) from God, each one by his own soul, to try whether he could find out and apprehend the truth; but they have not been found competent fully to apprehend it, because they thought fit to learn, not from God concerning God, but each one from himself; hence they came each to his own conclusion respecting God, and matter, and forms, and the world."

Let us understand and appreciate the greatness of our Coptic Church, as a church of teaching and evangelism, and pride ourselves in being the children of such great scholars such as Athenagoras and Clement, who were shining lamps placed not under a basket, but on a lamp stand; their light shined before men, they saw their good works and glorified their Father who is in Heaven.