

## PATRIARCH: FATHER AND HEAD

**T**he world's Catholic Bishops, assembled in council, fell into hushed silence as the bearded, black-robed hierarch, striking in his ebony-veiled stove-pipe hat in a sea of white miters and copes, approached the podium to speak. Suddenly the two observers representing the Russian Orthodox Church rose to their feet and removed their own headgear as Patriarch Maximos IV (Sayegh) addressed the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. Later, when interviewed by the press, Archpriest Vitaly Borovoi explained, "We listen to the words of a Patriarch with the same reverence as that due to the Holy Gospels – by standing with heads uncovered."

What is the title which engenders such awe? What role and function in the life of the Church do the bearers of such an august title play? Whence did it arise? Why is the role of Patriarch barely known among Roman Catholics? To answer these questions we must travel back in time to the infancy of the Church and in place back to its cradle.

It is likely that the apostles, following Christ's saying that He had come first to the lost sheep of Israel, exercised their ministry among the Jewish colonies spread throughout the Roman Empire. Then, as now, Jews tend to congregate in big cities. In fact, the early Church was so identified with urban centers that the word *paganus*, meaning country-dweller, became synonymous with *non-Christian*.

## THE PENTARCHY

**O**nce established in the principal cities, the Church began to spread outward over the countryside. The Daughter-Churches created by the great centers always looked to these centers for direction and support as to "Mother-Churches." A Mother Church was called the metropolis or mother city. In time, five of these metropolitan Sees enjoyed special prestige and honor because of their civil importance and because they were associated with the direct activity of the Apostles, especially St. Peter. These five sees were called the pentarchy or five-fold centers of rule. Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were the five Patriarchal Sees of the early Church.

If the Metropolitan Sees were named Mother Churches, the patriarchal title means "father-ruler." St. Peter's ministry had begun in Jerusalem and continued in Antioch. The preaching of St. Peter spread to Alexandria through the writing of his disciple, St. Mark and, by tradition, to Constantinople through the apostolate of Peter's brother, St. Andrew. The patriarchs of two of the primatial churches, Rome and Alexandria, were called by the special name POPE or *Papa*. To this day the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria is called "Pope." This explains why Eastern Christians always speak of the Pope "of Rome", in order to distinguish him from his brother patriarch, the Pope of Alexandria.

## THE EASTERN PATRIARCHATES TODAY

**I**n time the unity of the Churches was broken. In the early fifth century the Assyrian Church split from the

others in the Nestorian controversy. Later in the same century the Greek and Latin Churches on one hand supported the Council of Chalcedon while the Coptic and Syrian Churches did not. Then in the eleventh century The Greek and Latin Churches found themselves divided. Still later various missionary efforts resulted in the restoration of communion between groups of Eastern Christians and the Roman See.

In each of these cases the variously divided or realigned Churches maintained for themselves the Patriarchal structure so historic in Eastern Christianity. As a result there are five heads of communities employing the title Patriarch of Antioch: the Greek Catholic, the Greek Orthodox, the Maronite, the Syrian Catholic, and the Syrian Orthodox. There are three Patriarchs of Alexandria: the Coptic Catholic, the Coptic Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox. In addition the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch is also the Patriarch of Alexandria and Jerusalem for the Greek Catholics. Similar situations occur among the Assyrian, Chaldean and Armenian communities.

Vatican II recognizes the Patriarch as Father and Head of the Church over which he presides together with his synod of bishops. As supreme arbitrator in liturgical and discipline matters, the Patriarch serves as a unifying force for his flock which is scattered over the world.

For most of the last millenium, the Patriarchate of the West has been separated from its sister Churches in the East. As a result, Western Catholics began to blur the distinction between the two roles of the Pope of Rome: as Patriarch of the West and as first hierarch of all the Churches.

The Pope of Rome is the Patriarch of the West. Whenever he acts to reform the Western Church's liturgy or its discipline of fasting and abstinence or marriage laws, he is acting in virtue of his Patriarchal authority over the Western or Roman Church. These functions are discharged for their respective Churches by the Eastern Catholic Patriarchs with their synods.

Since Vatican II had decreed the full revitalization of the Patriarchal office in the Eastern Catholic Churches according to the experience of the Undivided Church of the first millennium, we can expect these venerable Churches of the pentarchy to continue to flourish to the extent that “they take pains to return to their ancestral traditions.”

## THE MELKITE PATRIARCHS

1724-1759	Cyril VI (Tanas)
1759-1760	Athanasius IV (Jawhar) - first term
1760-1761	Maximos II (Hakim)
1761-1788	Theodosius V (Dahan)
1788-1794	Athanasius IV (Jawhar) - second term
1794-1796	Cyril VII (Siage)
1796-1812	Agapios II (Matar)
1812	Ignatius IV (Sarrouf)
1813-1814	Athanasius V (Matar)
1814-1815	Macarios IV (Tawil)
1816-1833	Ignatius V (Kattan)
1833-1855	Maximos III (Mazloom)
1856-1864	Clement (Bahous)
1864-1897	Gregory II (Youssef-Sayour)
1898-1902	Peter IV (Geraigiry)
1902-1916	Cyril VIII (Jeha)
1919-1925	Dimitrios I (Cadi)
1925-1947	Cyril IX (Moghabghab)
1947-1967	Maximos IV (Sayegh)
1967-2000	Maximos V (Hakim)
2000-2017	Gregorios III (Laham)
2017-present	Youssef I (Absi)

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