



*Interview Questions*  
*With Father Tadros Malaty*

Research on the Life and Theological Legacy of

**Pope Kyrillos VI**

(1902-1971)

**1. When did you first meet Pope Kyrillos VI, and what were the circumstances?**

The first time I met with H. H. Pope Kyrillos VI and had the opportunity to speak with him was November 1962, before I was ordained a priest for St. George Coptic Orthodox Church of Sporting, Alexandria.

**2. Prior to your first meeting with Pope Kyrillos, what was your collective knowledge of him?**

Before I got to meet with him, I only knew what I heard that he was a very spiritual hermit, simple in nature and practiced his ascetic life so seriously.

**3. What was your first impression of him, and did it ever change during the years of relationship with him?**

I was impressed with his simple appearance, sweet and cheerful countenance, yet he possessed a strong character that depicted a man who had much respect for traditions, values, and the teaching of the forefathers of our Orthodox Church. Through the years of relationship with Pope Kyrillos, I was able to see and come in touch with a true man of God whose main goal was to pray without ceasing in many ways, through the daily liturgy, *Tasbeha* (hymns), the hours of Agape prayers, and time of solitude with God... Pray without Ceasing (Thess. 5:17). He was blessed with heavenly wisdom and a vision into the future of our church and her needs (Ex. his concern to establish the church that will grow over seas and across the oceans)

**4. Do you think after all these years and many books have been written about his life and the listing of encounters of many people with his holiness, do actually portray the truth about the man that you personally knew? If not, why do you think that?**

I believe that even those who were considered close to him, did not know all the facets of his character or his life. For his efforts were much spent in hiding his heavenly gifts (Ex. Healing of the sick, the vision into the future,

the foreknowledge of events and people names and their intents etc.) resulting from his faithful relationship with God, the saints (especially St. Mina), and the heavenly hosts.

**5. How long did you know Pope Kyrillos and what was the nature of your relationship with him?**

\* For me as for many of the clergymen and people (laity) he was a special father. Everyone felt as if he was his only son (or daughter) and a friend.

\* In 1962 after my ordination, I spent twenty days with another newly ordained priest in the Pope's building in old Cairo. He took care of us as his own children, teaching and guiding us in our new responsibilities. It is customary that a new priest would spend 40 days in the monastery to learn the liturgical hymns and the administering of the Holy sacraments.

\* I asked him to spend the other twenty days in the Monastery of St. Mina, near Alexandria, which pleased him a great deal, for he had a great appreciation for the monastic life, especially at St. Mina's.

\* My meetings in person began from 1962 until 1970 when he appointed me to serve in California and other states in USA. All priests of Alexandria were very close to him as he visited Alexandria almost every month.

My contacts with him from 1970, until he departed 3/1971 was via phone or writing letters.

**6. What do you know of his early family life or pre-patriarch life?**

\* I know that he loved God since early childhood and his intercessor was St. Mina whom he lit up a candle daily before his icon at church.

\* He was very successful at his job and was respected for his achievements and his honesty. One time he found a wallet full of thousands of English pounds that belonged to an English General and refused the repeated offers of a reward for his honesty.

\* When he became a Monk, he lived in Solitude in an open Mill in the desert, where he was visited by many Christians and non-Christians for his prayers, his gift of healing the sick, and his wisdom.

\* During my visit to one of the patients at the University Hospital in Alexandria, I met a professor who happened to be non-Christian. He told me that he and his family had befriended Pope Kyrillos VI, and known him for many years. "We've loved him a lot since he was a monk in Old Cairo; at that time, I was a child, he said. He was reverend by my friends and I, and we ran to him often for we considered him to be like a father to us." The professor added; we enjoyed his charming company, and kind dispossession.

My parents and their friends being amazed at his character used to say of him, "**He is not of this world!**"

**7. What and who had reflected positively on the shaping of the man Pope Kyrillos was?**

I believe that the greatest influences on his life were the following:

- a. The Bible.
- b. Serving the Liturgy of Eucharist and the daily *Tasbeha*, except on Saturdays.
- c. Ascetic Books and manuscripts especially the ascetical homilies (*Memers*) of St. Isaac the Syrian and “The Paradise of the Monks”.
- d. His close contact with great spiritual monks, such as Fr. Abd-el-Messih El-Masoudy.

