The Middle East Christians:

THE UNTOLD STORY

Their Heritage
Their Aspirations
Their Survival

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Fifth Edition
2017
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all people of goodwill, Christians and non-Christians, who have worked together to preserve Christianity and Middle East Christians.

To His Holiness Pope Francis I, known to be the People’s Pope for his humility, simplicity, and dedication to the poor, sick, hungry, and destitute.

To His Holiness Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI for his perseverance in protecting the rights and presence of the Middle East Christians.

To the emergence of a new breed of Middle East Christian leadership--Popes, Cardinals, Patriarchs, Bishops, Clergy, and Laypeople--for their vision of unionism of all Christians, and for preserving Christianity, especially with the ever-evolving geopolitical and religious movements in the Arab world and Middle East.

To the Middle East Christians at large, who have over centuries endured all kinds of discrimination, injustice, and persecution, but still were able to preserve their Christianity, culture, and heritage in the Middle East.

To those Middle East Christian organizations in the Middle East and around the world that are working diligently to serve and preserve the Christian communities-at-large.

To those Middle East Christians in diaspora who, in spite of centuries of emigration and immigration, have never lost their faith, culture, and heritage, and continue to build bridges with their fellow Middle East Christians.
The United Nations

Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge:

Article 1.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2.

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Article 18.

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

*This charter was signed by all members of the United Nations.
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Preface

This is the fifth revision and expansion of this book. Many chapters were re-written, and new chapters were added. The first edition was published in November, 2008. The second edition was published in December, 2008 due to public demand. The third edition was published in February, 2013 in English and other languages. The fourth edition was published in January 2016.

This new edition contains additional and updated information in response to the ongoing political, social, and religious changes in the Middle East and surrounding countries that have affected and afflicted the Middle East Christians' demographics, identity, and political, social, and cultural presence in the region.

For many years, I have been contemplating to write or publish a book in a very simplistic way to explain the heritage, theology, and liturgy of the American Middle East Christians from the dawn of civilization to the Christianization of the Middle East and their future. As of today, there is no collective information regarding all the Middle East Christians, but a wealth of information regarding their sub-sects individually.

Throughout my conversations with my fellow political, religious and social leaders, there was a vacuum to rudimentary information or lack of public awareness regarding the Middle East Christians' heritage, their numbers, and their aspirations.

This was a more complex and complicated project than I anticipated. At the outset, I am not a historian, nor am I an authority on the sources and contents of these topics. Nevertheless, I chose a collection of these articles from various resources that originate in the Middle East and around the world that I find useful and informative, educational, and resourceful to the readers. Many of these articles have multiple sources and authors that discuss an issue, history, or the aspiration of their own prospective heritage. This information encompasses the Middle East Christian communities that are present in the Middle East or Arab world, diaspora, with a special emphasis on the American Middle East Christian communities.

The Middle East Christian communities are a heterogeneous group in their origin, evangelization, culture, and in their assembly. For instance, the Coptics are mostly based in Egypt; Maronites in Lebanon; Antiochians in Syria; Chaldeans in Iraq; Arab Christians in Jordan.

PRE-CHRISTIANITY ERA
The Middle East Christian communities are descendants of what is known as the cradle of civilizations. Their heritage is well documented in the archives of history and in the Holy Bible. The Egyptian, the Babylonian, Chaldean, Assyrian, Syriac, and Arabic Christians achievements are well known. They are the descendants of those who built the pyramids and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and drafted the first civilized legal code. They were also famous for their astronomy and science. Their early contributions to humanity and civilization have enriched the Greek, Roman, and Arabic civilizations that followed.
THE ISLAMIC ERA
As a result of the emergence of Islam and their conquest of the Middle East and northern Africa, Islamic religion and its laws became the laws of the land. The relationship between the Christian and Muslim communities and their leadership waxed and waned depending on the whims of the Muslim rulers. In the early Islamic eras, the Muslim rulers and caliphs sought the Christian communities to promote science, literature, humanity and to translate to Arabic books from Roman and Greek philosophy. Christians were also advisors and counselors to the caliphs. This relationship gradually dwindled, and the Christian communities were subjected to bigotry, hatred, forced conversion and persecution. In spite of all adversaries, the Middle East Christians were successful in keeping their distinct language, culture, and heritage while adapting to their new environment.

This era has been very difficult for their coexistence, survival, preserve their heritage, safeguard their faith, have freedom of religion and protection of their house of worship, maintain their civic rights, liberties, and social status.

THE NEW ARAB WORLD
The Arab World as we know it now has undergone dramatic and radical changes after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and colonization by the western European powers. With the subsequent emergence of a new brand of Arab patriotism and nationalism, the majority of the Arab world Christians have joined their fellow countrymen in this surge of nationalism and patriotism in resisting the western colonization and its philosophy and have contributed to the new era of political and cultural Arab world.

The colonization of the Arab world and northern Africa by the Western European powers while implementing the colonial power by imposing regimes and rulers, creating artificial countries, abusing the natural wealth, creating social injustice, and suppressing civil liberty. Such a hostile environment created a new outlook of Islam and a breeding source of radicalization in some parts of the Middle East. This new environment has led to ethnic and religious cleansing that targeted the Middle East Christians for the failures of their rulers and as a revolt against the western colonial powers. This ethnic and religious cleansing was under the excuse of —Christian‖ commonality as a religion of the western colonizations and the Middle East Christians. The fact is that the Middle East Christians' ethnicity, Christian faith, and heritage are totally different in its origin and culture. The Middle East Christians are nationalistic and patriotic to their motherland. They stood side by side throughout history with their fellow countrymen against invaders, including the Crusaders.

These hostile acts throughout history toward the ethnic Christian communities have led to acts of genocide to the Armenians in the early 20th century, the Assyrians in Simmele, Iraq in 1933, and other minor collective or individual acts. These led to total extinction of Christianity in countries, such as Saudi Arabia and in the Arab Peninsula, where the Christian numbers have dwindled to be marginalized in the Holy Land. In the other Middle East countries, the fate of Christianity has come under attack either by the ruling leaders, their surrogate, zealous religious organizations or fundamentalism.
In countries, such as Lebanon, the Maronite Christians, whose rights are protected by the constitution, were subjected to many armed conflicts in order to preserve their rights, which have been challenged from time to time, and where the presidency of Lebanon has been assigned to a Maronite Christian (this is the only Middle East country where a Christian can be elected a president). In countries where there is a large presence of Middle East Christians, they have enjoyed an uneven and unpredictable degree of freedom of religion, worship, or social, political, and community status. However, in Iraq, the Chaldo-Assyrian-Syriac Christians are the ethnic inhabitants of over 4,000 years and are an integral part of the Iraqi society. Unfortunately, the situation has changed completely with invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003. The Iraqi Christian community, in particular, was singled out by the radical fundamentalists that led to mass exodus and forced emigration (over 50% of the Christians), kidnapping, killing of their religious leaders, and destruction of their churches. There was nothing unusual about the persecution of the Iraqi Christians. Such acts have occurred from time to time. The fundamentalist plan to ethnically cleanse Iraq of its nearly 2,000 year-old Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac and Armenian Christian communities is reaching fruition.

In Saudi Arabia, the government bans churches, public Christian worship, the Bible, and the sale of Christmas cards. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia announced that only Muslims could be citizens. (Anthony Browne, The Spectator UK, Church of Martyrs)

The Copts of Egypt make up half the Christians in the Middle East, the cradle of Christianity. They inhabited the land before the Islamic conquest, and still make up a fifth of the population. By law they are banned from being president of the Islamic Republic of Egypt or attending Al Azhar University, and severely restricted from joining the police and army. By practice they are banned from holding any high political or commercial position. Under the 19th century Hamayouni decrees, Copts must get permission from the president to build or repair churches—but he usually refuses. Mosques face no such controls. (Anthony Browne, The Spectator UK, Church of Martyrs)*

THE WESTERN WORLD’S ATTITUDE TOWARD MIDDLE EAST CHRISTIANS

What has added to this tragedy is the past attitude of the western world leadership, who profess to be Christians in their personal faith while leading secular democratic systems in their countries. They directly or indirectly have turned a blind eye and even sometimes became hostile, to the Middle East Christian communities through acts of appeasement of the Middle East rulers, compounded by their potential military, industrial, business, and political relationships.

The non-governmental western world organizations and human rights organizations, whether they were religious-, social-, civic-, or political-oriented and whether they were aware or oblivious to the plight of the Middle East Christians, have not fared better in their relationships or support to the Middle East Christians. In western world countries, Christianity has been ridiculed, including the Bible, in their televisions, radios, and social programs, while they cannot ridicule any other religion out of fear of backlash. Such organizations include the British Broadcasting Channel (BBC), which is funded by the
government. The guilt-ridden west is ignoring the plight of the people because of their religion, which means that the Middle East Christians receive a lack of sympathy. The World Evangelical Alliance wrote in its report to the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 2004 that Christians are—the largest single group in the world which is being denied human rights on the basis of their faith.

On the face of it, the idea of Christians facing serious persecution seems as far-fetched as a carpenter saving humanity. Christianity is the world’s most followed religion, with over two billion believers, and by far its most powerful. It is the most popular faith in six of the seven continents, and in both of the world’s two biggest economies, the U.S. and Europe. Seven of the G8 richest industrial nations are majority Christian, as are four out of five permanent members of the UN Security Council. The cheek-turners control the vast majority of the world’s weapons of mass destruction. (Anthony Browne, The Spectator UK, *Church of Martyrs*)

There is no Christian country that says, —We are Christians and will help the Middle East Christians.

As Anthony Browne wrote, —As a liberal democrat atheist, I believe all persecuted people should be helped equally, irrespective of their religion. But the guilt-ridden west is ignoring people because of their religion. If non-Christians like me can sense the nonsense, how does it make Christians feel? And how are they going to react? The Christophobes worried about rising Christian fundamentalism in Britain should understand that it is a reaction to our double standards. And as long as double standards exist, Christian fundamentalism will grow. (Anthony Browne, The Spectator UK, *Church of Martyrs*)

In the last part of the 20th Century, there was a new wave of religious, moral, political, social, and community awakening toward the minorities’ and ethnics’ persecution around the world and especially in the Middle East, whether they were Christians or Muslims. This has benefited the Christian community. Such movements have been supported by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, who brought the political, religious, and social issues related to Middle East and Middle East Christians into the open through his visits to the Middle East, meetings with world leaders, interfaith meetings, or support for organizations that dealt with these issues, such as Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation, which is working very hard to stabilize the population of the Holy Land and interfaith meetings. He was followed by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, who continued to bring these issues to the open, and other ecumenical, political, and social organizations.

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI has exhibited an intellectual understanding of the plight of the Middle East Christians and has professed this publicly, privately, and assertively, through his public sermons, whether in the Vatican or other places, through his actions, including, but not limited to, the elevation of Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel Delly III (Iraq) to the College of Cardinals, meetings with King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia during his visit to the Vatican, the Iraqi Prime Minister and others, or through correspondence
with the 138 Muslim and religious leaders, including His Royal Highness Jordanian Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, where he encouraged religious leaders of other faiths not to yield to negative pressure, but must affirm the values of mutual respect, solidarity, and peace. He also emphasized that the life of every human being is sacred, both for the Christians and for the Muslims. He further reiterated that in acting together in the service of fundamental moral values, such common ground will allow us to base dialogue on effective respect for the dignity of every human person, on objective knowledge of the religion of the other, on the sharing of religious experience and, finally, on common commitment to promoting mutual respect and acceptance among the younger generation. The Pope is confident that, once this is achieved, it will be possible to cooperate in a productive way in the areas of culture and society, and for the promotion of justice and peace in society and throughout the world.**

**IN AMERICA**

In America, the post-September 11th era has created a new challenge and dilemma for the Middle East Christians in America and in the Middle East. Prior to September 11th, the Middle East Christian communities actively and passively integrated with American society at-large since their first wave of large immigration to the U.S. in the nineteenth century. Their assimilation in the American political, social, legal, artistic and scientific society is well documented. They even supported non-Christian Middle East organizations on par with their relationship with their similar relationships in the Middle East. The majority of the American Middle East immigrants are Christians (totaling 77% of the Middle East communities spread all over the United States, but mostly in New York, Michigan, Illinois, and California, as per the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000, Arab American Institute, Zogby International Polling and Marketing Firm). The challenge in America is how to preserve their heritage as Christians while advocating for their religious and civic rights in the Middle East without causing friction with other Middle East non-Christian organizations that are being supported directly and indirectly by the Arab/Muslim Middle East and non-Middle East governments.

It has been observed lately that the tragedy that has befallen upon the Middle East Christians has become critical and in some regions catastrophic, that a sizeable portion of American Middle East Christian organizations have become more assertive and more forceful in bringing these issues into the open—at all national and international, political, religious, social, and media levels.

Since 9/11, the political, religious, and social aspects of the Middle East and Arab world’s images have been shattered. The Arab world/Muslim world’s political and religious leadership have taken steps to remedy this problem by developing continuous interfaith and inter-culture seminars, conferences, and dialogues. These were specifically aimed toward the western world, such as the one held in Madrid, Spain in July 2008 under the auspices of King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and other acts, including Muslim scholars’ letters to Pope Benedict XVI or the Archbishop of Canterbury. Such conferences also were held in the Middle East, where some Middle East Christian religious leaders that are sympathetic to the Middle East rulers were invited to show
solidarity and public support for those rulers in spite of the adversity their followers are enduring.

Throughout all these meetings or contacts, no political, community, or civic Middle East Christian community organizations or leadership were invited in order to minimize in public the plights or the presence of the Middle East Christians in the Middle East. Some Arab/Muslim governmental leadership does not even acknowledge the presence or the rights of the ethnic Middle East Christians in the Middle East.

