

St. Cyril (From Coptic Encyclopaedia)

CYRIL I, SAINT, or Cyril of Alexandria, twenty fourth patriarch of the See of Saint Mark (412-444), who is reckoned one of the greatest prelates of Christian antiquity (feast day: 3 Abib). Cyril spent his early years at Dayr Anba Maqar in the Nitrian Valley, which had become noted as a center of theological studies. After five years of intensive study in that monastery, Cyril was summoned to Alexandria by his uncle, the reigning patriarch THEOPHILUS, and was ordained a presbyter. He distinguished himself as an eloquent preacher, and his name became widely known in the capital. At the death of his uncle, he automatically became a candidate for succession to the throne of Saint Mark against another local rival, the archdeacon Timotheus, who had the support of the government. Nevertheless, only three days after Theophilus' death, Cyril was enthroned on the archiepiscopal seat of Saint Mark, despite the strong opposition of the prefect, Orestes, who was regarded as a strong competitor of Cyril in influence in Alexandria. The rivalry between the two potentates in the capital, the one heading the church and the other the local prefecture, flared up repeatedly in the following years. From the early years of his accession, Cyril proved himself to be a man of strong personality, unusual ability, and profound theological scholarship, a match for the tempestuous events that marked his thirty-two-year reign.

Immediately on his accession, he declared spiritual warfare on several fronts, both at Rome and in other areas beyond his frontiers. At home, he had under his command an army of dedicated

and self-effacing followers known as *Parabolani*, that is, "those who disregarded their own lives" in the service of the church. The *Parabolani* were monks from adjacent monasteries who made themselves available for any drastic action.

One of Cyril's first actions was to confirm the rejection of Novatianism by DIONYSIUS I, the fourteenth patriarch. The organization of Novatianists was a residue of a movement that originated in Rome after the Decian persecution of 249-250. Its founder, Novatian, initially espoused a lenient system of approach toward readmission to church communion of persons who had apostatized in the course of a Christian persecution. Later, during a papal election in which he was a losing candidate and which he ended by becoming a rival bishop of Rome, Novatian reverted to a rigorist policy regarding the apostates. Novatian was later martyred by Valerian. His legacy, however, survived him. His followers, though perfectly orthodox in their profession, persisted in keeping his rigorist policy even though they unctoned under a sentence of excommunication until the fifth century, when Cyril tried to destroy their Alexandrian branch. While closing their headquarters and laying his hand on their secret treasure, Cyril dispossessed their bishop Theopemptus, and left him an impecunio-;;'sand powerless nonentity.

In the meantime, Cyril continued to inspire the *yParabolani* with mortal hatred for Neoplatonist philosophy, which was taught in the Alexandrian Museon. At that time, the leader of the Neoplatonist

school was Hypatia, at whose feet both pagan and Christian pupils studied philosophy. She was also highly esteemed by the prefect Orestes. Though avowedly a Christian baptized by a bishop of Constantinople, Orestes was accused by the *Parabolani* of being a pagan and a firm supporter of the pagan Hypatia, after whose blood they thirsted. Thus, in 415 they encountered Hypatia in her chariot, attacked her, dragged her to the Caesarian church where they murdered her, and took her mutilated corpse to a place called Cinaron where they burnt it. This tragedy aroused public feeling, and some followers of Orestes went as far as to accuse Cyril of indirectly inspiring the crime. Though it would be a mistake to involve Cyril in this act, the hostility of the patriarch to Neoplatonism must have been the starting point of all the trouble that precipitated this ungodly crime inside a godly institution during the holy season of Lent.

On another front, Cyril's hostility to the Jewish community in Alexandria was reciprocated by the Jews, who began to plot against the archbishop and the church. At one point, rumors circulated that the church of Alexander had been set on fire by Jews.

When the Christians hastened to save their sanctuary, the Jewish plotters fell upon them and slew some of their number. Cyril did not let the occurrence pass without response. He and his monastic bodyguard, which was beefed up by monks from Wadi: al-Nap'un, descended one morning on the synagogues in the city, took possession of them, and the Jews were expelled from the capital. Orestes was powerless in the face of such lawlessness sponsored by Cyril's armed monks and the *Parabolani*. He could only complain to Emperor Theodosius II (408-450), who was himself just a youngster of fourteen, and Cyril had