**8. Was there any opposition to his life of solitude while he was still Fr. Mina El Baramosy and his nomination for a Patriarch?**

We can know the attitude of some persons concerning Fr. Mina’s (future Pope Kyrillos VI) solitude life, from a friendly conversation with the attorney Nazmy Boutros, he said to me,

“Do you know how I became a friend of H.H. Pope Kyrillos VI? My response was “no.”

He said, “I did not know him well, but heard conflicting stories about him. Once he was nominated to become a Patriarch, I aggressively attacked him in one of the newspapers. He later became the Pope, and I visited him in Alexandria to pay my respect to the new Pope.

After congratulating him, I noticed his cheerful countenance, so I assumed that he was not aware of what I had written about him in the paper. During our conversation, he said to me, “They say this and that about me...,” referring to my negative comments about him. I was extremely embarrassed, and said to him, “Forgive me your Holiness, for I did not know you well!”

He smiled and said, “You did not attack me, but rather you attacked Father Mina the Hermit, who died to the world! I am now Pope Kyrillos your father!” I sensed his loving and forgiving heart, and from that moment on, we became close friends. At the end of my visit, he called his assistant and told him: “Anytime Mr. Nazmy is here to visit me, let him in. Even if I am asleep, knock on my door to wake me up.”

This is how great his heart was, and through love, he won others over. Even the ones who resisted him, later they became his loyal friends. Pope Kyrillos knew that the greatness of man is not due to his position, or popularity; but rather to his sincere interest in every person, desiring his personal friendship.

He is a Patriarch whose mission was to seek all as a father who forgives! The hierarchy in the church, or age and experience do not measure up to his

tremendous heart and amazing love.

**9. In what way do you think his pre-Patriarch life of solitude had impacted his reign as Pope?**

\*The influence of his pre-Patriarch life of solitude was very clear in his worship, concepts of pastoral care, his attitude and his wise behavior.

Here I'll give you some examples:

\*Of the memorable moments celebrating the anniversary of the enthronement of H. H. Pope Kyrillos, I recall when all the priests of Alexandria gathered to celebrate in St. Mark's Cathedral in Alexandria. Fr. Youssef Megali (an old and pious priest) would express on everyone's behalf our love to our father the Pope, asking for his blessing. These simple words never displayed or portrayed any of his pastoral actions including visits to the dioceses. Fr. Youssef would conclude his words, and the Pope would end the gathering with a prayer and a blessing. The event was very simple and did not include any catered meals, or elaborate signs of festivity, but we all would leave the simple celebration feeling as being one family united in love that bears warm and spiritual bond.

\* He is well-known for his amazing spirit of Humility. One time, a priest from Upper Egypt visited H.H. Pope Kyrillos. The priest asked for the blessing of the Pope, who was accompanied at the time by Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim. In his modestly said, "How can I bless you, while we're in the presence of Fr. Mikhail? Get the blessing from him?" Anytime, the Pope met with one of Fr. Mikhail Ibrahim's fellow priests, he would say, "I envy you for having Fr. Mikhail's amazing blessing whom you are serving with."

\*Another glimpse into the ascetic life of Pope Kyrillos VI, which had influenced him in his life of repentance. One time he performed the Vesper prayer in Alexandria, Egypt. Fr. Luke. Sidaros was sharing the prayers with him. At the time, the Pope was wearing a white shawl (*shamlah*) on his head, covering part of his face, in addition to his regular church attire.

After the Vesper prayer was over, the Pope asked Fr. Luke, "What do you think the shawl is for?"

Fr. Luke answered that he did not know.

The Pope told him, "If the Bishop or priest should weep during his prayers, that shawl would conceal that from those around him."

\* Fr. Luke told me that once he was praying the Liturgy of the Eucharist and right at the end of it and before he released the angel of the Sacrifice, he was taken by a surprise that Pope Kyrillos had entered the sanctuary through a side door. He did that to preserve the reverence and silence among the

people while he released the angel of the Eucharist with the prayers to heaven and allow the people to leave the church. The Pope did not enter the church the customary way for a Pope or a Bishop to come through the front door in a procession of priests and deacons singing a special hymn all the way to the sanctuary. He did not want to interrupt the priest, deacons and the people through praying the liturgy.

**10. Do you recall an incidence that reflected his asceticism, and surely continued into his method of episcopacy?**

\*We (his children the clergymen) were often touched by his inner asceticism during our meetings with him. He was always interested in the salvation of the souls and the progress in our spirituality. I never heard him inquiring about the financial situation of the churches.