It is the duty of the western world religious leadership to invite and involve Middle East Christian community organizations that advance the civic and civil rights of the Christians and safeguard their freedom of religion and freedom of worship independent of the religious hierarchy leadership in the Middle East. Such independent Middle East Christian organizations can be more effective in advancing such causes without the restraint and pressure that many Middle East religious leaders must endure to protect their institutes in the Arab world.

**ACTS TO PRESERVE THE MIDDLE EAST CHRISTIANS’ RIGHTS**

Throughout the centuries, history has recalled that the inter-fight between the different sects of the Middle East Christians and within their own sects had led to their own downfall. This inter-sect rivalry was cultivated by their adversaries and their downfalls. That is also true due to the early division and rivalry of the church leadership between the Byzantine and Roman Churches that led to the fall of the Byzantine Church and Constantinople and occupation by Islamic forces of one of the holiest and earliest Christian sites.

Throughout history, there were only few Christian leaders in the Middle East that revolted against the injustice that has been imposed on them. But for the majority of the church leadership, and sadly to say, they developed a co-existent policy that often acquiesced to the whims and wishes of the Muslim rulers. This led to the gradual dwindling of the Christians in numbers and in their churches.

The commonality between all the Middle East Christian communities’ persecution is that they are Christians, whether they are Copts, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Armenians, etc. This common denominator should be a source for uniting the Middle East Christian communities to act together with a new voice, to create a lobbying or political pact and to coordinate with other like-minded non-Middle East Christian organizations to advance their causes.

The other two predominant religions’ followers of Islam and Judaism, whether in the Middle East or in diaspora and especially in the United States, have well recognized, centralized local and national religious, political, and social organizations to speak on their behalf, at the political, interfaith, and inter-heritage levels and whenever is subjected to negative issues. These organizations are proactive and ready to respond. These organizations have been supported politically and financially directly and indirectly by the Arab/Muslim world countries and by the State of Israel.
The Middle East Christian communities, which have been besieged by all the divisions between the inter-religious and inter-culture rivalry, have not been able to unite or develop similar organizations on par with their fellow Muslim and Jewish groups. We are at a disadvantage of not having Christian countries to support the Middle East Christian organizations politically, financially, or through public relations.

In order to remedy this problem and avoid the mistakes of the past, there should be two distinct organizations: one to represent the church to continue its rituals, liturgy, and tradition; the other should be independent, composed of laypeople to advance the political, cultural, civic and civil rights of the Middle East Christian community irrespective of their ethnicity or country of origin.

These two organizations should coordinate with each other, cooperate with each other, and not interfere with each other. Each group should understand its obligation to the other. This may be difficult, as we have learned from the past that each group wishes to dominate the other as it was in the Middle East. But now we are in a new era, and if we do not learn from our past history, we will be condemned to repeat the same mistakes.

In Michigan, which has one of the largest congregations of Middle East communities, and the majority of them are Christians of various churches and denominations and cultures, such a movement of the Christian laypeople came together with the blessing of the religious leadership and created a national organization, the American Middle East Christians Congress. With the support of the community, this congress achieved its goals in advancing the civic and civil liberties and informing the public at-large of the heritage of the Middle East Christians.

On the state level, local chapters to a main national organization should be created for better communication between the state and national organizations.

At the same time, national religious leadership organizations must be created independently of the laypeople organization to coordinate their religious sub-sects of Christianity, such as a national religious organization for Copts, Maronites, Syriacs, Assyrians, Arab Christians, etc. Such organizations should have a liaison officer to coordinate with the other sub-sects in order to have one central office to be proactive if and when an adversary has befallen upon the Middle East Christians in America or in diaspora.

There are other organizations, such as the Holy Land Christian Ecumencial Foundation (HCEF), which is a tax-exempt, non-profit 501(c)3 organization committed to improving the lives of Christians in the Holy Land through building bonds of solidarity between Christians in the United States and Christians in the Holy Land. It has two goals: two inform Americans about the Christians in the Holy Land, and to provide humanitarian assistance for the needy in the land where Jesus Christ was born, preached, died and rose again (www.hcef.org).
I am very grateful and proud to acknowledge the sacrifices that our Middle East Christian forefathers endured over the past centuries in order to preserve whatever is left of our culture, heritage, and Christian liturgy.

In final analysis, there are two points-of-view. One point-of-view thinks that Christianity will disappear from the Middle East sooner or later due to the negative prevailing condition. The other point-of-view, which I share, believes that Christianity in the Middle East will survive for the following reasons: 1) it is in the interest in the Muslim and Arab world leaders and their communities to create a better atmosphere for the survival of Middle Eastern Christianity in their own interest for a better image; 2) the Middle East Christian communities are well-cultured, well-educated and are an integral part of the Middle East and can help and advance the Middle East countries, as they have done in the past; 3) the Middle East Christian communities in the United States and in diaspora, irrespective of present division, have a political, social, and commercial influence to direct the political thinking in their adoptive country; 4) there is a new era of thinking and acting toward the Christian Middle East communities, whether through the Vatican, the elected conservative religious heads of western countries, or the western religious organizations toward the Christians.

It is the responsibility of the Middle East Christians to protect, preserve, and advance the aspirations of the Middle East Christians. What is Bethlehem without the Christians, and what is the Holy Land and the Middle East without Christianity?

This book is the first of its kind as basic encyclopedic information about the originality of the various Middle East Christians since the dawn of Christianity in order to have a better understanding of the rich heritage of the Christians of the Middle East and their contributions to civilization and humanity.

Ramsay F. Dass, MD

*Anthony Browne is Europe correspondent of the Times and The Spectator UK

**Part of the letter from Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican Secretary of State, addressed to His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of the Royal Palace in Amman, Jordan on November 19, 2007
About the Editor

Ramsay F. Dass, MD was born in Iraq. Completed his medical training in India, England and the United States. Dr. Dass is an accomplished physician, philanthropist, humanitarian, and community activist.


Dr. Dass was a medical consultant, advisor and member of many medical, community and charitable organizations in England, including being a member of British Medical Association.

Dr. Dass is the President of the American Middle East Christians Congress, Past President and CEO of Detroit Hope Hospital in Detroit, Michigan, Medical Director and Practicing Physician at Oak Park Medical Clinic in Oak Park, Michigan, Director of the Iraqi American Endowment Center.

Dr. Dass has been a President, Past President, or board member of many political, humanitarian, community, and faith based organizations, including but not limited to Interfaith organizations, BRIDGES, Arab-American and Chaldean Forum, ACCESS, CIAM, Arab American Medical Association, Michigan State and Medical Society, and Oakland County Medical Society.

Dr. Dass was appointed by former Michigan Governor John Engler as a member of the Governor’s Arab American Advisory Board.

Dr. Dass has led or been a member of many humanitarian missions to the third world countries, especially to the countries that have been afflicted by war, hunger and poverty by providing food, medicine and auxiliary services.

Dr. Dass has been active in promoting civil, civic, religious liberty and humanitarian causes in the American political arena and abroad by discussing these issues with the Presidents of the United States of America and their administrations, members of the Congress, and Presidents or officials of foreign countries.

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Ramsay F. Dass, MD, with His Beatitude Patriarch Louis Rafael Sako of the Chaldean Catholic Church

Ramsay F. Dass, MD, and Mrs. Natalie Dass with His Beatitude Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Bechara Rai in 2012

Ramsay F. Dass, MD, with His Holiness Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch

Ramsay F. Dass, MD, with His Beatitude Ignatius Youssef III Younan, Patriarch of Syriac Catholic Church of Antioch and All the East
His Holiness Catholicos Karekin II, Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians

His Beatitude Patriarch John X Yazigi Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East

His Holiness Pope Tawadras II, 118th Pope of Alexandria & Patriarch of All Africa on the Holy Apostolic See of Saint Mark the Evangelist of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria

His Beatitude Gregory III Laham, Melkite Greek Patriarch of Antioch
His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa, Archbishop, Patriarch of Jerusalem of the Latins

Rev. Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church Bishop of Palestine and Jordan in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and President of the Lutheran World Federation

His Holiness Mar Addai II, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East

His Holiness Mar Gewargis III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East
Ramsay F. Dass, MD, presenting His Holiness The Late Pope Shenouda III, 117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St.

Ramsay F. Dass, MD, with His Holiness The Late Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East

Dr. Ramsay and Mrs. Natalie Dass with former President of Lebanon Amine Gemayel and his wife

Dr. Ramsay Dass meets with President of Lebanon, General Michel Aoun, the only Middle Eastern Christian president in the Arab world.
Dr. Dass presents award to His Excellency Gebran Bassil, MBA in Engineering, Minister of Energy and Water of Government of Lebanon, as keynote speaker at the September 28-30, 2012 AMECC conference in Warren, Michigan. His Excellency Gebran Bassil serves as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon.

Dr. Dass meets with Honorable Nadim Gemayel, member of the Lebanese Parliament, and Mr. Ibrahim Marji.

Dr. Dass meets with General Chamel Roukoz and Mr. Issa Gabby.

Dr. Dass meets with President Vicente Fox, president of Mexico.

Dr. Dass meets with FBI Director, James Comey, and presented him a book about the American Middle East Christians.
Dr. Dass, President of American Middle Eastern Christians Congress, presenting His Excellency Amr Moussa, Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, with the American Middle East Christians Congress booklet during his visit to Michigan.

Dr. Ibrahim Al Jaffari, past Prime Minister of Iraq and current Foreign Minister in Iraq, with Dr. Ramsay Dass in a Washington D.C. conference discussing the future of Iraq.

Personal photograph taken of Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI by Dr. Dass celebrating Mass at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C. on April 17, 2008 by special invitation from His Eminence Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington, D.C.

Ramsay F. Dass, MD with Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, at the Catholic-Muslim Forum at The Vatican on November 6, 2008

H.E. Archbishop Francis A. Chullikatt, Holy See Permanent Representative to the United Nations; William Ishaya Odisho, Deputy Permanent Iraqi Representative to the United Nations; Dr. and Mrs. Dass on Sept. 17, 2012
President Bill Clinton meets Ramsay F. Dass, MD in the Oval Office in 1996.

Dr. Ramsay and Mrs. Natalie Dass meet President George W. Bush

President Barack Obama’s reply letter to Dr. Dass’s letter regarding the American Middle East Christians and his Congress.
Dr. Dass with His Excellency Bishop Francis Kalabat of Chaldean Eparchy of Saint Thomas the Apostle.

Dr. Dass with H.E. Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio in Washington D.C.

Dr. Dass with Archbishop Avak Asadourian, Prelate of the Armenian Apostolic Church of Baghdad.

Dr. Dass awarded Sayyed Jawad Al-Khoei the Interfaith Award on October 27, 2015.

Dr. Dass was awarded the Man of Swagger 2016 by Reverand Dr. Jim Holley.

Dr. Dass is invited for many television and radio programs to discuss issues related to Christians and Christianity.
Dr. Dass with Hon. Senator Ted Cruz in Washington, DC.

Dr. Dass with Hon. Senator Tim Scott at the Michigan Christian Coalition.

Dr. Dass with Hon. Congressman Darin LaHood and Hon. Secretary Ray LaHood.

Dr. Dass and his son, Mr. Clarence Dass, with Hon. Congressman Dave Trott.
Chapter One:

Middle Eastern Christianity
In General
The Origins of Middle Eastern Christianity
By Dr. George Khoury

1- Introduction:

The Christian church was born in Palestine at a time when the Roman Empire was in its youth and when Palestine had been incorporated into an empire. Palestine was governed in the first century by a Roman procurator who in turn was countable to the legate of the Roman procurator province of Syria.

Jerusalem had the apostle James "the Minor‖ as first bishop, and while not much is known about the life and career of the other apostles, Peter, after the Council Jerusalem (Acts: 10, 15; Gal: 2:11), apparently went to Antioch in order to confirm the nascent church there. Soon after, the Christian faith spread to Ephesus, Edessa (today's Urfa), Alexandria, and Rome.

It was natural, therefore, that the teaching and the worship of Christ spread first in his homeland, i.e., in Palestine, and extended slowly to the neighboring countries. The Acts of the Apostles gives us a vivid account of the progress of the faith and its success Judaea, Samaria, and Galilee. This progress was slow, and the Gospel seems to have had more effect in the hellenized, maritime cities than inland. The Acts of the Apostles informs us that the mission of the Apostle Philip took him to the pagan cities along the Mediterranean shore. He proclaimed Christ in Caesarea and Lydda, and it was near Gaza that he baptized a Jewish proselyte of Ethiopian origin Acts 8:27). Peter, we are also informed, followed Philip to these areas; first to Samaria, then to Caesarea, Gaza, and Lydda. Anyway, we see Christians living on the shore of Palestine at the end of the second century.

2- Paul Apostle to the Nations

Paul became the great missionary to the Gentiles. He was by no means the only such missionary, but we hear more of him than of any of the other apostles. Through him the faith was proclaimed and planted in several cities in present-day Turkey and in Greece. There were, however, communities of Christians which had arisen quite independently of Paul, notably in Antioch and in Rome. We also know that the faith had an early spread among the Syriac-speaking peoples in Syria and Mesopotamia. As for Arabia, which became a Roman province in A.D. 106, it probably received the Christian faith from Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. In the land of Saba – present day Yemen- once the hub of Arabian civilization, it had arrived from Abyssinia and for a time during the preceding century had been the religion of the state, until the country was overrun by the Persians.
3- The Ghassanids

The Ghassanids were the first to convert to Christianity. Nestorian Christianity came early to Hira, where a monastery was built in A.D. 410. A bishop is recorded in the same year.

