

THE ORGANIZATION AND HISTORY OF THE PATRIARCHAL LAICAL COUNCILS IN THE COPTIC ORTHODOX CHURCH OF EGYPT

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History

Background

Throughout the last quarter of the eighteenth century, under the oppression of the Ottoman Pachas and the feudal government of the last of the Mamelukes, the Coptic population in Egypt reached its lowest ebb.

It was only after Mohammad Ali rose to power in 1805 that the miserable conditions of the Copts began to ease. The Church was relatively in peace, many of the Coptic personalities were appointed by the new tolerant Sovereign in high posts, and though the Copts remained a small minority, they developed much in commerce and professions.

Later on, during the seven-year pontificate of Abba Kirillus (Cyril) IV (1854—1861) known as „The Father of Reformation“, lasting reforms for the enlightenment of the Clergy and the education of the Laity, were achieved. Two modern boys' schools and two girls' schools were established in Cairo for the study of languages including Arabic, French and English as well as arithmetic, geography and science. In addition, an Arabic printing house, second only to the Government Press, was opened by the end of the Patriarchate of this great Reformer.

In the wake of the said reforms, the Laity movement to participate in the administration of Church affairs, emerged quietly. Its history, however, during a hundred years since it initiated in 1874, was quite eventful, involving hard times of strife between the Clergy and the Laity of the Coptic Church.

Factors Contributory to Laity Movement

Various factors helped in the emergence of the Laity movement:

(A) So far as the State was concerned, the atmosphere was favourable. „Al-Khatt Al-Hamayoni“ (The Jubilant Decree) had already been issued by the Ottoman Sultan in February, 1856, and was duly recorded by reference in Article 9 of the Paris Convention signed in March, 1856.

Contrary to a rather wide-spread but mistaken opinion about this Decree, I venture to think that in the circumstances then prevailing and subject to some exceptions; it was a charter of freedom and security for the Christian minorities scattered all over the vast Ottoman Empire.

The „Khatt-Al-Hamayoni“ confirmed what the Sultan described as „the spiritual privileges and tolerance given in previous times by our Great Ancestors or granted in recent years to the Christian Community“.

Moreover, it called for further reformation of these privileges considering that "it has timely become necessary in view of the current civilization and cultures acquired".

Such reform should be discussed, the Decree continued, "in special councils to be formed in the Patriarchates". Amongst matters for this discussion, the Decree stated specifically that "the administration of community interests of Christians and other non-Moslem subjects be referred to Councils formed of elected monks (meaning Clergy) and the laymen of each community . . ."

The Decree also provided that "the private suits such as those relating to inheritance between Christians or non-Moslem subjects, if the parties concerned so desire, be referred for examination by the Patriarch or Prelates and the Councils".

We can safely say, therefore, that the Patriarchal Laical Councils of the Christian communities (not only the Copts) in Egypt, can be traced back to the said "Khatt-Al-Hamayoni" of 1856. Its provisions, as quoted above, had not only permitted but even urged the establishment of such Councils.

(B) As regards the Coptic Church, it had cherished enormously since that date. The Patriarchate of Abba Kirillus IV marked the "Renaissance Age", and his successor Abba Dimitrios II (1862—1870) carried on with the Reformation.

The Coptic schools numbered 14 in Cairo and Alexandria alone. The Patriarchal Cathedrals of Saint Mark, in Cairo & Alexandria were rebuilt, and the old Monasteries of the Western Desert were renovated.

A very important development was that it was mainly during these three decades or so that the Patriarchate and Coptic Monasteries acquired by way of donations and religious endowments, vast land estates, which were held in trust under the legal device of "Wakf" as laid down in the Moslem Law.

On the occasion of the Sultan's visit to Egypt and a cordial welcome by Abba Dimitrios II, the Sultan bestowed upon him 1000 feddans (acres) of land, and the Khedive Ismail another 500 feddans of the State property.

(C) The Coptic laity also rose in culture and influence, in step with the advancement and enrichment of their Church.

Highly educated Copts graduated from the famous schools of Kirillus IV, and were the first to establish Coptic Associations to advance education and activate works of charity.