\* As he started the construction of the Monastery of St. Mina, he never asked us once to contribute financially in the project. Only through love and prayers that the construction was completed and the churches and people joyfully and abundantly contributed. (His logo was: “ Don’t worry but Leave the matter in the hands of Who controls all matters.”)

**11. How was he first received as Patriarch, do you recall any of the first reactions – negative or positive? i.e. was anyone/the media against him.**

On his visit to a city in the Delta (Lower-Egypt), one of the leaders of the governmental investigators asked his Christian friend. Who is the Pope that the entire city came out to welcome him by the enormous love and respect? The Christian friend said to him, “He is truly a man of God; his prayers have special power.. etc. The governmental investigator underestimated what he heard of the Pope; he entered the church among the crowd. While the Pope was giving incense among the people, he moved the censor toward him causing the governmental investigator to incline backward. The Pope cheerfully said to him in much lowered voice: “Does the governmental investigator fear?” He felt peace at the decent approach of the Pope. After the prayer of the vesper was over, he said to his friend, “Who told him that I am a governmental investigator? I want to meet with him and ask him to bless me.”

**12. In your opinion, what would be a few defining characteristics of his personality?**

I feel he had a sound and strong personality, for nothing of this world could have crept into his mind or his heart. For him, religious life is not performing some aspects of worship and ascetic practices, but an actual and practical fellowship with God and love towards men.

**13. In your opinion, how would you describe his vision for the Church?**

He was a father to all; he constantly encouraged the priests to concentrate on the salvation of men. He fulfilled the apostolic advice, "Comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, and be patient with all." (Thessalonians 1 5: 14)

Father Bishoy Kamel and I agreed that rather than waiting for each other to visit the Pope together, either one of us could meet with him and apologize on the behalf of the other, since it had been over six months since we last visited him. When I visited him, I asked him to excuse us for not visiting sooner, but his response to me was, "What concern me is not your visits to me, but how pleasing to hear about your blessed successful services!"

I remember feeling his fatherly love and his encouragement for us, his children the clergymen at all times.

**14. In your opinion, what would signify his character as far as his ecclesiology?**

\* He believed in the unity of the Church of Christ, even death cannot separate the members of the Church, the Body of Christ.

\* He was a friend of the saints; he trusted the promise of God, "For I will defend this city, to save it for My sake and for My servant David's sake." (Isaiah 37: 35)

\* Mr. Hanna recalled the following incident to me as he experienced it, as close friend with Pope Kyrillos even before his ordination. He used to attend the daily liturgies with the Pope as a deacon in Saint Mena's Church in Old Cairo. He said, "We travelled to Saint Mina's Monastery, and I attended the Vesper's service (as the deacon), along with his holiness the Pope, and a monk (who was reciting with the congregation the usher responses). During the Doxologies, the Pope stood quiet in the sanctuary, but suddenly a wide smile appeared on his face. A sight that shocked me, for knowing him for so many years, I knew firsthand how strict he was on himself and others inside the sanctuary.

I proceeded to ask him after the service the reason for his laughter inside the sanctuary, and he attempted to avoid my question. Upon my persistence, he promised to tell me on the condition of concealing this incident until his passing. He said, "When I entered the sanctuary, I was deeply troubled by an issue related to the Copts. Suddenly, St. Mina appeared to me and asked why I was distressed. When I explained the reason, he responded: "Do you think you are alone? We are all here supporting you." "Then, he lightly pushed me, and so I laughed."

**15. In your opinion, what would define his character in his method of reforming the Church?**

- a. As a true man of prayer, his life has its effect on the Coptic Orthodox Church till today. Many of the clergymen and laity look to prayer as their source of joy, happiness, and salvation.
- b. Practically he never interfere in politics; he believed that the church is an icon of heaven, never enter in competition with the world.
- c. He was very firm in preserving the Orthodox dogma, at the same time his heart was full of love to towards non-Christians, and non-Orthodox.
- d. In admitting any person from an apostolic churches, he did not ask repeating his baptism or confirmation.
- e. The first Coptic Pope who ordained bishop for Christian education, Coptic higher studies, ecumenical affairs, and public services.
- f. He was caring for the immigration movement, and the salvation of the immigrants.