Al-Mundhir III (d. 554) was a pagan though he had a Christian wife some of the notables were Christians. Bishops are recorded in Uman in 424 and in the district of Bahrain in 575. When the Persians conquered South Arabia they favored the Nestorians and there was a bishop of Sanaa as late as 800. From these borders, Christianity filtered through into the interior. There were bishops in Aila, Duma, and Taima', and most of the tribes of the North had some knowledge of the faith.

4- Christian Egypt

How Christianity infiltrated Egypt is not clear. The church in Alexandria traditionally been ascribed to Evangelist Mark, once a traveling companion of Paul declared by early report -though this not historically a sure thing-to have been Peter in Rome and to have written down the memories constituting the body of the teaching of that Apostle, which we have as Gospel of Mark. It seems though up until the third century it had meager Christian population despite the presence of many Christian communities. However, at the Synod of Alexandria (320-321) which convened in order to condemn Arius, there was already a thriving church with an imposing ecclesiastical hierarchy. The historian Duchesne states in his 'Early History of The Christian Church, vol. II, pp.385-386.

Since the fourth century Egypt was the sanctuary of orthodoxy and the classic ground of confessors of faith. It was also the fatherland of the monks. To the revered name of Athanasius were united in pious stories the names of Antony and Macarius, of the two Macarri, of Ammon, and those of many other personages in whom piety soon embodied the ideal of Christian heroes.

5- Antioch and Edessa

Antioch, whose Christian beginnings date from the first century (Acts11:19- 21), became at the end of the third century an important Christian center. In fact, as early as the second century it considered the Apostle Peter to have been its first bishop. One can hardly exaggerate the importance of Antioch for the ancient Eastern Church. Because of its privileged position, given its biblical connections with the early Jerusalem community, and especially with the Apostles Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, Antioch early on raised the claim of teaching and leading the other churches. The region of Edessa, in Northern Syria, already teemed with Christians by the end of the second century. In fact, Christianity became the state religion around the year 200, and while, according to Hitti, Antioch rose to a position of leadership in the Greek speaking part of Syria, Edessa was getting a corresponding position in the Aramaic
(i.e., Syriac) speaking world. This city was the earliest seat of Christianity in Mesopotamia. It was also the cradle of Syriac literature. The chief versions of the Syriac Bible were probably made there in the second century. The school of Edessa was founded by Saint Ephrem (320-373). Around the year 489 the emperor Zenon closed the school of Edessa and its students fled to Persia where they founded instead the school of Nisibis which became a Nestorian center.

6- Arius and Nestorius

In the fourth and fifth centuries Christological controversies split Syrian Christianity into a number of divisions. Arianism taught that God is without beginning but that the Son had a beginning and is not a part of God. The council of Nicaea rejected and condemned Arianism in 325. As to the relation of the divine to the human in Jesus, Apollinaris, a friend of Athanasius, maintained that in Jesus the Logos was the rational element. That position left the divine nature complete but made Christ less human, for a human being, it was held, had body, soul, and reason. The Ecumenical Council of Constantinople condemned in 381 the views of Apollinaris and maintained that in Jesus both the divine and the human natures were complete. In 431 the Council of Ephesus rejected the views of Nestorius who preferred for Mary the title Mother of Christ to the term Mother of God. And in 451 the Council of Chalcedon adopted a creed which was influenced by the Tome of Pope Leo, a document prepared by the then bishop of Rome. The creed of Chalcedon declared Christ to be "perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, of rational soul and body." Thus the distinctive views ascribed to Apollinaris, Eutyches, and Nestorius were condemned.

The decisions of Chalcedon did not produce peace in the church and among the contending parties. On the one hand most of the members of what was to become the Catholic Church, East and West, adhered to them, as did the Greek-speaking majority in the East who looked to the Bishop Constantinople as representing the teaching of Chalcedon. There were on the other hand, elements in the East who either rejected Roman rule or were restless under it as symbolized by Constantinople. Most of these professed their adherence to the decisions reached in Nicaca in 325 but rejected the definition in the creed of Chalcedon of the relation of the divine and human in Christ. Since they stressed the divine in Christ, those who adhered to Chalcedonian Christology labeled their opponents monophysites (of the one nature), with the implication that they regarded Christ as wholly divine and not human. The dissenters from Chalcedon repudiated the term monophysite, insisting that they recognized both the divine a human in Christ but maintaining that the relationship was not as described in Chalcedon. These passionate controversies among the Eastern Churches created continuing strife, thus weakening them and making easy the spread and triumph of Islam seventh century.
Christianity By Tore Kjeilen
Arabic: 'al-masihiyya or 'an-nasrāniyya
Hebrew: netsrut

Third largest religion in the Middle East/ North Africa, second to Islam and Alevism.

The many Christian churches in the region have between 14 and 20 million adherents. These figures are uncertain for a number of reasons. In some countries, the religion of expatriates is generally not included in official figures or statistics. In other countries, the Christian minority is represented with smaller figures than foreign estimates and/or the statistics of the churches themselves. The figures to the left, indicating 19 million as of 2005 are fair estimates, but cannot be verified. In the case of Iraq, with the present Muslim Religious Cleansing of Iraq, the estimates now go as low as 600,000 remaining Christians.

Christianity started as a Messianic orientation in Judaism, which in this encyclopedia is called Jesus-Judaism. It was around 100 CE that the differences between the Jesus-Jews and Jews who did not accept and believe the stories about Jesus became so grave that a reconciliation was no longer possible. From this time on, the supporters of Jesus formed their own fully independent religious groups and developed theologies and organizations independent of Judaism and Jewish leaders.

Christianity is a religion based upon the belief that the Bible contains a divine message and that Jesus (who died between 25 and 40 CE) represents a new orientation in the relationship between man and God. There are differences on how the different churches of the Middle East and North Africa see this message, how they transmit it, and also how they define Jesus. But in general, the similarities outnumber the differences.

MYTHS and THEOLOGY

All Middle Eastern Churches employ a common approach to Christianity's extraordinary metanarrative, sometimes referred to in religious or literary analysis as its mythical dimensions. These dimensions are presented at three levels: 1) The personalities and the stories of Judaism before Jesus (Old Testament); 2) Jesus, the disciples and the first apostles (New Testament); 3) The personalities of each church and their stories, down through the centuries. Within the latter level, which often has been central in forming unique identities for the different churches, stories about martyrs and saints are often found.

Central to first 2 levels of metanarratives or myths is the notion that there is only one god, and that man is offered eternal life in Paradise after death, or they will be sentenced to harsh punishment.

As Christianity understands it, the Old Testament contains the promise of Jesus as the Messiah. This creates a great divide between Christians and Jews; the two groups
could be seen as defining themselves belonging to two different religious perspectives within the same history.

The actual understanding of the role of the Messiah himself was, however, different for Christianity. The Jews considered the Messiah as a political liberator of Israel, while Christians understood Jesus to be a spiritual liberator of humankind in a far broader sense. But in both religions, Messiah represented an end of the unjust world. As the Christians saw it, Jesus’ main task was to prepare for the forthcoming apocalypse and the end of Satan's influence in the world. One book in the New Testament tells about this, Revelation. It has many similarities with the apocalyptic books of the Old Testament, but also with some of the literature in the gospels, It both threatens the unbelievers and the lukewarm, and gives promises to the many who believe.

But as the decades passed, and the promise of the end of the world was not fulfilled, one might have expected that Christians would reject the idea of a link between Jesus and the end of the world. This really never happened; instead the idea of a new world order was developed to explain the delay of the parousia, or return of Jesus: With Jesus, a new relationship between humanity and God had been established, and Christians could use this as a basis for living in the secular world. While living an earthly life, they were saved and purified through their trust in Jesus' claim on that life.

But even today, Christians expect that the end of the world remains an ever-present prospect. When this final event arrives, God will judge every human being, and his or her destiny in the hereafter will be determined. The unjust will burn in hell, while the just will experience eternal bliss in paradise.

Central to the message of Jesus is love, along with forgiveness and openness towards other human beings. While Judaism at the time of Jesus was predominantly a closed religion, the message of Jesus was by many understood to imply that every human being could become a Christian – through the prospect of conversion and faith alone.

The gospels are far less detailed about regulations on morality and life than the Jewish Law. Among other things, the dietary regulations are here abolished.

The third group of metan arrives and myths belong to the period when Christianity had established itself as a religion. It was often in the clash with kings and rulers, as well as with other religions (especially Islam) that many Christians faced persecution, and had to stand up for their beliefs. These stories, true or not, gave the churches both strength and identity, but also cultic centers that were built around places central to each personality.

There are also many myths about ascetics, men or women who devoted themselves entirely to Christianity, and sometimes moved to inhospitable places, like the desert, yet who still managed to survive.
RITUALS
In most of the churches in North Africa and the Middle East, many rituals are performed by the clergy for the benefit of all members of the congregation. In many cases, it is expected that a membership attend the churches and cathedrals to participate in these rituals, but there are also some central everyday rituals that are performed for the benefit of members who are not present.

The totality of rituals are both too complex and time consuming for each individual to perform. It is, therefore, necessary to have a clergy who perform all obligations and do it correctly. The adherents participate with money, gifts and, sometimes, voluntary work.

Some rituals are however central and cannot be effective unless the believer participates. These include acts like baptism, confirmation, marriage and the Eucharist. It is sometimes also expected that that certain worship services have obligatory attendance. Important feasts among the Orthodox Christians are: Easter (celebrated at other times than in western Christianity, starting in April or May); Christmas (December 25); Theophany (January 19); Great Lent (fast, starting in February or March). Confession, fasting, prayer, self denial, obedience, righteous deeds and visits to holy places are other rituals, and they are often performed on an individual basis. In one’s personal religious life, these can often be of more importance to the believer than the big feasts.

ORGANIZATION
The organization of the churches in the Middle East and North Africa is strictly hierarchical, and there is little congregational democracy. The existing leaders are effectively in charge of appointing new leaders.

Most of the independent churches are headed by a patriarch, who has a small group of bishops below him, who then again have a group of priests below them. Connected to some of the churches, there are also monasteries which enjoy a certain amount of independence, but are still subject to the authority of the highest leaders.

Even the local Catholic churches have a great deal of independence, and cannot be defined as controlled by the pope in Rome. The relationship between the pope and these churches is more symbolic than factual, but the Vatican has the ability to exercise influence through communication channels.
HOLY PLACES

There are many holy places for Christianity in the Middle East. The most important place is Jerusalem, where a church has been erected over the place claimed to be the crucifixion and burial place of Jesus.

In Bethlehem a church has been constructed over the place where Jesus is believed to have been born. Nazareth has several sites that remember the life and works of Jesus. Syria has many cult centers for lesser known personalities, but in Damascus there are places that are visited and revered as sites from the life of St. Paul.

Egypt has a rich tradition of its own, and there are places that commemorate the stay of Jesus and his family in Egypt.

HISTORY

This is only a brief treatment, more details being listed under each of the different church traditions/denominations.

1st century CE: Spreading of the Jesus-orientation in Jewish communities, also called Jesus-Judaism, that ultimately developed into churches as part of what came to be an independent religion. It is possible that groups like the Essenes and others may have had both positive and negative influences in this development.

Around 100: The Jesus-Jews break free from other Jews, and start developing their own emphases and structure.

2nd century: The spread of the new religion continues. At this period of time, the congregations are weak but have much contact with each other. The main centers at this period of time are in Syria and northern Egypt.

2nd and 3rd centuries: Strong growth in North Africa, but also inside the Roman Empire.

312: The Roman Emperor Constantine becomes a Christian, resulting in Christianity developing into the state religion of the empire.

5th century: A great schism between the churches over a central issue: Was Jesus of two natures, a human and a divine, or did he just have one nature? At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, the western churches came to decide that Jesus had two – 2 – natures, but combined in the same person. Many Eastern Churches do not accept this, and new and independent church bodies with no relationship to the Western Church results.

7th century: Muslim rulers take control of the Middle East and North Africa. This results in a centuries long relationship that would alternate between mild and strong persecution on the one hand, and fruitful coexistence on the other hand. Many Christians would over the next couple of centuries convert to Islam.
Formation of the Christian Byzantine Empire, which comes to cover most of modern Turkey, Greece and parts of lands further west in Europe. This develops into an important centre for the development of eastern Orthodox Christianity. The empire would remain large for more than 700 years, until it was defeated by the Ottomans.

12th and 13th centuries: The Christian Crusades in the lands around Jerusalem involve new contacts between Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church of Rome. In some areas (especially around modern Lebanon), Christian countries are established, while in other areas hostility between eastern Christians and the Crusaders results.

15th to 18th centuries: A well-conducted campaign from the Catholic Church towards Eastern Churches, encourages some to rejoin the Catholic Church. But they were allowed to keep their identity, organization, special rites, and a liturgy performed in their own traditional languages. None of the churches were forced to introduce celibacy for its clergy against its own will.

19th century: Heavy and brutal actions from Muslims against Christians in the Ottoman Empire result in a great exodus of Christians from the region.

Start of colonization in Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania brings large quantities of Christian Europeans into the region. For a period deep into the 20th century, Christianity becomes the politically dominant (if not largest) religion for this region. There was minimal persecution from the Christian side, and very few conversions from Islam to Christianity.

Early 20th century: Morocco and Libya are colonized, and experience a large immigration of European Christians. The same religious development takes place here, as had been characteristic of the other North African countries earlier.