They included Butrus Ghali (Pacha) who was eventually appointed Prime Minister in 1903, being the first true Egyptian in this highest Government post, and many notable Copts of similar caliber and weight whether within the Church or the State.

First Stage (1870—1874)

In these circumstances, after the death of Abba Dimitrios II, in 1870, Abba Marcus (Mark) Bishop of Al-Beheira (a province south of Alexandria), was appointed "locum tenens" until the election of a new Patriarch.

Bishop Marcus selected some Coptic notables to assist him in his task, especially with respect to financial affairs. This was the nucleus of a Patriarchal Laical Council and the origin of "Al-Maglis Al-Milli" (Community Council) in the Coptic Church.

The Coptic Community welcomed this system, and applications were submitted to the Government requesting formal permission to organize "Al-Maglis Al-Milli" to support the Patriarch.

It was then felt by many laymen that the Clergy should rather attend to spiritual matters, leaving the administration of Coptic Wakfs, schools, benevolences and "personal status" affairs into the hands of the Laity who would be more capable to look after such matters.

Whereupon, in reply to a formal request presented by Butrus Ghali (Pacha), Khedive Ismail approved on the 5th February, 1874. The "Maglis Milli" for the Copts formed of 12 members and 12 submembers elected by general suffrage, and presided by the Patriarch.

In January 1874, the first formal "Maglis Milli" in the Coptic History was elected.

Second Stage 1875—1927

In November 1875 Abba Kirillus (Cyril) V was enthroned as Patriarch of the Coptic Church. He did not accept the system of a Community Council, and declined to cooperate with the aforesaid elected "Maglis Milli", which was consequently dissolved.

Upon request by the Coptic Community to the Patriarch and to the Government for the election of a new Council, it was reorganized in March 1883.

In order to guarantee that this new "Maglis Milli" Council would function without hindrances, and upon the diligent offices of Butrus Ghali Pacha (then Minister of Finance) the first formal Constitution of the Council was passed by virtue of Khedivial Decree issued on the 14th May, 1883. The Constitution provided for the organization of the Council, its functions, assembly procedure, jurisdiction in "personal status" cases etc. . . . as will be dealt with later in this paper.

Nevertheless, on account of disputes with the Patriarch, the Council did not function effectively and was eventually decomposed.

After constant struggle since June 1891, a new Council was again elected on the 30th June, 1892; but the Patriarch supported by the Church Synod did not allow the newly elected members to meet at all.

This time the members resisted the Patriarch and agreed with the Bishop of Sanabo (in Upper Egypt) that he would preside over the Council in place of the Patriarch which agreement was approved by the Government, on 18th August, 1892.

However, when the Council endeavoured to meet in Cairo on the 27th August, 1892, they found the doors of the Patriarchate closed by order of the Patriarch. The confrontation intensified to the extent that the Council finally requested the Government to intervene. Consequently, by order of the Government on the 1st September, 1892, Abba Kirillus V and his assistant Abba Yoannis (John) Bishop of Al-Beheira, were both

exiled to St. Mary's Monastery (Al-Baramus) in the Western Desert and St. Paul Hermitmonastery in the Eastern desert respectively.

It was a very sad incident and unprecedented in the history of the Church. The strife involved harsh and hasty steps taken on both sides. When the dust of this most unfortunate battle cleared up, the Copts realised with regret the grave consequences of schism in the one Church of Christ.

Eventually, the Khedive ordered the return of the Patriarch on the 30th January, 1893, and on the 1st February he arrived in Cairo amidst cheerful acclaim of the simple believers and passionate welcome of the Clergy. Ten days later Butrus Ghali (Pasha), Bishop of Sanabo, and the members of the Council who had all been excommunicated before his exile were pardoned by the Pope and received back in their Mother Church.

Upon the return of the Patriarch who was fully supported by a decision by the Church Synod given on the 16th February, 1893, confirming that the Clergy alone are entrusted with the administration of all Church affairs; the "Maglis Milli" system collapsed and the newly elected Council of June 1892, was decomposed.

