

CYRIL VI (1902-1971)

A Patriarch and saint. He was the 116th patriarch of the Coptic Church (1959-1971). He was born 'Azir Yousseef 'Ata in 1902 at the village of Tukh al Nasara in Lower Egypt. He played a large role in the renaissance of the Coptic Church. He joined the **Monastery of al-Baramous** in **Wadi al-Natrun** at the age of 25. In 1931, he was ordained a **priest** and was known as Father Mina, the solitary from al-Baramous monastery. Between 1936 and 1942 he lived as a hermit in a deserted windmill in Old Cairo.

People sought his blessings and miraculous powers. It is said that many miracles happened during that period. He attracted graduate students who wished to be monks and advised them to join the **Monastery of the Syrians** in Wadi al-Natrun. Among the students, who were influenced by him were **Matta al-Miskin**, Bishop **Samuel**, and Pope **Shenouda III**, the present patriarch of the Coptic Church.

Cyril was elected patriarch on 19 April 1959. In 1960, Cyril VI issued a decree that all the priests must be graduates of the **Clerical College**. He was able to secure permission from President Gamal Abdel-Nasser to build 25 churches each year, and thus he avoided the long complicated process of obtaining such permissions. On 26 July 1968, he and Ethiopian [Emperor Haile Selassie I](#) inaugurated a new cathedral on the occasion of the transfer of the relics of St. **Mark** the Evangelist from [Venice](#) to Cairo and the 1900th anniversary of his martyrdom. Moreover, Cyril VI solved the problem of the administration of the *Waqfs* (property or land endowed to the Church) by establishing an independent board to control the *Waqfs*.

During his pontificate the Coptic Church became a member of the World Council of Churches and the **Middle East Council of Churches**. One of his innovations was the consecration of three extradiocesan **bishops** for social affairs, higher education, and religious education. Although Coptic

canon law only allows the **canonization** of a saint at least 50 years after her or his death, Cyril VI was considered a saint not long after his death. He is buried in a huge modern church in the new Monastery of St. **Menas** at Mareotis, to which many people flock, seeking his intercession.

[**GAWDAT GABRA**](#)

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