

## **COPTIC CATHOLIC CHURCH**

A distinct Eastern church in communion with Rome. Its patriarchate is in Alexandria.

Pope Leo XII of Rome (1823-1829) was falsely led to believe that the viceroy of Egypt, MUHAMMAD 'ALI, wished the establishment of the Coptic Catholic patriarchate for all Copts and the appointment of the vicar apostolic Maximos Guaid (Zuwayd) as the first patriarch. On 1 August 1824, Leo XII personally consecrated as [bishop Abraham](#) Khashur, a very young Coptic alumnus of the Propaganda College in Rome. The bishop was supposed to return to Egypt and consecrate Maximus as patriarch of Alexandria.

Having acknowledged that the non-Catholic patriarchate existed actually but not de jure and having proclaimed it suppressed, in the bull *Petrus Apostolorum Princeps* of 15 August 1824, Leo XII founded the Catholic Coptic patriarchate of Alexandria. Leo XII soon recognized that he had been deceived, and the establishment of the patriarchate remained on paper only. The Catholic Copts continued to be ruled by vicars apostolic.

In September 1895, a delegation of Catholic Copts, headed by the vicar apostolic Cyril Maqar, arrived at Rome and petitioned Pope Leo XIII to form a Catholic Coptic patriarchate. Leo XIII (1878-1903), in the apostolic letter *Christi Domini* (27 November 1895), proclaimed: "We reestablish the Patriarchate of Alexandria and erect it for the Copts." In the same letter, Cyril Maqar was appointed apostolic administrator of the patriarchate. Furthermore, Pope Leo XIII stated that this Catholic patriarchate was "the only one which legitimately rules the Church founded by [Saint] Mark, the only heir of all the memories faithfully handed down from the pristine and glorious times of the Patriarchate of Alexandria."

Thus, from the juridical Roman point of view, the Coptic patriarchate of

Alexandria, not being in communion with Rome, was a legal fiction and canonically did not exist; thus, all the hierarchs of the Coptic church had no spiritual power or jurisdiction. This regrettable attitude overlooked the fact that Catholic Copts were a tiny minority in Egypt, and the non-Catholic Copts had a tradition reaching back to Saint Mark. Consequently, when a Coptic bishop or [priest](#) converted to Catholicism, it was presumed that he had no jurisdiction over his flock and that the Roman see had to grant him all the faculties (e.g., as Pope Benedict XIV had granted faculties to Bishop Athanasius on 4 August 1741).

In 1898, under the presidency of the apostolic administrator Cyril Maqar, the synod of Alexandria of the uniate Copts was held. It was a Latinizing event. The synod introduced Latin feasts: Corpus Christi, All Saints, the Immaculate Conception, and Saint Joseph. At the express wish of Pope Leo XIII, during the closing ceremonies of the synod Cyril Maqar dedicated the Coptic Catholic Church to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The decrees of the synod were approved by the Roman Curia. Leo XIII also approved the introduction of Latin-rite offices and the rosary into the Coptic Catholic Church. The synod also introduced the Latin discipline of clerical celibacy. The patriarch, however, could grant a dispensation to married priests converting to Catholicism.

The same synod introduced the FILIOQUE into the creed and theological thought, and accused the [orthodox Copts](#) of “having followed external doctrines.” Furthermore, the synod tried to prove that the Greek fathers had come close to the *filioque* and presented witnesses of the Egyptian tradition allegedly tending toward the *filioque*. This synod was a classic example of uniatism; it was a very rapid Latinization of the Eastern canonical Christian discipline, liturgy, theological thought, and spirituality.

On 19 June 1899, the apostolic administrator of the patriarchate, Cyril Maqar, was appointed patriarch of Alexandria by Leo XIII; he was to be known as CYRIL II, recognizing Cyril the Great (412-444) as CYRIL I.

This, of course, was not accepted by the Coptic community, whose patriarch bearing the name Cyril II lived in the eleventh century. Soon great difficulties emerged, especially with respect to the financial dependence of the patriarchate on Rome, and in 1908 the patriarch was suspended.

A great number of uniate Copts returned to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Cyril II published a pamphlet against the papal primacy but again subjected himself to Rome in 1912 and died in 1922 in Beirut as a titular archbishop at peace with the Roman Curia. Cyril II had been a great scholar; note his *L'Église copte, sa foi d'aujourd'hui comparée avec la foi de ses pères* (Cairo, 1893); *Histoire de l'église d'Alexandrie depuis St. Marc jusqu'à nos jours* (Cairo, 1894); *La Constitution divine de l'église* (Bern, 1922).

The Catholic patriarchal see remained unoccupied until 30 December 1927, when Bishop Markos Khuzam was named as administrator. Only after a probationary period of twenty years, on 9 August 1947, was he permitted to occupy the Catholic patriarchal see as Mark II (Mark I being the Evangelist). On 2 February 1958, Mark II died, and on 10 May 1958, Stephanos I Sidarus was appointed patriarch. In 1965 he was created the first Coptic cardinal.

The erection of the Catholic patriarchate contributed greatly to the growth of the Coptic Catholic Church: in 1895, it had 5,000 communicants; in 1907, 14,576; in 1931, 35,365; in 1950, 57,556; in 1959, 80,580; and in 1975, 107,500. Besides the patriarchal eparchy of Alexandria (with residence in Cairo) there are the eparchies of Asyut, Minya, and Luxor.

The Catholic patriarchate is ruled by the patriarch with his synod, which includes all the bishops. In the patriarchate there are pre-seminaries in [Tahta](#) and Alexandria, and minor and major seminaries in Cairo. The official Arabic [bulletin](#) of the Catholic patriarchate is *Al-Salah*; the second

periodical is *Sadiq al-Kahin*.

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