After a score of years, the system revived but with restricted functions, and under the complete control of the Clergy. In this direction, two amendments to the original Constitution of May 1883 were passed, viz:

(A) The first amendment, by Law No. 8 of December 1908, provided that the Patriarch was solely entitled to appoint a member of the Clergy to act as president of the Council in his absence, and that the administration of the "Wakf" estates of the monasteries was given to the Patriarch assisted by four of the Abbots of monasteries.

(B) The second amendment, by Law No. 3 of February 1912, provided that the number of the members of the Council should be twelve only, four clergymen to be nominated by the Patriarch and eight laymen to be elected by the people.

The laity, however, strived a great deal in order to abolish these restrictive amendments. Eventually, after about twenty years of rising laical pressure, the Egyptian Parliament passed Legislation/Act No. 19 of the year 1927 repealing both the above mentioned laws of 1908 and 1912, and re-establishing the original Constitution of May 1883.

A few days after promulgating the said Act, Abba Kirillus V who was then 96 years old and had attained the 52nd year of his patriarchate, passed away on the 7th August, 1927.

Third Stage 1927—1945

Abba Yoannis, Bishop of Al-Beheira and the strong assistant of the late Patriarch in the 1892 incidents, was appointed first as "locum tenens" and thereafter Patriarch in December 1928.

By that time a completely new atmosphere prevailed. Egypt was rising rapidly as an independent free Country. Democracy tides calling for the government of the people by the people, were running high in all respects.

The Coptic laity were enjoying the best privileges of the "Age of Enlightenment" and all their civil rights as well.

In these circumstances, Abba Yoannis who had a very wise understanding and foresight, admitted a compromise decision that was adopted by the "Maglis Milli" in November 1928. A committee was thereby established to supervise the vast "Wakf" estates of the monasteries, consisting of the Patriarch as president, four laymen of the "Maglis Milli" and two Bishops, as members.

This system, however, was not effective, and following the grave incidents which occurred in Saint Mary's (Al-Moharrak) Monastery in Upper Egypt in early 1937, the "Maglis Milli" decided in June 1937, to withdraw the said decision insisting on taking full control of all Wakfs of the Coptic monasteries. Thereafter, the Council took the whole case to the Law Courts!

Apart from the chronic dispute over this thorny issue of the administration of "Wakfs", the "Maglis Milli" (as well as the Provincial Community Councils affiliated thereto) carried out their duties without difficulty during the Patriarchate of Abba Yoannis XIX ending on the 21st June, 1942.

Elections uninterrupted did take place every five years to elect members of the General "Maglis Milli" in Cairo, and of the Provincial Councils in the Capital cities of Egyptian Provinces. Periodical meetings of the Councils were held in the normal way, discussing and deciding on all matters pertaining to their functions according to the 1883 Constitution, particularly the Jurisdiction in respect of "personal status" affairs.

Abba Macarius III rose to the Patriarchate amidst great expectations that he would fully support the "Maglis Milli" to take over the administration of "Wakf" estates. A few days after his consecration, he issued his famous "Letter of Reform" on the 22nd February, 1944, which received the approval of the Council and was thereupon communicated to the Bishops and "Wakf" Trustees. A special committee of five members of the Council to be accepted by the Patriarch, was entitled to administrate the "Wakfs", whereas revoking the Trustees was left to the Patriarch's authority upon recommendations from the Council.

The Church Synod, however, resisted the said joint decision and the dispute continued. The Government was sought by both adverse parties to intervene, and the Cabinet of Ministers decided on the 16th May, 1944, upholding the decision, but even this was of no avail.

Abba Macarius deeply depressed and in despair left Cairo and exiled himself in Saint Antony's Monastery near the Red Sea. He returned later on to the Patriarchate, but there was no peace on earth there. Shortly afterwards this good hearted Father passed away in tears on the 31st August, 1945.

Fourth Stage 1946—1973

Abba Yussab (Joseph) Bishop of Girga (Upper Egypt) who failed in the 1944 elections, was assisted this time by many notable Copts on the account of his promise that if elected, he would accord to "Maglis Milli" the supervision of monastic "Wakfs".