**16. Much has been said of his disciples, Bishop Shenouda (his successor Pope), Bishop Samuel, Bishop Gregorious, and Fr. Matta El Meskeen; could you please give me your thoughts on these relationships.**

\* Unfortunately, several individuals had misinformed the Pope about those disciples. Nevertheless, he had a simple loving heart.

\* Fr. Mina Iskander (priest in Alexandria) and I visited H.H. Pope Kyrillos in the Monastery of Saint Mina, and he professed his pain and uneasiness about what has been related to him about Bishop Shenouda and Father Matthew. Father Mina asked the Pope, “Your holiness, who ordained these fathers? We have never heard either one of them attack your holiness.” The Pope sadly said, “Why would anyone relate wrong stories that may cause conflict and troubles with me.” Then he smiled and was overjoyed.

I left this gathering delighted, and comforted by my father’s simple heart, yet sad and agonized over the ones who cheer for troubles.

**17. What had happened during his papacy that you consider a strong point in the history of the Orthodox Church?**

I could mention few’

\* The conversion of the heart of President Gamal Abd-el-Nasser. Today the Copts consider Gamal Abd-el-Nasser as one who was very close to the Pope.

According to the Copts, the period of Nasser’s reign can be divided into

two main periods. In the first period, he and his government had a very serious and hidden plan against the Church not only in Egypt but also in all of Africa. In brief, I will mention little examples about our sufferings at that time:

President Gamal Abdel Nasser appeared very decent in his dealings with the clergy, at the same time, he gave green light to the media to attack our faith and the Bible and the personality of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time the governmental bureau of investigation, prevented Christian priests or people even to publish books or articles in Christian magazines to defend their faith.

\* Those who wanted to convert to Christianity often suffered torturing and sometimes death.

\* The national Newspaper of “El-Ahram” shows that the majority of those whose possessions were confiscated by the government were Christians.

\* When the Pope tried to meet the President, the latter did not meet him. The Pope wrote a very decent and humble comment, revealing the love and submission of the Copts.

\* Through Pope Kyrillos’ prayers, the heart of the President was converted and he asked the Pope to visit him and his family. Later; he used to walk with him holding the Pope’s hand, and calling him “My father.” His relationship with the Church became excellent until he died.

\* When Abdel-Nasser died, many of the Copts believed that God choose Pope Kyrillos who has the spiritual power to gain the President. Within six months, the Pope also departed.

\* Also during his papacy the apparition of the Holy Mother of God St. Mary in Zaitoon, Cairo, Egypt for the longest period ever recorded in history. Christian, non-Christian, acknowledged it the media and the government.

**18. Much have been said of his relationship with the former President Gamal Abdel Nasser, what are your thoughts? Are the commonly repeated accounts true – that he healed his son and daughter?**

Regardless what is said concerning the healing of the son and the daughter of Gamal Abdel Nasser; we were in touch of the difference of the President dealing in the first period of his reign and the second, especially in Alexandria, for the students of the University of Alexandria suffered too much in the first period. There were many factors for this phenomenon:

a. Pope Kyrillos did not interfere in politics; he believed that the message of the Church is trusting in God and do her best as an ambassador of Christ. Some of the clergy of Alexandria, although they loved him also criticized his method. As he used to come to Alexandria and the monastery of St. Mina,

they would question why he did not put pressure on the President to meet with him and speak openly concerning the situation of the Copts. His love, modesty, and his unceasing prayers had much greater effect on the President.

b. Once he came to Alexandria and after he entered the sanctuary of the Cathedral of St. Mark and prayed, immediately he went to the place where the relics of St. Mark and asked him to pray for the Church, and in boldness said that he would not come again if St. Mark would not intercede before the Lord. He went to the monastery and in no time, somebody came from Cairo and said to him that the President wanted to meet him right away.

c. In Cairo, a well-known priest (Fr. Salib Sorial) whom the Pope loved came to meet with him and he was angry. He said to him, do you think God chose you to sit on this throne, while the Church is suffering; Why do not you contact the president and discuss with him the situation of the Copts, for lot of them could not find jobs?

The Pope tried to calm him down and said to him that we have to pray.

The priest said, “you always say: pray. You have to do something.” Then he left him.

After about a month, the president issued a decree that all those who finished their College study will be appointed in governmental affairs. Many of the Copts were appointed.

The priest came to the Pope and apologized. The Pope met him cheerfully and said to him, “I told you that we have to pray. This is the power of the prayer.”