no difficulty in facing the imperial court with a case about the Jewish sacrilege. In the end, the matter was laid to rest, but the hostility toward the prefect remained. One day Orestes' chariot was assailed by the monks in the streets of Alexandria, and a monk by the name of Ammonius hurled a stone at Orestes, seriously wounding him. Consequently, the prefect's men seized Ammonius and tortured him to death. Cyril considered this a crime and gave the dead monk a martyr's funeral. However, this affair was allowed to sink into oblivion as a minor incident. The fact remains that Cyril was an implacable fighter, not merely a saintly head of a religious institution, and his warfare was not confined to Egypt. In the field of foreign policies, Cyril inherited his uncle's hostility to Saint JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, though in the end Cyril was persuaded to accept John Chrysostom's name in the Alexandrian diptych. The greatest conflict of Cyril's career was directed toward the patriarch of the Byzantine capital, NESTORIUS. The subject of the conflict was Christology. The discord between the two prelates was Nestorius' rejection of the term THEOTOKOS (Mother of God) in regard to the Virgin MARY, whom he designated only as Mother of Jesus in the flesh. This led to the inference of the dual nature of Jesus, which precipitated another round of metaphysical warfare between the two patriarchs. Cyril wrote a corrective letter to Nestorius without avail. Consequently, he addressed himself directly to Theodosius II, Empress EUDOXIA, and the emperor's sister, PULCHERIA, whose interest in religious matters was well known.

The imperial family was, on the whole, disenchanted with these quarrels within the church and began to contemplate the possibility of holding an ecumenical council to settle the disputes and restore

order and unity within the empire. In the meantime, Cyril contacted the bishop of Rome, Celestine I (422-432), regarding the irregularities committed by Nestorius. It happened at the time that Nestorius had received the Pelagian enemies (see PELAGIANISM) of Celestine with honor, and this naturally stirred up the wrath of the bishop of Rome against the patriarch of Constantinople. Celestine was more than willing to listen to Cyril's complaint against Nestorius, whom he condemned in a council at Rome, while Cyril was encouraged to hurl twelve anathemas from Alexandria against his peer at Constantinople. Nestorius at once answered by casting twelve counteranathemas at his adversary. Thus the stage was set for another phase in the war between the two prelates, and only an ecumenical council could settle their differences.

The imperial decision was made to hold that council at EPHESUS in the year 431, and the summons to that meeting was issued jointly by Theodosius II in the East and Valentinian III in the West.

This was the third ecumenical council, the other two being NICAEA in 325 and CONSTANTINOPLE in 381.

Nestorius arrived at Ephesus with sixteen of his bishops and a.n. armed bodyguard headed by the commander of the imperial guard. Cyril came by sea with fifty bishops, and he was surrounded-by an army of devotees, the *Parabolani*, and some monks.

These were said to have included the great SHENUTE in their humber, though this report is unconfirmed by the rsources and must be quoted with caution.

On Cyril's side was the bishop of Ephesus, Memnon, who mustered another body of forty suffragans from Asia and twelve from Pamphylia. Celestine was able to send two Roman bishops and a priest

who openly upheld Cyril's cause. With such a host of supporters, Cyril did not hesitate to open the session. Nestorius abstained from attendance because, he still awaited the episcopal contingent from Antioch under the leadership of his old friend John, bishop of Antioch. Later, John arrived together with forty-two Antiochene bishops, and immediately Nestorius held his own rival council. Cyril's gathering of approximately two hundred bishops unanimously condemned Nestorius and anathematized him, and the Nestorian rivals indepen'oently and unanimously anathematized both Cyril and Memnon, also deposing them. The two parties rushed their verdicts to the emperor, who unwittingly signed both deposition edicts, and all the leaders found themselves under arrest.

However, after much manoeuvring and diplomatic intrigue, the Cyrillian party succeeded in recovering its freedom, and Cyril returned to Alexandria, where his loyal congregation gave him a hero's welcome.

Nestorius remained incarcerated in his old CYRIL I, SAINT 673 cloister at Antioch. For the next two years, numerous dispatches were exchanged between Cyril and the authorities and leading churchmen.

The result was his total reconciliation with them, even with John of Antioch, thus leaving Nestorius a solitary victim to face a grim future. Nestorius was a sorry figure in 453. He was manhandled in his forced retirement and then was carried into exile first to Petra and afterward to the Egyptian oasis of the Western Desert, where he died at an unknown date after 439. According to the Coptic SYNAXARION, his death occurred at the city of AkhmIm in Upper Egypt in the year 440; however, this information is not corroborated by other sources.

In 439, Cyril was at the peak of his power in the universal church. He wrote to the

then reigning bishop of Rome, Sixtus III, that peace was restored, and he signed a declaration possibly prepared by Theodoret of Cyrrhus confessing the divine maternity of Mary. He never halted his theological warfare against all supporters of Nestorianism. While he condemned THEODORUS OF OPSUESTIA, the old mentor of Nestorius, he refrained from an open clash with him in order to avoid the revival of the Christological controversy. Cyril died on 27 June 444; the Coptic church commemorates him on 3 Abib.