Nevertheless, following his election in May, 1946, he sided with the "Wakf" Trustees of the Clergy. To add to their support he even raised the Abbots of the Coptic monasteries to episcopal status, nominating new Bishops for the monasteries who would be in charge of all matters whether spiritual or financial.

In mid — 1950 a new General Council was elected. During its period the Army Revolution put an end to the loathsome rule of King Farouk in Egypt on the 23rd July, 1952.

Thereafter in 1954 and 1955 Abba Yussab II, then ailing and often weak, was widely and wildly criticized for grave accusations relating to his personal behaviour, the unorthodox ways in choosing a score of new Bishops and last but not least for his mismanagement of Patriarchal affairs in Alexandria.

During the turmoil and almost the open revolt of the Coptic Community at large, the Church Synod and the "Maglis Milli" were fully united. Eventually, in September, 1955, the Patriarch was relieved of his powers, and a triumvirate of Bishops Committee was formed to administrate the Patriarchate affairs. On the 13th November, 1956, Abba Yussab II died in solitude, thus closing the darkest chapter in the contemporary Church history of the Copts.

Meantime, the new General "Maglis Milli", as well as the new Provincial Councils in Egypt were elected in mid — 1956. Their task, however, had shrunk substantially.

They ceased long ago to grant Probate in respect of Coptic estates or to supervise the Coptic schools and Coptic benevolent Associations, which establishments had become under the supervision of the Egyptian Ministries of Education and of Social Affairs, respectively. Finally, since the 1st January, 1956, Law No. 462/1955, abolished "Maglis Milli" jurisdiction in respect of "personal status" cases (Marriage, Divorce, Alimony, etc.) referring same to the Civil Courts.

On the 10th May, 1959, after two and half years during which the patriarchate remained vacant; Abba Kirillus (Cyril) VI, a pious anchorite, was enthroned as the 116th Pope and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.

Abba Kirillus VI, a sweet fruit of the genuine monastic life in the desert, endowed with great spiritual gifts, soon became very popular and fully supported by the Coptic Community at large. Immediately after his enthronement, he devoted his efforts to solve the problem of "Wakfs", which had so far remained a stumbling block in the way of greater unity among Clergy and Laity.

At last, after three quarters of a century of strife, he made it! On the 19th July, 1960, he succeeded in obtaining Presidential Decree promulgating Law No. 264/1960 and Decree No. 1433/1960, which provided for a new system to administrate all the Coptic Wakfs. A joint Board was thereby formed comprising the Pope Patriarch as chairman, six Bishops and six experienced Coptic laymen as members. This board was fully authorized to appoint and to supervise the Wakf Trustees and to revoke them if necessary.

Now, little of the initial rights of the "Maglis Milli" remained. Therefore, when its five-year period expired in mid — 1961, Abba Kirillus VI advised the Government formally that he was not agreeable to the new

elections which were due to take place on the 12th July, 1961. The Government accepted his wish, the Coptic Community acquiesced to the "fait accompli", and the Councils of 1956 were satisfied to carry on with what remained of their duties.

Later on in 1967, the "General Maglis Milli", then shaky and disintegrated, faced financial difficulties in administering the Patriarchal Office and Theological Institutes. Whereupon, at the request of Abba Kirillus VI, a provisional Committee of twelve members replaced the "General Council", by virtue of Presidential Decree No. 2326/1960 issued on the 6th December, 1967.

The said "status quo" was still maintained when Abba Kirillus VI died in peace on the 9th March, 1971, and the present Pope Patriarch Abba Shenouda III succeeded to the Patriarchate on the 14th November, 1971.

After twelve consecutive years since freezing the "Coptic Elections" in July 1961, the "Maglis Milli" of old revived again, and quite unexpectedly!

A fact-finding Parliament Committee was formed by Order of President El-Sadat to investigate and report on some grave incidents which happened in September and November 1972, endeavouring to undermine the national unity of Moslems and Copts in Egypt.