**19. What is your opinion of the many thousands of miracles attributed to him during and after his lifetime?**

Truly, many miracles are still occurring by his prayers, but what is more important in these miracles are the following:

a. He never mentioned those miracles, but he was concerned more of those who were suffering. He is truly a man of love.

b. He was straightforward in his advices to his spiritual children, wanted everyone to behave as faithful believers.

c. He prayed lovingly for the Christians and non-Christians, even after his departure to Paradise.

d. He was not much of a traveler, but now he prays on behalf of many peoples from many countries, and continents.

**20. Did you personally experience any of these miracles?**

One of these miracles happened when the priests and the board of deacons met him for the return of Fr, Bishoy Kamel from California, USA.

Fr. Luke was very eager for the return of Fr. Bishoy. We travelled from Alexandria to Cairo to meet with Pope Kyrillos; on our way we passed by the

house of Fr. Luke's parents, and there he ate quickly while we were standing. Upon our arrival to the Patriarchate, Fr. Luke and some of the deacons were preparing to insist on the return of Fr. Bishoy Kamel. The Pope cheerfully met us, and asked Fr. Luke "What about the meal which you ate at your father's house? Moreover, he mentioned the meal in details as if he was there with us for those moments. All of us were astounded at his heavenly vision. All then spoke quietly about what we came for.

**21. What role did he play in reviving the Church?**

a. He had a keen desire for the unity of the priests;

A day before one of the anniversaries of the enthronement of Pope kyrillos the Sixth, one of the priests, who was recently ordained, travelled from Alexandria to Cairo to congratulate the Pope. Upon arrival, he paid his respects to the Pope, displaying his courtesy before any of his fellow priests. The Pope in his wisdom, who would not allow one of his children to be favoured over his brethren, greeted him and had the following conversation:

- Did you travel from Alexandria to congratulate me?

- Yes your holiness.

-Why didn't you wait to come along with your brothers?

- I plan to come back with them again.

- Rather than coming alone, next time you ought to come accompanied by them.

\*This is how the father the patriarch taught his son the priest a lesson in loving his brothers as himself, and not to favour himself over them. As such, He was never concerned about his own personal status, as much as his concerns for the salvation of everyone that he meets.

b. Encouraging the leaders of the Sunday school servants.

c. He was very simple, traditional and broad minded.

d. As I said before, for the first time a bishop was ordained for the Church education, another for the Coptic and Higher Studies, and third for Ecumenical affairs etc.

**22. What do you think his main weaknesses were?**

It is too hard to speak about weakness in the life of Pope Kyrillos VI, for as a man of God who was full of love, sincerity, purity, kindness, and humbleness and hope that was very strong and always cheerful. However, as a human being, surely he had some weaknesses but he knew how to overcome them with prayers and supplications.

**23. Who did he confide in, and who were his closest associates?**

I believe Fr. Makary El Souriany (Bishop Samuel), his disciple and those who shared with him in the liturgies of the Eucharist and daily *Tasbeha*.

**24. What was his relationship with another recently canonized saint, Habib Girgius?**

In brief, the archdeacon Habib Girgius established the services of the Sunday School in the Coptic Orthodox Church all over the country, and Pope Kyrillos harvested the fruits of what Habib planted, and chose many of the leaders in Service to be admitted to monasteries, and to be ordained deacons, priests and bishops.

**25. Why do you think Pope Kyrillos VI became a saint?**

He was not looking for authority, honour or fame, but he concentrated on his sanctity by the work of the Holy Trinity, his unwavering love for a relationship with God and his sincere desire and effort for the salvation of all humankind.

**26. Why do you think he has become one of the most popular figures in the Orthodox Church?**

He became one of the most popular figures in the history of the Orthodox Church, for having an answer to all questions and a resolution to all problems through one word "Pray." His faithful prayers have been availing millions across the globe.

**27. What is your lasting impression of him?**

He was an ambassador from heaven who lived among us to teach us how to have faith in the power of prayer, and how simple it is to have a relationship with God, the Saints and the heavenly hosts.

**7. Is there any misconception of him that you would like to correct?**

Pope Kyrillos is referred to as a simple man yet he was strong in his convictions, steadfast in the theological faith and unwavering in his apostolic church traditions.

He was kind and gentle yet never stopped protecting the rights of his church and all that belonged to her.