Around 1960: With the fall of the North African colonies, most Christians with European origin in North Africa return to their families’ original home countries. Only a few Christians remain.
Eastern Christians or “ARAB AMERICANS”
By Toni Freij

At the end of the 19th century in 1880 A.D., the USA opened the door to immigration from the Middle East. Most of the immigrants from the Middle East were Christians from Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. Historical documents show that their main reason for leaving their home countries were persecution and massacre by the Ottoman Empire against Christians in its territories, which at that time included Lebanon and Syria. These massacres started in 1870 A.D. and the result was the killing of a large number of the Christian population in those countries. A large number of Christians left these lands in order to escape the religious persecution and intolerance, and came to America.

The first immigrant to arrive in the USA from Lebanon was a Christian Tanyous El-Bashaalani, who arrived in Boston, MA in 1874 A.D. In addition to Christians, there was a small number of Druze and Muslims who left Lebanon and Syria in order to escape the mandatory participation in the Ottoman Imperial army. Together these immigrants formed the first generation of people to emigrate from the Middle East.

The second wave of immigration took place from the 2nd World War. Most of these immigrants were Christians from Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon. The reasons from their immigration were similar to those of the first generation of immigrants; persecution and oppression because they were Christians.

The third wave of immigration started approximately twenty years ago. Most of these people were from Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. The reasons these people chose to immigrate ranged from political and religious persecution to economic factors. Another factor was that the USA opened the door wider to those seeking political asylum, due to the influence of the Communist system and ideology on the daily life of people in the Middle East.

The population statistics that have been published by the Arab-American Institute in Washington D.C. say that the total population of Americans descended from immigrants from Arabic-speaking countries is 2.5 to 3 million*, and the percentage of Christians among them is 80%. Now we should ask ourselves a very important question: Who are the Arab Americans? Is it true that just because a group of people speak the same Language that they automatically share the same origin, roots, culture and ethnicity? Let’s study the following example: some West African countries such as Senegal, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, etc. share the common use of the French language, and the French culture has a great influence on their cultures. To this day, French is the official language of these nations, and French currency is in use there, and some other French traditions are retained. Does this mean that they are French? Of course, not. They are Black Africans and the French are white Europeans. Therefore, the Term “Arab-Americans“ is incorrect, especially when applied to the Christians who emigrated from what are generally called the “Arab Countries.”
The following reasons explain clearly that the term Arab American is not correct:

1. The presence of the language factor (Arabic) among Arabic speaking countries does not prevent significant differences in the traditions and cultures of these countries. Even on the linguistic level, the differences in the Arabic dialects sometimes causes difficulty for ordinary citizens in these countries to understand another Arabic speaker using a different dialect.

2. The presence of local and tribal trends in each area of the Arab countries. This cannot be ignored.

3. The racial/ethnic factor which represents one of the important factors, especially for the Christians of the region. The Christians who live today in the Arab countries are racially and ethnically different from their fellow Muslim citizens in the same countries. Historical documents show that there are no true Arab Christians. The true Arab Christians who used to inhabit some of the Arabian Peninsula in the areas of Najran Mecca, El-Madina and some areas of Yemen were annihilated by the Muslim armies during the Islamic invasions in the 7th century and those who were left alive were forced to convert to Islam.

4. Today’s Christians who live in the so-called Arab countries are in fact its indigenous inhabitants of their countries and history proves this. Although they speak Arabic and no longer speak their original language, they are ethnically and racially different from the Arab Muslim citizens of their country (who are of mixed blood). The reason for this phenomenon of preserving their racial purity is due to the fact that Islamic laws permit a male Muslim to marry Christian women on the condition that their children are raised Muslim. On the other hand, a Muslim woman is permitted to marry a Christian man only if he converts to Islam first, and of course their children would be raised Muslim. It should be noted that any Muslim who converts to Christianity must be killed according to the Share’a (the Islamic law). Therefore, one can see from all directions now how the number of Muslims grew steadily over time. Hence, we can see how the population of Christians of the East who are the indigenous peoples of their countries were reduced due to the factors mentioned above as well as other very important factors such as severe persecution, torture, economic and civil restrictions which would automatically be lifted if a person chose to convert to Islam. Often, the choice was given to convert or to be killed. The final result of their policies, as we know, is that the Christians of the Middle East were once in the majority but now are in the minority in their ancestral lands.

Who Are The Eastern Christians In The Arabic-Speaking Countries:

1. The Lebanese Christians are the indigenous people of Lebanon (Phoenicia) and are the Phoenicians and Aramaens. Their languages, descended from Phoenicians, were written in cuneiform. Their civilization existed before that of the Arabs by hundreds of years. The Phoenicians were highly skilled seafarers and very important in world trade in ancient times.

2. The Copts, the Christians of Egypt, are the indigenous inhabitants and direct descendants of the Ancient Egyptians, the Pharaohs. Their civilization and Hieroglyphic writing amaze all the world up to the present time. Their civilization developed thousands of years before the Arabs started to form tribes.
3- The Syrian Christians are the indigenous people of Syria. Their languages were Syriac and Aramaic, which is the language that the Lord Jesus Christ spoke.

4- The Palestinian Christians are Hamites in their origin. They inhabited the land of Palestine hundreds of years before Abraham, the father of Isaac and Ishmael. Therefore, Palestinians were present in Palestine hundreds of years before the Arabs.

5- The Christians of Iraq are the Assyrians and Chaldeans. They are the indigenous inhabitants of Mesopotamia. Their civilizations are among the oldest civilizations on earth.

6- The Christians of Jordan are descendants of Canaanite tribes, who inhabited the eastern part of Palestine. They lived in their land hundreds of years before the formation of the Arabic tribes in the Arabian Peninsula.

7- The Christians and Animists in Southern Sudan are true black Africans. They lived in Sudan hundreds of years before the existence of Arabs.

Now, if the historical facts show that today’s Christians of the East are the indigenous inhabitants of their lands, the question that should be asked is this:

How can a group of Eastern Christians deny true ethnic and racial roots and call themselves —Arab-Americans? How can the Eastern Christians identify themselves with the Arab-Muslims who invaded their home lands, killed their grandparents and raped their grandmothers, eliminated their languages and civilizations, destroyed their churches and treated them as lower class citizens —Ahl el-themaa. To date, Christians are not allowed to worship or preach freely, and it is impossible to build a church in some Arab-countries, such as Saudi Arabia, and very difficult to do so in others.

It is so sad to see that Eastern Christians who live in the USA and the West have not educated the Western population of their forgotten true history or educated their children who were born in the West about their true history and identity. They haven’t been taking advantage of the democracy and freedom of expressions to participate in organization which support the human rights and freedom of religion in the Arab countries. Participation in such human rights organizations can play a major role in supporting the Christians who still live in the Middle East.

How Did The Plan Of Forcing The Arab Muslim Identity On The Eastern Christians Begin?

During the Arab-Israeli war, especially in the year 1973, Saudi Arabia and the oil rich states of the Persian Gulf started to promote and financially support a very organized plan behind closed doors to collect all immigrants from all the Arab countries under one umbrella called the Arab American Organization. The purpose of this block is to politically force power on the USA and Western governments to promote their agenda and act as a counter to the Israeli lobby. The second and hidden agenda is to spread Islam and its teaching in the USA and Western world under the umbrella of freedom of religion that is present in the Western world. And in fact, the oil money has started to flow into the pockets of a few so-called —Arab Americans. In the year 1980, the —American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee or ADC was formed by the Lebanese-American former Senator James Abourezk. Also, the oil money of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States has succeeded in buying the conscience of many such as James
Zogby (president of the Arab-American Institute) and Albert Mekhiber and many others. It was very well planned by these Muslim countries to use Eastern Christians on the surface to execute their plans to collect all the Eastern Christians under the —Arab-American‖ umbrella using those few individuals to influence the USA and Western governments to respond to their demands. In this way, the Muslim Arab countries can gain some legal accesses to their demands. In addition, they can promote their hidden and important goal, which is to spread Islam in the USA and the West by all means; and many articles have been written and published, and numerous interviews have been done to defend Islam by these individuals. As an example, the weekly TV show —The Capital View‖ on the Arabic Cable-TV, hosted by James Zoghby and others.

Nowadays, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) tries to give legitimacy to its work by saying that its members are thirty thousand. Even if this number is accurate, it represents only 10% of the total number of so called —Arab Americans, which is three million. Of this 3 million, 80% (eighty percent) are Christians.

This will lead us to ask some important questions: Is this organization honest and not biased in its agenda? Does it represent all those Arab-Americans, and does it reflect the concern and needs of the entire Arab-American population, or only those of a few? Let’s ask the ADC and other Arab-American Organizations the following questions:

1- Where are their actions on the problem of containing occupation of Lebanon by Syria? Lebanon, the country which was a good model for all countries in the Middle East in terms of peace, freedom of religion and expression, is on its way to becoming an Islamized State.

2- Where are their actions on the frequent attacks on the Copts in Egypt by the Muslim extremists and the Egyptian government denying their basic right in equality with their fellow Muslim citizens?

3- Where are their actions on the human rights of the Christian Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, where Muslim extremists are forcing them to leave their land? All this was from financial support of the oil money of Saudi Arabia, Gulf States, and Iran. These extremist groups have destroyed and forcibly closed many churches in the Gaza strip so that now only four churches are left, while there were more than fifty churches 10 years ago.

4- Where are their actions in defending and condemning the ethnic cleansing of Assyrians and Chaldeans from Iraq?

5- Where are their actions and defense of the people of Southern Sudan? They are suffering one of the most severe plans of starvation and ethnic cleansing in modern history with the purpose of forcing them to embrace Islam.

The fact is that the ADC and other Arab Organizations are busy executing the agenda that has been put behind the walls by Muslim countries. We see that the ADC is very active in defending the rights of the Muslims in Bosnia Herzegovina and the rights of Muslims everywhere. The ADC forgets that it is an Arabic Organization and that the country of Bosnia Herzegovina is a European country that does not share a border with an Arab country and is not a member of the Arab League. We must in truth, that the Eastern Christians in the USA and the West, must recognize
the tactics and the danger of these types of organizations, such as the ADC who are supported by known Arab-Muslim countries that are known for hate of Christianity. Therefore, all Eastern Christians must reject the terminology of —Arab Americansll when it refers to them, because in truth the term is an insult and injustice to the rights of their parents, grandparents and ancestors who suffered and continue to suffer severe persecution from the Arab-Muslim governments up to present time. In addition, using the term —Arab-Americansll is a crime of denying and not giving the true origin and roots of Eastern Christians to the new generations who were born in the USA and the West and who deserve to know the truth about their heritage and history. We must educate the children of immigrants of Eastern Christians with the truth about the history, culture, and languages of their ancestors and how these things were abolished from the world map. Eastern Christians must oppose and boycott the Arabic-Muslim Media in the USA and the West, and must expose their wicked agenda to the public.

In Summary

Christians from Arab-speaking countries should be called —Eastern Christians. It is the right Biblical terminology, or by terms such as Lebanese-Americans, Coptic/Egyptian-Americans, Palestinian Americans, etc or just Americans period, rather than identifying with the Arab-Muslims who persecuted and killed our ancestors and abolished our original cultures and languages. The Eastern Christians must recognize that the name —Arabll given to Christians is a new hidden method by the Anti-Christian groups to abolish the identity of the Eastern Christians. We must act as Eastern Christians and unite our efforts, educating our children and people of the USA and the West about the suffering and discrimination that the Christians face every day in the lands in the Middle East, especially in the Arabic-speaking countries. In this regard, we must appreciate and encourage the effort of —The Eastern Committee in the USA, which was founded in 1992 and represents a coalition of Lebanese, Coptic, and Assyrian organizations in the USA and the West. Therefore, we must call all Eastern Christian communities of Assyrians, Chaldeans, Copts, Jordanians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Sudanese and Syrians to join and support —The Eastern Committee in the USAAll to represent their concerns and to liberate ourselves from false Arabic-Muslim identity.

*Editor’s Note: The numbers are now believed to be between 5-6.5 million Middle East/Arabic-speaking immigrants in the United States. 78% are Middle East Christians.*
What is the origin and history of Christians in the Middle East?

- "...overwhelming majority of Middle East Christians came from nationalities which did not convert to Islam after the Arab conquest of the seventh century."

What is the situation of Christians in the Middle East today?

- **Types of Persecutions:**

  There are various types of persecutions of Christians in the Middle East. We can sort them in two:

  a) **Religious persecution of individuals** (human rights abuse): This persecution is conducted against individuals because of their religious affiliation, individuals are punished for displaying crosses or stars of David, jailed for praying in public, and in some cases punished by death, for not complying with the religious tenants. Converts to Christianity are sentenced to death.

  b) **Political oppression of religious communities** (ethno-religious cleansing): In this case, ruling regimes are oppressing entire religious communities on political, security, and economic levels. The objectives of such oppression is to reduce the influence of the Christian communities, and in certain cases, to reduce it physically.

  The ethno-religious cleansing of Christian peoples in the Middle East alternate between military suppression and political oppression. Moreover para-military fundamentalist groups are conducting pogroms against the Christians, which includes burning Churches and assassinating civilians. The stated objective of the ruling regime is to Arabise and Islamize the Christian.

  Religious persecution of Christians in the Middle East has reached extreme forms of human degradation.

  **The authors of persecution:**

  a. The religious persecution and oppression is normally conducted by one religious group against other religious group: for Christians, this case has been the case. Of course, persecution can also conducted by members of one particular group against other members of the same religious group on the basis of religious fundamentalism.

  b. Persecution of ethno-religious groups, the Mideast Christians in particular, is conducted by legal governments (Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Sudan) or by organizations (National Islamic Front in Sudan, Front Islamique de Salut, the Hizbollah of Lebanon, etc.)
How many Christians remain in the Middle East?

- The largest Christian community of the Middle East is found in Egypt, which has ten to twelve million Copts. This Christian group comprises 1/5 to 1/6 of the country's population. Egypt is also a major recipient of U.S. foreign aid, despite blatant violations of religious freedom which occurs weekly in this country.