In the Committee's report submitted to and approved by the Egyptian Parliament on the 28th November, 1972, a passing note pointed out that elections were frozen since 1961, whereas "the General Maglis Milli" is the representative organization standing beside the spiritual authority of the Church Synod, hence the Council was unable to enjoy his functions . . ." The report recommended, therefore, that the Government should take the necessary steps for the election of the "General Maglis Milli" pursuant to its constitution of 1883.

Consequently, under the supervision of the Government as per Decree of the Ministry of Interior No. 715/1973 of the 12th April, 1973, free enthusiastic elections of the Provincial Councils all over Egypt and of the "General Maglis Milli" took place in June 1973.

These Councils, whether General or Provincial are carrying out, up to the present date, what was left for them of their initial task under the 1883 Constitution, and in full harmony with the clerical hierarchy.

Here ends happily this eventful one-century history of the Patriarchal Laical Councils of the Coptic Church in Egypt.

Organization

(A) The General "Maglis Milli":

According to the 1883 Constitution and its amendments, the General "Maglis Milli" is domiciliated at the Patriarchate in Cairo (Sec. 1). It is composed of 24 members elected by the Coptic Laity every five years, whereupon a Khedivial (now Presidential) Decree is issued to confirm officially (without right of veto) their nomination (Sec. 2, 5 & 6).

In order to qualify for membership, of the General Council, the Candidate must be (1) of Egyptian Nationality, (2), Coptic Orthodox Faith (3), of good reputation (4), resident in Cairo (5), thirty years old minimum (6), and is either holding a University Degree, or employed in Government Administrations for annual pay of 480 Eg. Pounds minimum, or employed in Public or Private commercial enterprises for 600 Pounds, or a tax payer of a "taxe immobilière" amounting to 100 Pounds per annum (7) and he should not be a military man. (Sec. 7 and Regulations of April 1944 and April 1973).

In the writer's opinion, requirements as per conditions (4), (6) and (7) above are not convincing. Notable Copts are all over Egypt and not necessarily confined to the Metropolis. Financial standing may hinder those "chosen of God who are poor in the eyes of the world, to be rich in faith" (Epistle of Saint James 2 : 5). Finally, there appears no reason in discriminating between an Army Officer and a Judge.

The Council is presided by the Patriarch, and in his absence by a Vice-President of the members who is elected by the Council in conjunction with the Patriarch upon the first meeting (Sec. 3 & 4).

Throughout the "Maglis Milli" history the Vice-President presided over almost all the meetings, was the official Spokesman of the Council, and the "Liaison Personality" with the Government as well as with Coptic concerns.

But, in recent years, it has been noted with great appreciation that our present Pope Patriarch Abba Shenouda III cares to be always in the chair and to attend every meeting of the new Council since it was elected in July, 1973. Had this been the case in the old days, much of the regrettable strife between the Clergy and the Laity could have been avoided and an atmosphere of cooperation would have instead prevailed.

(B) The Provincial Councils:

The 1883 Constitution of "Maglis Milli" provided for the organization of Provincial Councils in the Cathedral cities of Egypt, under the presidency of their respective Bishops (Sec. 19).

Each Council consists of four laical members with the exception of the Council of Alexandria consisting of seven. Members are chosen by local elections for a five-year period. Conditions for candidates are similar to those relating to the General Council but the financial requirements are more modest, may be due to the higher standard of living in Cairo!

(C) Council of Coptic Wakfs:

As already mentioned in the historic chapter of this paper, the old dispute on the administration of "Wakf" estates of the monasteries had eventually been finalized by virtue of Law No. 264 and Presidential Decree No. 1433, issued in July, 1960.

A "Council of Coptic Wakfs" was established thereby consisting of the Pope Patriarch as President and of twelve members: six Bishops and six Coptic Laymen of experience.

The twelve are appointed by a Presidential Decree upon the Pope's nomination (Sec. 3/Law 264). A Vice-President of the Bishops and a Secretary of the laity members should be elected upon the first meeting of the Council, and all the members are not entitled to any fee or compensation for their work (Sec. 5 & 6/Decree 1433).