Like Athanasius, Cyril left behind him a tremendous number of theological studies and works of exegesis, homiletics, and apologetics. A meticulous theologian, he seems to have devoted more attention to the essence of his arguments than to the elegance of his style. Nevertheless, it is worthy of note that his indiscriminate use of the terms *physis* (nature) and *hypostasis* (substance) resulted in the Chalcedonian confusion, which led to the establishment of the so-called Monophysite doctrine. Cyril's apology against JULIAN THE APOSTATE is a document of historical interest. His numerous epistles are documents of the highest importance for the ecclesiastical historian. His twenty-nine paschal homilies defined the date of Easter. His extended liturgy, practiced in full mainly in monasteries, presumably reflects older texts ascribed to Saint Mark's Anaphora. On the whole, Cyril's theology was regarded by subsequent generations as the key to orthodoxy, though some theologians tend to differ on its interpretation.

At his death, the Alexandrian church occupied a position of undisputed leadership in the whole of the Christian world. Cyril's massive writings have been the subject of several editions since the

sixteenth century. In 1546 at Basel, George of Trebizond published all available material of his works in four volumes. In 1573 and 1605, Gentianus Hervetus reproduced his works at Paris in two majestic volumes. From 1859 to 1864 John Aubert, canon of Laon and master of its college in Paris, published Cyril's works in ten volumes. Cyril's immense literary heritage has been analysed in works on patrology. A selected list of his works follows:

A. Commentaries on the Old Testament

1. *De adoratione et cultu in spiritu et veritate.*
2. *Glaphyra* (thirteen books, of which seven are devoted to Genesis; three to Exodus; and one to each of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).
3. *Commentary on Isaiah* (consisting of five *biblia* (books), of which some are divided into *logoi* (principles), others into *tomoi* (dogmatic pronouncements).
4. *Commentary on Minor Prophets.*

B. Commentaries on the New Testament

1. *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint John* (consisting of twelve books subdivided into numerous chapters).
2. *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke* (containing homilies on Luke; a Syriac version of the sixth or seventh century preserves at least 156 such homilies).
3. *Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Matthew* (covering twenty-eight chapters of which only fragments remain).

C. Dogmatic-polemical works against the Arians

1. *Thesaurus de sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate* (mainly reproducing Athanasius, *Contra Arianos*).
2. *De sancta et consubstantiali Trinitate* (seven dialogues with Hermias).

D. Dogmatic-polemical works against Nestorius

1. *Adversus Nestorii blasphemias* (history of Nestorian blasphemies; five tomes).
2. *De recta fide* (consisting of three memoranda refuting Nestorianism, one to Emperor Theodosius II, another to his younger sisters Arcadia and Marina, and the third to his elder sister 'Pulcheria and his wife Eudoxia).
3. *Twelve Anathemas against Nestorius* (consisting of three apologies, two refuting accusations of Apollinarianism and monophysitism, and a third in defense of the anathemas by quoting the Scriptures).
4. *Apologeticus ad imperatorum* (submitted to Theodosius II after Cyril's release and return to Alexandria).
5. *Scholia de incarnatione Unigeniti* (defining the *hypostasis* union as against mixture or external association) .
6. *Adversus nolentes confiteri sanctam Virginem esse Deiparam* (treatise against those who do not acknowledge that Mary is the Mother of God).
7. *Contra Diodorum et Theodorum* (treatise against Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, mentors of Nestorius).
8. *Quod unus sit Christus* (dialogue on unity of person in Christ, one of Cyril's last anti-Nestorian works).

E. The Apology Against Julian (dedicated to Theodosius II), consisting of thirty books refuting Julian the Apostate's work *Against the Galileans* written in 363, and the survival of paganism in Egypt).

F. Paschal Letters (twenty-nine Homiliae Paschales)

addressed to churches of Egypt, fixing date of Easter and dealing with Christological controversies, the refutation of paganism, and the establishment of Jewish infidelity).

G. Sermons (twenty-two *Homiliae diversae* to distinguish them from the *Homiliae Paschales* of which eight date from the summer of 431 during the Council of Ephesus. Of the remaining homilies, the most famous is the Marian Sermon delivered at Saint Mary's Church in Ephesus).

H. Letters (eighty-eight letters; PG 77, cols. 10390;

some surviving in Coptic, Syriac, and Armenian versions; these are important documents on church history and ecclesiastical doctrine and law).

I. Liturgical Work (Cyril's liturgy reflecting Saint Mark's has been confirmed by the discovery of several papyrus fragments at DAYR AL-BALA'YZAH in Asyii! relating to a third-century Coptic Euchologion and the Anaphora of Saint Mark probably used at the time of Athanasius and preserved by Cyril).

Cyril's fame spread during his lifetime and after his death. His contemporary, Pope Celestine I of Rome, described him on several occasions as *homo fidei catholicae defensor* (defender of the faith), *vir apostolicus* (apostolic man), and *probatissimus sacerdos* (upright priest). After his decease, he became renowned in the Eastern churches as the ultimate authority in all Christological subjects. He was called th~ "Seal of the Fathers" by the seventh century ecclesiastical authority Anastasius Sinaita.

In 1882, the Sacred Congregation of Rites dubbed him Doctor of the Church. To this day he is considered the "Pillar of the Faith" in the Coptic church.