- The Southern Sudanese are about six million. Christians are the largest monotheist group.

- The Christians of Lebanon: about 1.5 million still reside there and more than 6 million live in the diaspora, including about a quarter of that number in the United States. Among the Lebanese Christians, the largest group is the Maronites, which are Catholics which follow Rome. Other smaller religious entities include the Melkites and Orthodox Christians.

- The Assyro-Chaldeans: Around one million in Iraq with large concentrations in the Kurdish zone.

- The Christians of Syria: About 1.2 million including Aramaics, Armenians, Melkites and Orthodox.

- There are small but significant Christian communities in other countries such as Iran, Jordan, Israel, and less significant in Turkey, Algeria. By law there are no Christians in Saudi Arabia.

What has been the situation for Christians in Israel/Palestine?

- In the last census conducted by the British mandatory authorities in 1947, there were 28,000 Christians in Jerusalem. The census conducted by Israel in 1967 (after the Six Day War) showed just 11,000 Christians remaining in the city. This means that some 17,000 Christians (or 61%) left during the days of King Hussein's rule over Jerusalem. Their place was filled by Muslim Arabs from Hebron.

  During the British mandate period, Bethlehem had a Christian majority of 80%. Today, under Palestinian rule, it has a Muslim majority of 80%.

  Few Christians remain in the Palestinian-controlled parts of the West Bank. Those who can - emigrate, and there will soon be virtually no Christians in the Palestinian Authority controlled areas. The Palestinian Authority is trying to conceal the fact of massive Christian emigration from areas under its control.

- *Middle East Digest* - Nov/Dec 1997
• *Time* magazine (April 23, 1990): "After years of relative harmony, friction between Christians and their fellow-Arabs [in the disputed territories] has intensified sharply with the rise of Muslim fundamentalism." (Time went on to cite various examples of Muslims pressuring Christian Arabs).

• *The Jerusalem Post* (May 2, 1991): "Muslim activists have been trying to convert Bethlehem, home of some of Christianity's holiest sites and once predominantly Christian, into a Muslim town. In contrast to the world-wide fuss over the purchase of a hostel in Jerusalem's 'Christian Quarter' by Jews, this steady and often violent encroachment has met with a thunderous silence in the Christian world. The pattern of increased violence has been unmistakable. Last December 21, a school for nuns was torched. During the first week in March, there was an attempt to break through the wall of the Carmelite monastery, followed by a break-in at a Christian school. On March 3 vandals desecrated Bethlehem's Greek Orthodox cemetery, removing crosses and disinterring and mutilating corpses ..."

• *La Terra Sancta* (A Vatican publication, dated 1991): "The Christians are abandoning the Middle East ... [although] the Jewish presence has alarmed the Arabs ... more than anything else, the commercial, cultural and technological contacts of recent years have caused a confrontation between Western civilization and Middle Eastern culture, or, as is commonly known, Islamic culture against Judeo-Christian."

• *The Jerusalem Post* (May 6, 1994): In April 1994, Israel's Hebrew press reported that Christian Arabs had accused activists of Arafat's Fatah faction of the PLO of harassing Franciscan nuns in the Aida convent near Bethlehem. One nun described as a "reign of terror" the behavior of the activists, who allegedly regularly invaded the convent, vandalized graves, destroyed equipment and painted graffiti.

• *CNN* (December 20, 1995): "Today, Bethlehem is a predominantly Muslim town. At Friday prayers, they spill into Manger Square [the traditional site of Jesus' birth], so crowded are the mosques. Christians complain they're publicly harassed and harangued for their faith. The Christian cemetery has been desecrated and vandalized ... this Christian boy said the Muslims are fascists, bad people. Muslim families of 10 and 12 children leave smaller Christian families awash in an Islamic sea, afraid they will be overwhelmed by the refugee camps and Muslim villages around Bethlehem. Many of the town's Christians are afraid to talk openly now."

• *The Times* (London, December 22, 1997): "Life in [PA-ruled] Bethlehem has become insufferable for many members of the dwindling Christian minority. Increasing Muslim-Christian tensions have left some Christians reluctant to celebrate Christmas in the town at the heart of the story of Christ's birth".

SOURCE: http://www.peacefaq.com/christians.html
Christian Presence in the Middle East Witness and Mission

Part I

Collegial Pastoral letter of the Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East to their Faithful in their different countries of residence

Signed by:

Stephanos Ghattas 1, Patriarch of Alexandria of Catholic Copts, Maximos V Hakim, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, of Alexandria and Jerusalem, Mar Ignace Antoine II Hayek, Antiochian Patriarch of the Syrian Catholics, Mar Nasrallah-Pierre Sfeir, Patriarch of Maronite Antioch and all the East, Mar Raphail 1st Bidawid, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, Jean-Pierre XVIII Kasparian, Patriarch of the Armenian Catholics, Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

Greetings and Thanksgiving

1. The greeting of the apostle introduces this collegial pastoral Letter, fruit of the 2nd symposium of our Council held in Cairo 17-22 February, 1992, where we were the guests of H.B. Patriarch Stephanos II Ghattas, Patriarch of Alexandria of the Catholic Copts. In addressing this greeting to you, we give thanks to God always for all of you remembering you in our prayers unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 1:2-3).

2. We direct our- selves to you, brothers Catholic sons and daughters, who live in our beloved East and in the ancient Arab lands. Through you, we wish also to direct ourselves to all our Christian brothers and sisters in the region, to all those who believe in God, to all our compatriots, and all persons of good will, for ever and ever (cf. I Cor 15:28).

Experience and reflection

3. The grace of faith shone for the first time in our East, and from there spread to the ends of the inhabited earth. This grace gave rise to a rich and enduring experience of faith and civilization in our countries and our societies. By our constant prayer and meditation, we wish so to foster it that it continues to open up its pathway through ever-renewed conditions. We, therefore, beseech the grace of the Holy Spirit, who guides us to the fullness of truth who teaches us everything and reminds us of all that our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, told us (cf. Jn 14:26:16:13). We ask this same Spirit "to remain with you, and be in you" (Jn 14:17). The subject of our 2nd Symposium was the meaning of our Christian presence in our societies, and the way in which we give our Christian witness. In this pastoral letter, we wish to share our reflections and our views with you, so that together we might seek the will of God for us, and respond to the appeals of the societies to which we belong. This Pastoral Letter is a continuation of the
dialogue we established with you in our 1st Message following our 1st Symposium in Lebanon (24 August 1991).

I. New Facts and changes

A. In the world

Unity and communications

4. The continuing development of the means of communication has brought a compact unity to the world of today. Our universe has come to resemble a global village, the extremes of which have met, and each of its parts has an influence on the others within the whole of the body of mankind. Thus, it is no longer possible for a human group to live on the margin of history as a neutral observer of what occurs around it. The solidarity of mankind in good times and bad is one of the great signs of the times which overshadows the life of the world today. This requires us to cast a glance, however fleeting and partial, at what is happening all around us, and within our Churches. Our Christian presence in the East is determined by this context and directed by it.

Changes and conflicts

5. Over the last years, a new situation has been developing on the international level. Important changes have taken place, and it is not clear yet what their outcome will be. These changes are occurring constantly and have repercussions in all parts of the world. They lead States and societies to review their plans and the positions they have adopted. In the midst of all these changes old conflicts give way to new ones, within the context of a different geographical and political restructuring. This gives rise to the many questions that trouble the international community and sharpen its ability to handle conflicts in a way that serves the good of mankind, peace, tranquility and stability. While awaiting the realization of the hopes of the human family, however, some societies continue to suffer the effects of the changes caused by these conflicts, with all the destruction and hatred that this entails. As the world advances towards the longed-for stability, mankind is tormented by overwhelming ambitions, and more than at any other time the future of the world is brought into question by serious hazards.

The new world order

6. In our first message, we referred to what has come to be known as "the new world order". Although still beyond our grasp, the family of nations is seeking to establish it. If, by this order, we are to understand a climate of peace and relaxation which would allow the world to come to grips with the many unsolved problems with which it is faced for the good of the whole of mankind, this would present a new hope for humanity as it stands on the threshold of the third millennium of our era. If, however, it means that private forces are to monopolize the future of the universe and manipulate it in their own interests and selfish purposes, this would raise serious doubts about the future condition of mankind. The matter is still under study, and definitive judgment would be
premature at this point. We certainly hope that in the end it will be the common good that triumph us for all, and that the foundations of justice, peace and development for all men and women will be firmly established.

**North and South**

7. Unforeseen and significant new events have taken place in important areas of our planet. Notwithstanding the conflicts and trials that accompany them, we hope they will be beneficial for the peoples involved. However, these facts should not lead us to overlook one of the important questions raised throughout the world by the situation of the Third World, and by relations between the North and South: between an advanced, industrialized North and a poor, developing South. The following question must be asked: how will the new world order tackle this tragic situation? Will a positive interaction be established between North and South? Will this interaction take into account the aspirations and problems of the peoples of the South? Will an effort be made to satisfy the real needs for cultural, economic, and social development in this suffering part of the world, while respecting its character, its aspirations, its outlook and its hopes? Will the Third World be given a real chance to make itself heard, and determine for itself the role it will play in the general evolution? Or will it continue to lag behind the rest of mankind in the process of development? There are many fundamental, urgent and vital questions to be answered.

**Coexistence**

8. At the heart of this situation we find the great challenge faced by the modern world: the question of coexistence between the different human families. It would not be an exaggeration to maintain that all the problems that have afflicted our times have grown out of this fundamental question, or are extensions of it. A feature of the modern world is an awareness of the distinctive nature and authenticity of different peoples and social categories. It is at times difficult to reconcile this awareness with the demands of peace and good neighborliness, both within a single country and between countries and regions. It is also the cause of a lack of transparency in human relations, provoking crises which frequently become bloody conflicts. The contemporary world must respond to the following urgent question: How to live together in mutual respect and peace, while taking into account the pluralism characteristic of today's world? How can the pluralism which has so often been used as an excuse for misunderstandings and bloody struggles be transformed into a call for communication and complementarily? Can the logic of "Either Me or Him" be replaced by the logic of "You and Me"? This is the kind of question we must face up to.

**B. In Our Arab World**

**An essential partner**

9. Notwithstanding the variety of its regions, of its socio-political regimes, of its peoples, its minorities and orientations, the Arab world constitutes a characteristic geographical
and cultural unity. This world of ours does not stand at the margin of the diverse new phenomena which are springing up around it. It constitutes rather, an important part of them, constantly interacting with them at all levels and in all areas, and experiencing all the positive and negative consequences they produce. It can justly be claimed that the Arab world is an essential and influential partner in the interplay of the variables, new facts, conflicts and challenges of modern times. All this is due to its geographical position, its cultural bonds with the rest of the world, the wealth of its natural resources (principally oil), and the political problems which affect it, and which are of concern to the whole world. All this means that the Arab world is of particular importance in the context of world conflict, and gives it a special responsibility in the search for peace and international stability. This explains why our region has become a crucible of international conflict -as we declared in the message we issued after our first Symposium- conflicts which exhaust our peoples and disturb the peace of the world.

The gestation of a civilization

10. The Arab world is part of the Third World. This implies a difficult gestation as regards its civilization. It is a world in search of itself, trying to shape its existence and find a place for itself in the world of today. That would allow it to be a positive element in the evolution of a world civilization and the consolidating of peace, playing the part that corresponds to the authenticity of its identity and the characteristics of its inheritance. The search has to thread a path through deep social, geopolitical, economic and cultural changes, beset by innumerable internal and external differences. As a result, this difficult gestation experiences its ups and downs, makes progress and suffers setbacks. As it undergoes this historic trial, the Arab world feels that cannot recognize itself in the images the world applies to it. This has repercussions on its relations with the rest of the world and its outlook, creating tensions which are difficult to overcome.

Continues part II

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11. The problems involved in this gestation are many, and overlapping. We mention a number of them, but the list is not exhaustive: heritage and modernity, political stability, political and social regimes, socio-economic development, unity in diversity, protected from divisions and disintegration, public freedoms, including religious freedom and freedom of conscience, the problems of justice, peace and the rights of the human being, including those of women, the position of minorities and respect for their diversity, and the relationship with a pluralistic world in rapid evolution. The Arab lives in the midst of these problems, and seeks his identity as a response to his memories of the past and the questions posed by the future. A deciding moment is open to him, and he will decide on his fate and his future, only in so far as he is fully aware of the challenges and their intricate make-up, and is in control of the situation. He also
requires wisdom, discernment and patience to tackle these problems in a way that
serves the good of all those who live in this sensitive part of the world.

Current problems

12. A part from all this, the Arab word is faced by grave problems which have played a
vital role in the changes it has under gone and still influence nature of these problems
and the multitude of partners involved can only, it must be said, complicate them even
further. In the fore front of these problems is the Palestinian question. It has had a deep
influence on the contemporary history of the region and has stirred the Arab
conscience. It will continue to be an essential part of its trial as long as the Palestinian
people are the victim of injustice and oppression. As regards the Lebanese question,
there is an uneasy truce after all the sufferings and misfortune inflicted on all the sides
involved, first of all on the Lebanese and the Palestinians. Add to this all the lesser and
greater wars that have taken place, and will continue to take place in different Arab
countries, giving rise to suffering, misfortune and destruction. In particular, we would like
to mention the tragedy of the people of Iraq, who are waiting to overcome the state of
isolation and blockade imposed on them, and participate once again in the life of the
Arab world and that of the family of nations. We say this as the international community
and all the parties involved are considering how to deal with these problems and solve
them in their discussions. We pray that the initiatives undertaken in this regard may be a
genuine, serious opportunity for finding a just, lasting and global solution for these
different problems, and lead to the establishment of an equitable order, which
guarantees dignity and freedom to all, and reinforces a new and positive set of regional
and international relations for the good of all the peoples of the region without
exception.