Presumably, membership of the said Council is for life, because neither Law No. 264 nor Decree 1433 fixed a limited period for the Council. However, in point of fact, the first Council constituted in July 1960, was for various reasons reformed in March 1966, during the patriarchate of the late Pope Patriarch Kirillus VI of blessed memory. Thereafter following the consecration of the new Pope Patriarch Abba Shenouda III, a new Council was nominated in May 1972, wherein the writer is one of the six laymen members.

General Observations

(1) The laymen members of the different kinds of "Patriarchal Laical Councils" above-mentioned, have always come out of the "intelligentsia" of the Coptic community, who were at the same time closely connected with the Church.

Upon reviewing their names since the first "Maglis Milli" of 1874, up-to-date, we identify many Ministers, Judges of the Supreme Court or Conseil d'Etat, Under-Secretaries of State, Generals, University Professors, Members of Parliament, top Professionals (Doctors, Engineers, Accountants, Lawyers, etc.), famous Businessmen and notable Officials in the Government or Public Sector corporations. Scores of them (prior to the 1952 revolution) had received the high honorary titles of "Pacha" and "Bey".

(2) As to the average age of the members of these Councils, they were normally of the elderly people. Electing a member here or there in his thirties for the "Maglis Milli", was (and still is) very exceptional.

This phenomenon appears rather amazing, when noting the sharp trend in the age of the new Bishops in the Coptic Church; some of them who were recently consecrated have hardly attained 30 years of age!

(3) Some controversy arose following the consecration by Pope Shenouda III of the laymen members of the "General Council" as deacons in the Church, upon their election in June 1973.

Bishop Gregorios was rather critical, drawing a sharp line between what he termed a community council such as the "Maglis Milli", and the religious title and status of deacons, such as those "seven men of good reputation . . . full of the Spirit and of wisdom . . ." who were selected by the Apostles in the early days (Acts 6:1-6).

But soon replied a member/deacon of the General Council, that the members comprised lecturers in Coptic theological institutes, members of Church committees, religious writers, board members of benevolent associations. Are they not performing, in their laymen's lives, the Services of deacons, and why should they not qualify as such?

Functions

General Functions:

According to the 1883 Constitution (slightly amended in 1927) the general functions of "Maglis Milli" Council were extensive. Many functions, however, were eliminated as already mentioned in the History chapter of this paper.

(A) The Council had jurisdiction of "personal status" cases, provided all parties concerned were of Coptic orthodox denomination (Sec. 16). If any of them, though Christian, was of another denomination, the case would then fall within "Sharie" Court Jurisdiction.

Since the early thirties, judgments of divorce began to be given and at an ever increasing scale, by the "Maglis Milli" Councils. It must be noted, however, that the presence of the Clergy in the proceedings was a mere formality.

In any event the said Jurisdiction was withdrawn by Law, as from the 1st January, 1956.

(B) The Council was originally entitled full management of the Coptic schools, i. e., educational schools owned by the Patriarchate but open to all pupils irrespective of religion (Section 10). Not much is at present remaining in this connection, in view of the fact that almost all the Coptic schools have long ago been under the direct supervision of the Ministry of Education.

(C) As regards the "Wakfs" the Council should supervise them whether they had been instituted "in trust" for the benefit of Churches, Monasteries, or Schools. Records thereof were to be kept by the Council, accounts of revenues & expenses were to be examined and surplus of revenue was to be preserved in the Patriarchate treasury. (Sections 8 & 9).

As already explained the "Maglis Milli" could not practice the "Wakfs" management of the Monasteries, which eventually passed to the joint Patriarchal Laical Wakf Organization as from July, 1960, by virtue of Law No. 264/1960.

(D) The Council had also to keep a record of Churches and Priests, Monasteries and Monks, and to establish registers for the current entries of baptism, marriage, death, etc. . . . (Section 14).

Under this section we come across a very puzzling paragraph stipulating that the Council was entitled to "safeguard the application of Canon Laws relating to admitting monks into monasteries, the ordination and promotion of priests and watching their behaviour"! Such provision has certainly gone too far, and no wonder the Clergy strongly resisted the whole system of "Maglis Milli" almost to the extent of anathema in 1892.

