

A Tribute for a Great Coptic Leader & Egyptian Reformer Pope Cyril IV (1854-1861)

Contributed by Ed Rizkalla
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This February 1, 2008 coincides with the 23rd of the Coptic month of Tobi, 1724 A.M. On this day, the Coptic Orthodox Synaxarion commemorates the departure of Pope Cyril IV, the 110th Pope of the See of Saint Mark. Pope Cyril IV is well known as the Reformer or Abu El-eslah in Arabic for his efforts in the promotion of education for all Egyptians.

His life provides another shining example for some of the Coptic defining cultural attributes, specifically 1) The Copts respect for education, knowledge, and love of wisdom; and 2) The Copts respect for women, their role in the family and society at large, and the equality of men and women.

The Coptic culture is a forward-looking culture that has its genesis in the ancient Egyptian history and mythology. Christian teaching modified, enhanced and invigorated the Coptic culture. The Coptic culture continued to influence and be influenced by other cultures over the centuries, however it has primarily been shaped by its ancient Egyptian and Christian heritages.

Cyril IV was born in 1816 for a Coptic family from El-swame3 El-sharqia, a village at the province of Girga, in southern Egypt. His parents, in the best cultural traditions of the Copts gave him a good education and instilled in him the love of knowledge and wisdom. He elected to become a monk at the monastery of Saint Anthony, and was called Father Dawood El-antony. He was known for his love of knowledge, and developed a reputation for a high intellect, tact, interpersonal and leadership skills. He was appointed as a Metropolitan General and named Anba Cyril on April 17, 1852. He was consecrated as a Patriarch on July 17, 1854.

Abbas Pasha (1848-1854), a regressive and cruel ruler, known for religious fanaticism and hatred for the Copts, was the Viceroy of Egypt. One of the famous stories about Abbas's cruelty is that a slave girl served him a bowl of soup, which turned out to be hot for his taste. Abbas's sadistic cruelty was manifested, as he ordered sewing the lips of the slave girl shut to let her die from thirst. In matters of policy and governance Abbas believed it is easier to rule an uneducated population. He ordered the closure of the schools and educational institutes in Egypt. He ordered the dismissal of the Copts from the government employment, and initiated plans to deport all the Copts from Egypt to Sudan. His plans for the Copts were stymied by his death in July 1854. Sa'squ;id Pasha (1854-1861) succeeded him as Viceroy. Though Sa'squ;id was milder in character, he also believed in the premise that it is easier to rule an uneducated people.

Cyril IV spent quite a bit of effort on promoting education and knowledge. He was the first Patriarch to import and establish a modern printing press to promote publishing of books. He also established Coptic schools for both boys and

girls. Admission to Coptic schools was open for both Copts and Muslims. The school for girls was in fact, the first public institution for education of women in Egypt since the Arabs conquest in the 7th century. Pope Cyril IV paid a lot of attention for the promotion of education and knowledge; and the equality of men and women.

Among the many Copts and Muslims who were educated at Coptic schools, were many of Egypt's future leaders (1), e.g. among the Muslims were Abed Elkhaleq Tharwat Pasha, Houssein Rushdy Pasha, Abed Elhamid Moustafa Pasha, Mahmoud abed Elrazaq Pahsa, and Ismaiel Houssein Pasha; and among the Copts were Boutors Ghali Pasha, Hana Nasseralla Pasha and Mina Ibrahim Bey.

Pope Cyril IV was a great reformer, whose efforts helped not only the Copts but also the Muslim population of Egypt. His efforts however do not seem to have been well received by Sa'id Pasha. He was assassinated by poison, in 861. Pope Demetrius II, the 111th Patriarch succeeded him in 1862. It is said that as Pope Demetrius II visited Sa'id Pasha, he told him "not to follow in his predecessor's footsteps, and offered to help if help is needed".

The efforts of Pope Cyril IV reflected a vibrant Coptic forward-looking culture that continues to help the success, prosperity, and growth of the Copts in our day and age.

The peace of Christ the Lord be with you. Irene Passe.

Ed Rizkalla

- "El-mousharaqa el-watania lelaqbat fi el-aser el-hadieth" or "The Patriotic Participation of the Copts in the Modern Era", Volume 1, by Amir Nasser, published by the Youth Episcopate, the Coptic Center for Social Studies, Cairo, Egypt, 1998.

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