C. In our Churches Living

13. Our Churches are not isolated islands or foreign bodies living on the margin of
history. They are living Churches fully engaged in the whirlwind of world and regional
events. They are affected by them, but in turn have the ability to act on them. Our
Christian communities are a yeast which has its place in the human dough (cf. Mtt
13:33). They are engaged in a permanent interaction with their Lord, with one another
and with their environment: with their Lord, in order by the light of faith to discover his
will for them; with one another, in order to find in their thought, their spirituality, their
heritage and their recent experiences, the seeds of their vocation and renewal; with
their respective societies, in order to hear their appeals, their suffering and their needs.
By means of all this, our Churches recover their distinct character, their particular
contribution and their authenticity characterized by antiquity and constant renewal. We
are at a decisive turning point, overwhelmed by events, changes and challenges at
three levels -the world, regional and local- and our Churches pause to reflect and
meditate on the renewal of their fidelity to God and man. We look back and give thanks

14. In this regard, we can but give thanks to God for the signs of the Spirit revealed in
the life of our Al-Bushra Churches and their earthly progress. The Holy Spirit dwells in
our Churches. He acts in them and renews their youthfulness. For the spirit makes all things new (Rev. 21:15). It is this spirit which gives us peace of heart and the courage to continue along our way with you, full of confidence, however many difficulties there may be, however daunting the challenges. In our churches today, we are witnesses to a vast movement of serious, responsible, creative reflection, aimed at shaping our ecclesial, social identity as believers, hic et nunc (here and now). This reflection is common to all the Christian Churches and the socio-cultural categories of which they are composed, and in spite of the different starting points, it brings them together in the heart of the same ecclesial crucible. This movement finds that reflection alone does not suffice. It must be put into action in the different areas, such as liturgical life, social action, commitment in the diverse forms of public life, a growing participation of the laity in Church life, maturity of faith in the diverse sectors of the Christian people, the growth in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, and other expressions of the calling to the service of mission. The varied seeds of renewal which have begun to sprout in our Churches are a promising sign of their vitality and a pledge for the future.

15. The seeds of renewal are accompanied by a number of difficulties and problems. We must reflect upon these if we are to face up to them. As we contemplate the future, we are not unaware of the concern and fear which overshadow us, both you and us, in the challenges and demands of this turning point of history in which we live. As we examine our position, we see ourselves as a ship making headway through the storms. This awakens fears for the present and for the future, for ourselves, our existence, our authenticity and our identity, accompanied by the discouragement and despair that such fears can arouse. The many serious difficulties faced by our Christian communities at every moment of their daily life are never absent from our minds. These difficulties are not unrelated to the tensions which spring up for one reason or another in each individual Church, or because of the divisions and separation between the different Churches in the East, or our relations with others, which are often not subject to the spirit of fraternity and respect, and also by the precarious nature of our life in this region. All this gives rise to a number of disturbing questions. It causes us to live in a state of permanent tension undoubtedly one of the reasons leading some of us to emigrate. And the phenomenon of emigration continues to be an open wound that limits our vitality and even raises a question mark over our very existence and our witness. We launch an appeal.

16. Nonetheless, we should all remember that our faith in Jesus Christ is an element of considerable spiritual energy which has accompanied us in the past and brought us through the most difficult historical transformations. This same energy accompanies us now and in the future, giving us confidence in ourselves and serenity as we move ahead. It is Christ himself who accompanies us amidst the waves and the storms. He tells us, "Why are you afraid, 0 you of little faith" (Mt 8:26). Our faith is a liberating force, that sets us free from the paralyzing fear caused by our difficulties. Our Churches are Easter Churches, and tension is one dimension of an existence which involves death and resurrection.
Hence, we appeal to all the faithful in our countries, inviting them to reflection and action, whatever the difficulties. Rooted in Christ, their Churches and their societies, and moving forward in faith and joy, let them always remember "that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us" (Rom 8:18).

II. Presence of faith and prayer Presence

17. After reviewing with you the world, regional and ecclesial conditions in which we live, we should now like to endeavor to define in the light of our faith, some of the characteristics of our vocation and our mission. We have chosen "presence" as a fact of faith which accompanies our reflection, gives unity to its different aspects and defines its overall orientation. Presence means that in the midst of the society in which we live we are a sign of God’s presence in our world. That invites us to be "with" "in" "for" and not "against" "outside" or "on the margin" of the society in which we live. This is an essential demand of our faith, our vocation and our mission. Presence is situated between two opposing pitfalls: "marginalization" and "dissolution." Marginalization nullifies our mission and dissolution produces the same effect as regards our identity since authentic presence is a guarantee for both, mission and identity. Presence deepens our faithfulness to God, to ourselves and to the society God has given us as the theatre of our earthly progress.

The Christian Presence in the MIDDLE EAST Witness and Mission

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Presence of mission and witness

18. Our Christian presence is not a presence for our own sake alone. Christ did not found his Church in its own service, but that it might be a confessing Church with a mission, the same mission as that of her founder and Master. The failure to live the spirit of mission and witness in our lives as Christians and our ecclesiastical progress would constitute a renunciation of ourselves and of the mission to which the Savior has called us. The Church will be the true Church of Christ in so far as she is a sign of the saving love or the Father for mankind, by the grace of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ defined the sense of our presence when he said, “You will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8). And the Apostles responded to this call, "of this we are all witnesses" (Acts 2:32). His Holiness Pope John Paul II has described this form of Christian and ecclesiastical life: " The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission: Christ whose mission we continue is the "witness" par excellence (Rev 1:5; 3:14) and the model of all Christian witness. Christians and Christian communities are very much part of the life of their respective nations and can be a sign of the Gospel in their fidelity to their native land, people and national culture while always preserving the freedom brought by Christ (Encyclical letter "Redemptoris Missio", 42-43). Witness to the evangelical beatitudes is the first path of the Gospels to the heart of man and his conscience. If in the past the Christian communities in the East
have turned in on themselves because of the constraints of the historical conditions, and lost the sense of mission and witness, content merely with the effort to survive, today they are called to free themselves from the after-effects of the past in order to incorporate a sense to open which witness brings person of mission into their lives, themselves up to the world surrounds them and bear to the buried treasure that joy to their hearts, as it joy to the heart of every (cf. Mt 13:44 46).

Light, salt and leaven

19. The teaching of our Lord and Savior calls us to such a manner of witness when he calls us to be light: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand where it gives light to all in the house. Just so your light must shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father” (My 5:14-16). And salt: You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot” (Mt 5:13). And leaven: The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened (Mt 13:33). If the light is removed from the house, it loses the sense of its existence. If the salt is separated from the food it is useless. If the leaven is removed from the dough, it hardens and decays. When we are no longer light, salt and leaven, we become an inert, solid entity, a dead weight for ourselves and our society.

"Do not be afraid, little flock"

20. The Gospel words we have quoted contain a great message of joy for the Christians in the East. If we read them in the light of our Al-Bushra condition as a minority in our societies, they are capable of transforming that condition. The sociological fact which weighs upon our psychology, the way in which we look upon the other, and the other looks upon us, is transformed into an element of witness and mission lived in joy and faith. The light in the house might be weak, but it gives light to the whole house. Salt is a minor element in food, but it flavors all of it. The leaven is a tiny proportion of the dough, but it causes it to rise, preparing it to become bread. We recall what we told you in our first message, “The Church is not measured in numbers. She does not depend on statistics but on the awareness which her sons and daughters have of their own vocation and mission. The time has come for us to transform this quantitative factor into a qualitative element. Spiritual energy must take the place of the weight of numbers. In this way we must free ourselves from everything that our historical condition as a minority may have produced as deadly psychological and social after-effects as a temptation to turn in on ourselves as lack of self-confidence and trust in society as a persecution complex marginalization and dissolution.” “Do not be afraid little flock” (Lk 12:32). The first Christians who came to life in our countries were but a small minority, but they were marked by the vitality of the new man, by their enthusiasm and joy. Everyone looked on them with admiration and wonder. They enjoyed favor with all the people (Acts 2:47). The idea that people have of us depends, in one way or another, on
the quality and intensity of our presence, not on the greater or lesser number of our communities. A Personal faith.

21. Our Christian presence is intimately connected to the quality of our faith, to its depth and intensity. Faith is a gift from God granted to us in Jesus Christ. The Lord entrusted this precious deposit to his Apostles, who in turn handed it on to their successors. The succeeding generations of Christians have handed on this deposit without stain or reproach. This they have done notwithstanding the risks, the historic changes and difficulties. We can but give thanks to God for the courage, the perseverance, the patience and wisdom shown by our Churches in the Middle East, enabling them to safeguard the deposit which has come down to us as a living thing. Succeeding generations have also enriched this deposit with their thought, their heritage, their culture and way of life, their witness and, in many cases, their martyrdom. There can be no doubt that modern challenges and the profound changes taking place around us are calling on us to renew our fidelity to our faith. What we have received from our fathers must be transformed into a conscious, free, responsive and active acceptance. We observe that faith today faces real challenges in the important changes being effected in traditional social structures. These structures no longer contribute as they did in the past to the preservation and strengthening of our faith. Faith which is merely an inheritance, and is not transformed in to a deep personal conviction, is not enough to meet the challenges of the present day. It is, rather, personal faith blossoming in the Church which will make it into a living community. Hence, its existence is no longer related to ephemeral, changing social arrangements, but to divine love which brings us together in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Formation in the Faith

22. To move from a faith which is a mere inheritance to that of a personal commitment depends, to a certain extent, on the deepening of faith through formation. Ignorance or superficiality in matters of faith can lead to its loss. This is particularly true as regards to the deep changes in the life styles of our modern-day societies. Even here in the East, we are experiencing radical changes in the traditional climate which in the past helped to safeguard and strengthen our faith. For the believer, not to know his faith means not to know himself. When the believer does not know himsef, he loses his identity, his vocation and his mission. Likewise, the community of the faithful loses its authenticity and becomes a social body deprived of its living interaction with its divine roots. In this regard, those initiatives dedicated to deepening religious knowledge, awareness of the Church and spiritual experiences in adults, both within ordinary institutions and in specialized centers, are worthy or every praise. We appeal for these efforts to be continued and intensified, and for them to be provided with the necessary human and material means. This will contribute to the formation of a new generation of faithful who can grasp the meaning of their belonging to Christ, to their Church and to their society. In this way, too, their understanding of their faith will include all aspects of their public and personal lives, enriching and vivifying them.
Religious Education

23. Religious education continues to be an essential requirement if the believer is to become aware of his Christian identity, his ecclesial belonging and his mission in society, and develop the seeds of faith sown in him by God by the grace of baptism. It is no exaggeration to say that, in one way or another, the authentic face of the believer and the vitality of the community of believers depend on the quality of religious education received in the Church. For the believer, this education is both a right and a duty. The Church must therefore provide favorable conditions, effective instruments and continuity for this education, enabling it to recover its importance in the life of the Church in our countries. Whether at home, at school or in the parish, it is within this educational triad that the believer will find the growth and maturity for all areas of his Christian life. It is vital for religious education to continue to be one of the essential tasks of our Churches and institutions. Only thus will faith become "living explicit and active (Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church, n.14) in the life of believers and of the Christian community. It is only right that we should publicly express our esteem and affection for all those who dedicate themselves to this noble task: priests, religious men and women, and laity. Our Churches value highly your efforts and invite you to continue to respond to the demands of such an elevated mission by pursuing your preparation at the dogmatic, pedagogical and spiritual levels.

Presence and prayer

24. The man of the East is a man of prayer. In good days and bad, he stands before God in a continuous dialogue which glorifies God, purifies the heart and renews one's existence. There can be no doubt that the spiritual, liturgical and Eucharistic life is one of the most obvious features of the history of our beloved East. The East, in the words of Pope Pius XI speaking of Islam, is "The East which prays". It is well known that in our Churches liturgical prayer has always been the living setting within which succeeding generations have transmitted the deposit of faith. It is here that our Churches have formed and developed the faith in the hearts of the faithful. On the other hand, prayer in its different forms is the preeminent aspect of Christian presence. If it is associated with social commitment, nourishing it and being nourished by it, it expresses the true image of the believer, who is spiritually charged in the presence of his Lord, and finds the
energy needed for action and commitment in the different areas of life. Our land is the land of the historical dialogue between God and mankind. This dialogue is continued and renewed through every community in dialogue with its Lord. From the clear waters of this dialogue it draws its strength and spiritual identity. At this point, we cannot overlook the wave of prayer spreading throughout the Church. This revival has deep roots within our ancient spiritual patrimony, and we are called upon to give them greater life, make them more active. The phenomenon to which we have referred has given birth to many prayer groups within our Churches. We wish to encourage them to draw on our own spiritual heritage, and actively to participate in the life of the Church and her spiritual renewal.

Anchoretism and penance

25. The feature that corresponds to the presence of prayer in our Eastern patrimony is the presence of anchoretism, expressed in the different forms of monastic life, and in the asceticism practiced by the ordinary faithful. This type of Christian life, moreover, flourished and developed in the East. It continues to be an outstanding witness to the vitality of the Christian faith in our lands and throughout the world. In Arab history, the monasteries have constituted a specific reference point for the recognition of Christianity, as witnessed to by the ancient Arab literature. At present, the trials which beset our peoples from all sides recall that life is a spiritual combat which elevates the soul, purifying it by giving the courage to meet all difficulties. Asceticism enables the believer to contemplate creation and history with a spirit freed from all passion. It helps him to make his presence in the world of today positive and effective. Hence, we are called on to encourage the anchorite life in our Churches, as the vanguard of the Christian presence and of the Gospel witness in our countries. It likewise demands from us that we adopt the basic Gospel values represented by the anchorite life, living in accordance with these values, which support us in our earthly progress and make our presence a living sign of the Kingdom.