Special Functions:

Ever since the post-apostolic eras in the history of the Coptic Church, the laity had almost always participated in some way or other in the nomination or election of the Patriarch.

This long established tradition is reflected in the "Consecration Deed" as recorded in a XIV century manuscript (still in use) reading as follows: "Therefore by an election from heaven, and the work of the Holy Spirit, and by the consent & conviction of us all, it was revealed to us to have regard unto . . . whom we have elected as Archbishop for the Apostolic Chair of Saint Mark . . ."

Therefore, when as late as 1942, it became necessary to write down the Rules for the candidature and election of the Patriarch, which Rules were formally promulgated by virtue of Royal Decree No. 37 issued on the 9th November, 1942; the "Maglis Milli" General Council was entitled an important role in this connection, in its capacity as the official representative of the Coptic laity.

According to the said Rules when the Patriarch passes away or if the Patriarchal Throne becomes vacant for any other reason, the Church Synod and the General "Maglis Milli" Council shall convene and jointly select a Bishop for the office of "locum tenens" to administrate the current affairs of the Patriarchate.

Thereafter, a committee shall be formed consisting of seven members of the Clergy and of the members of the General "Maglis Milli" Council, to examine nominations for the Patriarchal office, designating no less than three and no more than seven candidates whom the Committee considers to be most suitable for this office.

The election assembly comprising members of the Clergy, as well as members of the Laity will eventually convene in Cairo, and elect the Patriarch by secret vote.

The said Rules were applied when both Abba Macarius III and Abba Yussab II were elected Patriarchs of the Coptic Church in 1944 and 1946, respectively.

A few months after the death of Abba Yussab II, the patriarchal electoral process was stopped in February, 1957, owing to the grave disagreement between the Church Synod and the "Maglis Milli" General Council with respect to the qualification of candidates, and also due to the prevailing circumstances in the country consequent to the Suez War incidents of October, 1956.

On the 3rd November, 1957, upon the initiative of the Church Synod, a Presidential Decree was issued promulgating new Rules for the candidature & election of the Patriarch and repealing the 1942 Rules.

The new Rules maintained the "Maglis Milli" Council rights to participate in the proceedings in the following aspects:

(1) The Council should convene with the Church Synod in order that they jointly select the "locum tenens" Bishop (Sec. 1).

(2) The Committee for the nomination of candidates shall be formed of eighteen members chosen by the Church Synod and presided by the "locum tenens". Nine of them are to be chosen from the Bishops and nine from the "Maglis Milli" General Council. The meetings of the Committee shall not be considered valid unless a two-third corum of the members of each of the two groups of Clergy and Laity, is present (Sec. 3).

(3) The electoral list of voters shall be established by a Committee composed of three members of the Clergy and two General Council members. Amongst the categories qualified to vote for the election of the Patriarch, are "ipso facto" the General Council members whether of the past or at present (Sec. 9).

(4) An electoral committee consisting of the "locum tenens" Bishop, three Clergymen and three notable Coptic laymen, will conduct the voting at the Patriarchate. Eventually, the Committee will announce the names of the three candidates who received the greatest number of votes, on whose names the drawing of Alter-lot is to take place at Saint Mark's Cathedral in Cairo on the next Sunday following the elections.

The method of nomination of the Patriarch by election and by the casting of Alter-lot, as laid down in the aforesaid 1957 Rules, has revived an old practice of the Coptic Church dating back to the 8th century which was occasionally and very seldom used in medieval ages.

In any event, the said 1957 Rules were applied and the consequent results were overwhelmingly accepted by the Coptic community at large, in the election & nomination by Alter-lot of Abba Kirellus VI of Blessed memory and the present Pope Patriarch, Abba Shenouda III, in May, 1959, & November, 1971, respectively.

The Church Synod participated in the lections, as well as the Laity, and after all God's Mighty Hand selected the good shepherd for the "small flock" of Christ in Egypt.