III. An Incarnate presence Christ Incarnate

26. The Incarnation is at the heart of our Christian faith: He came down from heaven and by the power of the Holy Spirit he was born of the Virgin Mary and became man (Symbol of Faith). John expresses this divine fact in his Gospel when he says, —In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (Jn 1:1;14). The Letter to the Hebrews echoes this sentiment: Now since the children share in the blood and flesh he likewise shared in them... therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way (Heb 2:14-17). The human nature which our God and Lord assumed in the Incarnation is not an imaginary nature. It is a true nature with all its density and components (except for sin), with everything that pertains to it as individual, social and cultural characteristics. As a result, the mystery of the Incarnation is the basis and model for the Christian community in its earthly pilgrimage. It must therefore influence pastoral activity at all levels and in all areas.
The Incarnate Church

27. The incarnation of the Church is one aspect of the mystery of the incarnate Christ. The Church is a divine and human reality, living in time and space, with all that this implies as regards historical, geographical, social and cultural conditioning. The Church is rooted in this tangible human reality to which she owes her visible features and particular character. It has obvious repercussions for the way in which she lives her vocation and mission, hic et nunc (here and now). The mediation of this incarnation is ensured by the particular Churches, for the "Church" toto orbe diffusa' (spread to the whole world) would become a mere abstraction unless it assumed body and life in the individual Churches" (Paul VI. Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi, n.62). It is in the particular Churches that the one holy catholic and apostle in Church of Christ is truly present and active (Decree on the Pastoral Mission of Bishops, n.II). The Church is presence, and this presence is accomplished by means of the particular Churches when they are incarnate in the world of the real man, a man speaking this or that language. Each will have its own cultural heritage its own outlook on the world its own historical memories, its own human foundations (Evangelii Nuntiandi, n.62). Evangelization will lose much of its power and efficacy if it does not take into consideration the people to whom it is addressed, if it does not make use of their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not offer an answer to the questions which are relevant to them if in a word it does not reach and influence their way of life (ibid., n.63). All this, of course, on condition that the proclamation is not emptied of content or altered. This kind of incarnation is one of the requirements for the universality of the Church. It can only truly bear fruit if the particular Churches maintain a deep and living communion of faith with the universal Church (cf Ibid., n.64).

The heritage of the East

28. Here one should take note of the fact that our Churches in the East have throughout history shown a remarkable ability for this kind of adaptation, which has given birth to many different civilizations and heritages, enriching the common patrimony of the Church and of human culture. This heritage was mentioned by the Vatican Council II, which praised its richness, and declared it to be a treasure for the whole Church (cf. Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, n. 1;5; etc.). Cultural variety such as this remains alive in the Eastern Churches. They are illuminated by it and communicate its light. In it they find inspiration to face up to the contemporary challenges of cultures and civilizations. In this respect, we can only encourage those initiatives dedicated to renewing this heritage, translating it, studying it and purifying it, and making it accessible to all, so that it nourishes the Christian memory of our lands, and can meet the challenges of the present and the calls of the future. May our common heritage be made more available to the faithful of our different Churches, giving us pride in it and instructing us in it. It is one of the vital sources of our faith and of our Christian life.
Incarnation in the Arabic Language

29. The interaction of our Churches with different civilizations has never ceased, but has rather maintained an ever-renewed vitality throughout the succeeding generations and periods of history in our region. Mention must be made of the cultural vitality that has been a characteristic of our Churches since the Arab conquest. The different Eastern Churches have not been onlookers or prisoners of bygone days. They have made the effort to express themselves in accordance with the new cultural conditions. The Arabic language has gradually entered the different areas of liturgical, intellectual and daily life. In this way our Churches have successfully crossed this historic threshold, in spite of all the difficulties. They have received their letters of credence and become inseparable partners in the development of civilization in this part of the world. The commonplace that claims that ―The Arabic language has refused to be Christianized and Christianity has refused to be Arabized‖ is, in the light of all the evidence, historically false.

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Stephanos II Ghattas Patnarch of Alexandria of the Catholic Copts; Maximos V. Waxir, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, of Alexandria and Jerusalem; Mar IgnaceAntoine II Hayek, Antiochian Patriarch of the Syrian Catholics; Mar Nasrallah-Pierre Sfeir, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East; Mar Raphail I st Bidawid, Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans; Jean-Pierre XVIII Kasparian, Patriarch of the Armenian Catholics; Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

Incarnation in Arab civilization

30. Christians in the Middle East do not limit themselves to using the Arabic language as a means of expression for their rites, their particular culture, and daily relations. They have gone beyond this to concern themselves with the future of the whole of culture and civilization. Christians have not been mere spectators in the progressive modernization of Arab civilization. They have played an active part by the work of translation and the production of original works. They have thus created an outstanding means of cooperation between Muslims, Jews and Christians, and we can rightly be proud of this cooperation as a model and privileged means of coexistence. This cooperation has given life to a genuine Arabic culture, and, for centuries, has allowed it to nourish universal culture by its dynamism and richness. In this way, a common cultural heritage has been generated and the three partners have all helped to crystallize it. Mutual assistance and cohesion on the level of civilization between Christianity, Islam and Judaism, have thus become a reality engraved on the fidelity of each side to its own faith and beliefs. This phenomenon is not limited to the formative period of Arab civilization. It also applies to the following periods. In the period of the modern renaissance, for example, Christians, alongside their Muslim and Jewish brothers, have been pioneers in the cultural and political resurgence of the Arab world from which we
continue to draw at present. It is this dialogue, creative of civilization, which we invite Christians, Muslims and Jews in our countries to pursue in the new historic conditions opening up to the future.

The Arab Christian heritage

31. We would also like to consider the vast, outstanding heritage which has expressed itself in the Arabic language, and nowadays is known as the “Arab Christian heritage.” It is found particularly between VIII and XIV centuries in the different Christian Churches in the Middle East. Until recently, this heritage was buried away in libraries in the form of menu scripts, and researchers have been astounded by their number, the variety of subjects, and the wealth and originality of their contents. Today, we have only words of praise for those who have striven for so many years to publish this heritage. We wish to encourage this line of research and create conditions which will enable it to continue and develop, becoming a stimulus for Arab Christian thought in the contemporary world. We appeal to our universities, institutes and centers of scientific research to take the greatest interest in this subject, and place the necessary human and material resources at its disposal.

Present day demands

32. The return to a patrimony such as this is a powerful stimulus to meet the present urgent needs of our Churches in the realm of culture and ideas. First of all, we would like to stress the importance of Christian books and the production of original, intellectual work. Our ancient Eastern heritage is authentic, but needs to be renewed, recreated to respond to the new demands posed by present-day conditions. In spite of growing activity over recent decades, the move towards translating, research, publishing and popularization is still minimum compared to the needs. We are called to multiply our efforts, undertaking practical initiatives to enrich the Arab Christian library. It must be given the means to support our Christian advancement, providing it with the essential cultural contents. This takes us back to the need for specialized publishing houses and distributors who can act together to encourage a wave of Christian thought in our lands. To this must be added the attention that needs to be given to the social media, enabling them to became a suitable means or information and culture, and at the same time a precious instrument Or Christian presence and witness.

Incarnation and Authenticity

33. The cultural dialogue characteristic or our Christian experience in the Middle East cannot be divorced from authenticity and uniqueness. Interaction at the level of civilization demands authenticity, and calls it forth. Based on this, our social environment enriches us, while in turn being enriched by us. The incarnation is realized by two Specific entities which work together to create a common form of culture that gives glory to God, and honors man, while serving him. A transitory identification with the other and the momentary coloring which gives the illusion of assimilation to him, leads in fact to the setting aside of one of the parties, and nullifies the authenticity of his
participation, just as absorption by the other leads only to a false dialogue. This helps no one and leads nowhere. We have a twofold responsibility as regards our faith, and our patrimony. Only by fidelity to the one and the other will we be able to make a real contribution to the common task of giving our societies a sense of direction on the level or civilization. Moreover, cultural action is an essential area in the evolution or our societies. We must follow this evolution both from the aspect of our patrimony and from the aspect of world culture. With patience, objectivity, and a critical spirit, we will thus be able to make a real contribution to a renewed, authentic Arab culture, in a way that is consistent with our national patrimony and responds to contemporary needs. This is what guides our faith, and is far-removed from foreign ideological perversions which would isolate us from one another and from our environment, and I also protect us from falling prey to racial slogans.

IV. Presence and Service: Christ as Servant

34. When Christ defined the different aspects or his redemptive action, he insisted on service as the distinctive feature or his mission. He is the King who has come "not to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45). Christ, the Master and Lord, is he who rose from supper and took off his outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet (Jn 13:45). In particular, he serves those who are rejected or marginalized: the sick, the physically handicapped, the poor, sinners, women, children and all those to whom society gives scarcely no importance. Christ sides with all these, and brings them out of their isolation. He has dressed their spiritual, moral and physical wounds, and restored their human dignity. He has gone beyond the social barriers and the customs of his day, even the injunctions of the law, since, he said, "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (cf Mk 2:27). In his teaching, Christ has ennobled service, giving it a particular dignity, and he who wishes to be great, will be a servant (cf Mk 10:43).

Henceforth, service is not the task of slaves, but that of free men and women, who place their freedom at the service of the needy and neglected. This royal service of Christ found its highest expression on the cross. On the cross he did not limit himself to giving what he had: he gave what he was - he gave his life for those he loved. He came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45).

The serving Church

35. It was not enough for Christ to be a servant, so Christ did not call himself alone a servant he called also his disciples to follow in his footsteps and be a sign of his presence among men by their service to one another: " You call me teacher and 'master and rightly so for indeed I am. If I therefore the master and teacher have washed your feet you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow so that as I have done for you, you should also do (Jn 13:13-15). The Church has always seen in the example of Christ an urgent call to serve every man, whoever he might be, particularly he who suffers the different forms of human wretchedness, and to serve the
whole man, body and soul. Vatican Council II has summed up this ecclesial orientation in this way: "This is the reason why this sacred Synod, in proclaiming the noble destiny of man and affirming an element of the divine in him, offers to cooperate unreservedly with mankind in fostering a sense of brotherhood to correspond to this destiny of theirs. The Church is not motivated by an earthly ambition but is interested in one thing only - to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for he came into the world to bear witness to the truth to save and not to judge to serve and not to be served (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n.3).

Thus, throughout its history, the Church has put this directive into effect through its institutions and through the variety of initiatives that go by the name of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The service of Man

36. The spiritual mission of the church cannot be separated from its mission, for the love of God poured into our hearts is directed both to man and to God: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself" (Lk 10:27). As the Church looks towards the goods of the kingdom, she does not lose sight of the value of temporal, worldly affairs. On the contrary, her commitment to everything that is human is deepened. For she is "the good Samaritan" who stops to dress the wounds of the man by the roadside. "He came upon him (and) was moved with compassion the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them' (Lk 10:34). God has shown solidarity with man in all things except sin. He took a body like ours to free us from sin and from everything that disfigures his image in us, such as spiritual, moral and corporal evils. The Church is a living, tangible, visible sign which throughout history witnesses to this divine solidarity. She therefore stands at the side of man in order to alleviate his sufferings in all their forms, and to support his development in all its aspects.

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Different fields of service

37. As we observe the Church, we see that social and humanitarian service is one of the most visible aspects of her mission. This service takes care of the varied needs that affect man: material, cultural, social, and development needs. We say this not in order to boast of it, but to renew both our solidarity with all kinds of suffering and needs, and our commitment to do everything in our power to alleviate human suffering in all its forms. Moreover, our Churches are vigilant to detect negative aspects of this action, in order to purify it, and conform their service more closely to the spirit of Christ and the Gospel. Further-more, we call on all the faithful, and particularly the social services, to
pay attention to the demands of society, to discover its new needs and open up new areas of action. This action will thus accompany social progress and identify its trials its needs and its aspirations. In doing so, it has but one objective: that of edifying man, a man aware of his being and dignity, by confronting him with the basic truth that every person is created in the image of God and his dignity stems from this divine resemblance.

In serving every person in need, our Churches are not acting Out of self-interest, and most certainly have no hidden agenda. They are at the service of every person who suffers, simply because he is a person, and hence represents the suffering of Christ crucified throughout human history.

A renewed outlook

38. We therefore repeat our appeal to the faithful and the social institutions in the Church to renew their view of society and reexamine the services they offer, so that these different services be guided by the genuine charity from which they draw their inspiration and which gives them life. The time has come to set up a permanent system to coordinate all who work in this field, both individuals and organisms, and to review their activities periodically, so that they may continue to develop and satisfy new needs. We likewise invite them to cooperate with all those who work in this field Social, humanitarian service is a privileged place for dialogue and mutual assistance between Christians of different denominations and all members of society. It pertains to the suffering person to bring us all together in unity. This requires the creation of specialized centers capable of playing their role competently and effectively. We would like to direct a special message of encouragement and affection to all those who so generously dedicate themselves to working in the different areas of social service, particularly those that involve difficulties and sacrifice.

V. Ecumenical Presence

"We will be Christians together or we will not exist!!"

39. This declaration appeared in our first message, and we wish to recall the context in which it was said. It is addressed to all our Christian brothers and sisters.

"Our Eastern Churches are distinguished by their antiquity, their patrimonies, the variety of their liturgical expressions, the authenticity of their spiritualties, the breadth of their theological horizons and the force of their centuries-old witness which has sometimes reached the heroism of martyrs. All this represents a living experience which we bear in our hearts, a powerful stimulus for our hope and a source of confidence and perseverance from which we draw in looking to the future.

Diversity is an essential characteristic of the universal Church, as it is of the Christian East. This diversity has always been a source of richness for the whole Church when we have experienced in it the unity of faith and charity. Unfortunately, this diversity has
been changed into divergences and separation because of human sin and human rejection of Christ's spirit. Nevertheless, what unites us is even stronger and more important than what divides us. It does not prevent us from meeting each other and helping one another. The Christianity of the East, in spite of its divisions represents a fundamental unity in faith, which nothing can break. We are Christians together, in good times and in bad. Our vocation is one, our witness is one and our destiny is one as well. We are thus required to work together in the different ways available and, in a spirit of fraternity and love, to give fundamental reaffirmation to the faithful who have been entrusted to us. We must do this in the various areas where we are compelled by the common good of Christians, as well as by the aspirations of all the believers of our various Churches, who put great hope in our rapprochement and our mutual assistance.

In the East, we will be Christians together or we will not exist. Certainly, interecclesial relations have not always been well-founded in our region. There are many reasons for this, both internal and external. But time has come to cleanse our memory of the bad effects of the past, however painful they may be, and to look towards the future together, in the spirit of Christ and in the light of his Gospel and the teaching of the apostles.

"That all may be One"

40. Having recalled this commitment of ours last summer, we wish to encourage this ecumenical orientation which, in truth and love, wisdom and humility, seeks to Al-Bushra being about unity of faith and Eucharistic communion for all those who believe in Christ, Christ's tunic will thus once more be seamless. Many of the divisions in the Church have, for a variety of reasons, originated in the East. These divisions have often been accompanied by a hatred and rancor contrary to the Spirit of Christ. Indeed, we believe that Christ's call to unity, "That they may be one just as we are, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John) is an appeal directed in the first place to the conscience of all of us in the East. We are entreated to set aside the logic of division and follow the path of convergence and unity. "When God wills, and as he wills", this will come about with respect for the patrimony and legitimate characteristics of each ecclesial tradition. In this East of ours, unity is not a luxury, or a mere academic question. Its absence is a wound afflicting our faithful every day. They hope for the multiplication of efforts to bind up this wound which paralyzes us and restricts our Christian witness.

Ecumenical Institutions

41. We rejoice to see the growth of ecumenical movements and institutions in the Christian world, and the initiatives in multilateral dialogue undertaken as result in the East and in the West. We accompany them with our prayer, our interest and our encouragement, that they might produce the longed-for fruits, whenever they are based on solid, clear principles. As far as the East is concerned, there can be no doubt that
"The Middle East Council of Churches", which the Catholic Churches in the Middle East joined in 1990, is in the vanguard of ecumenical institutions in our region. The importance of its role in the service of Christians and man in our societies is destined to increase. As the foundational charter declares, the Council is intended to purify the Christian presence, bring about a spiritual renewal, direct its actions towards bringing about Christian unity, manifest community witness, develop mutual cooperation in the area of social service and monitor questions related to justice and peace. We renew the commitment to the Council, which we made in our previous message. We understand it to be a place "for meeting together and seeking the common denominators which favor a collective presence and a common witness in our beloved East", it being understood that this presence and witness is not for our own benefit, but for the glory of God and the service of man in our society. Our unity is to be a living sign of fraternal meeting among all God's children in this part of the world. Hence, we will use all our strength to support the initiatives the Council undertakes in all its sections, so that our mutual cooperation becomes a feature of our ecclesial life and our pastoral activity. The "Council or Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East" is situated within the same context and spirit. It was established in August 1991, as a channel of fraternal communion between Christians in the East. Its role will be to confirm and deepen communication and unity between all the Churches in the region, as is also the case with other local or regional councils or organisms, whether Catholic, non-Catholic or ecumenical, and it will cooperate with them.

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42. Institutions are not enough. They require a genuine ecumenical spirit. Ecumenical action is first a Gospel spirituality, before being an action deployed on the ground. We recall the characteristics of this spirituality as they have been defined in the decree of Vatican Council II on ecumenism. This spirituality is based on the interior renewal of our Churches, thus providing a guarantee and a sign of success for the ecumenical movement. It is based on "a change of heart," as the movement to unity will make progress only in so far as we live more transparent lives in accordance with the Gospel, and live a closer union with the Father, the Word and the Spirit. It consists of a search for mutual fraternal knowledge, free from over-hasty assessments and preconceived ideas (ef. Decree on Ecumenism n. 6,7,9). These spiritual guidelines aim to purify our hearts, and enable us to meet our brothers and sisters, not weighed down by our fears and suspicions, but in the Spirit of Christ who has set us free from all that prevents us from seeing in the other a brother in the faith.

Difficulties and pitfalls

43. It is clear that relations between the Churches and ecumenical progress are hindered by a number of difficulties, pitfalls and problems. Some may be real obstacles,
and some a question of suspicions, of fears, of misunderstandings or negative interpretations that are the legacy of centuries of Church divisions. These difficulties appear in the pastoral field and other areas of daily life. Difficulties of this kind demand from us a sincere, fraternal explanation, in the Spirit of Christ and of the Gospel. Such a Gospel climate will help to create an environment, to prepare the ground for overcoming the difficulties which obstruct us. It is highly desirable that in every diocese a council should be set up in which these difficulties could be studied as they appear, and serve as a means of exchange and cooperation in all those areas which are in the interest of the faithful and our common witness.

**A fervent, fraternal appeal**

44. In the present day, the conditions in which the Christians of the Middle East live, with all their children, are by no means easy. It is no less certain that we are liable to meet these challenges alone. We must coordinate with all the initiatives of the other Christian Churches, especially our sister Orthodox Churches, for whom we have the greatest love, esteem and respect. The difficulties of the past, with the bitterness they have sown in human hearts, cannot be allowed to be an obstacle to fraternal exchanges for the good of Christians and their fellow-citizens in our lands. We make a fervent, fraternal appeal to all the Christian Churches to come together, to find one another. How could we reject any sincere effort to cooperate in all those areas that affect the lives of believers? In this way, we will attain unity of love while we await the great day when God grants us the gift of unity in faith which Christ desired for his Church.

**The dimensions of dialogue**

45. Throughout the course of the Economy of Salvation, the East Ecumenical spirit Al-Bushra has been the land of dialogue between God and man. This dialogue reaches its culmination in Christ, God and Man. In Him, humanity is raised up to its Creator, and God draws close to His children the whole of mankind. The permanent dialogue he establishes with them is a reflection of the eternal dialogue of the three divine persons in the heart of the Blessed Trinity. Furthermore, God has entered into a dialogue with the man in Jesus Christ so that men can maintain a dialogue amongst themselves: “flat now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ for he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity.” (Eph 2.13,14). Hence, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28).

**The Church of dialogue**

46. In Vatican Council II, the Church proclaimed that her identity, her vocation and her mission led her to be a Church of dialogue. In the post-council period that has been seen in a series of openings to the world of our time and in all directions. The organisms required to transform this orientation into action have been set up. For their part, our countries have always been a place of openings, of the passage of
civilizations, with everything that this implies with regards to reconciliation and antagonisms, complementarity and conflicts, contacts and confrontations. This has given rise to forms of civilization which welcome and incorporate pluralism. Thus, nowadays as in the past, a characteristic of our countries is religious, ethnic, cultural and church pluralism. In consequence, dialogue is their fundamental vocation and their greatest challenge. Having lived at the heart of this cultural and human diversity, our Churches see in it one of the signs of the times, which they must interpret in the light of their faith and mission. This is how they acknowledge the call to dialogue as their primary vocation. It is also how the Church is called to be a living sign of the unity of the human family in a divided world. In the times in which we live, religions are invited to play a positive role in solving mankind's problems, instead of being a place for dispute and massacres among the children of the one human family, of the same country.

The conditions for dialogue

47. Dialogue is first of all a spiritual attitude. Man is engaged in a dialogue with his God which elevates his soul and purifies his heart and conscience, and this is reflected in his dialogue within himself and with others, both as individuals and as communities. Dialogue is a spirituality which leads us from exclusion to assimilation; from rejection to welcome; from placing into rigid categories to inclusion; from distorting the image of others to respect; from condemnation to mercy; from enmity to harmony; from rivalry to complementarity; from antipathy to encounter; and from hostility to fraternity. Dialogue with the other consists in knowing him, and acknowledging him as he sees himself. This means acknowledging him in the fullness of his personality, and welcoming him as the completion of ourselves rather than as an adversary, rival or enemy. This can be done only if all preconceived ideas, self-interest, and all kinds of egoism are rejected. In such a climate, dialogue becomes a shared wealth, and neither of the parties is required to renounce its identity or patrimony. It goes without saying that fanaticism in all its different forms, be it in the name of God, or of religion, the nation, confession, land, ethnic origins and language, or in the name of social or cultural affiliation, is the first enemy of dialogue. There is a great difference between the believer and the fanatic, the believer is in the service of God, whereas the fanatic makes use of God. The believer worships God, whereas the fanatic worships himself while imagining he worships God. The believer hears the word of God; the fanatic distorts it. The believer raises himself to God's level; the fanatic brings God down to his own level. The believer fears God; the fanatic attacks His greatness. The believer does the will of God; the fanatic substitutes his own will for that of God. The believer is a grace for humanity; the fanatic is a scourge. Fanaticism is a way of rejecting both God and humanity. In the fanatic, the energy of faith and love is transformed into the energy of hostility and rancor. He believes he is honoring God, those who differ from him in religion, race, language, color or patrimony. In the believer, on the other hand, all his energy is used to bring people together, to cooperate and edify.

SOURCE: http://www.al-bushra.org/hedchrch/christianprescense.htm
The Eastern Rite Church

FR. WILLIAM SAUNDERS

As are many Latin Rite Catholics, I am a bit ignorant about the Eastern Rite Church. What is the difference between the rites? Can Latin Rite Catholics fulfill their Sunday obligation by attending an Eastern Rite Mass? Can Latin Rite Catholics receive Holy Communion in an Eastern Rite Catholic Mass? Is the Eastern Rite Catholic Church the same as the Orthodox Church?

The Eastern Rite Catholics are part of the Roman Catholic Church, not the Orthodox Church. While the majority of Roman Catholics belong to the Latin Rite, the Eastern Rites provide a special dimension to our Catholic heritage and spirituality. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches emphasized, —The Catholic Church values highly the institutions of the Eastern Churches, their liturgical rites, Ecclesiastical traditions and their ordering of Christian life. For in those churches, which are distinguished by their venerable antiquity, there is clearly evident the tradition which has come from the Apostles through the Fathers and which is part of the divinely revealed, undivided heritage of the Universal Church (No. 1).

To appreciate the Eastern Churches and their rites, we must first quickly survey early Church history. At the Ascension, Jesus commanded the apostles, “Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world” (Mt 28:18-20). After Pentecost, the apostles, filled with the gifts of Holy Spirit, carried the gospel message throughout the world to unknown lands and foreign peoples. Tradition holds that the different Apostles journeyed as far as Spain in the West and India in the East. From the foundation they laid, the Church continued to spread despite persecution by the Roman Empire.

Keep in mind also that the Roman Empire at that time encompassed most of western Europe, parts of eastern Europe, Asia Minor, Palestine, and northern Africa. While the Romans were severe conquerors, they did respect and tolerate the culture and customs of their subjects to insure peace. To govern this vast expanse more efficiently, Emperor Diocletian (ruling between 285-305) divided the empire in the year 292 into two main portions: Rome and Byzantium, with four prefectures. When Emperor Constantine gained control, he legalized Christianity in 312 with the promulgation of the Edict of Milan, and then in 330 established the city of Constantinople as the capital of the eastern half of the Roman Empire. From this time on, the Empire was really seen as two halves — the West and the East. The eastern half was highly influenced by Hellenistic culture introduced by Alexander the Great in the fourth century before our Lord. Eventually, Constantine would make Constantinople his home and base of government, and this city would be called, —New Rome.
Within this framework, the Church grew. Dominant centers of Christianity eventually developed: Jerusalem, the —birthplace‖ for Christianity; Rome, the Diocese of St. Peter and the —home base of the Church; Antioch, in Asia Minor where Christians were first called —Christians; Alexandria, Egypt; and Constantinople, present day Istanbul, Turkey. Each of these communities professed the same belief and were united together as one Church. As the bishops of these dominant centers appointed and ordained other bishops to lead the growing Church, the hierarchy was mindful of the authority of the Holy Father, the Successor of St. Peter.

Especially when comparing the West with East, differences in culture and language impacted upon the expression of the faith even though essential elements remained the same. For example, Baptism always involved the invocation of the Holy Trinity and the pouring of or immersion in water; yet, other particular prayers or liturgical customs were introduced in different areas. For Mass, the West used unleavened bread while leavened bread became more of the norm for the East. Moreover, Mass was called “The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass” or simply “Mass” in the West and “Divine Liturgy” or simply “Liturgy” in the East. In the West, the faithful genuflected before the Blessed Sacrament, while in the East bowing became customary. In the East, the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confirmation were administered together, whereas in the West, these sacraments eventually were eventually separated and were administered to an individual as he matured. Another difference in religious culture was the usage of statues in the West as visible reminders to inspire devotion to the Lord, the Blessed Mother, or the saints whereas the veneration of icons evolved in the East. While these different traditions developed and remain to this day, the reflect the beautiful depth of Roman Catholicism.

As the Church hierarchy became more stable, the position of Patriarch was recognized. A Patriarch had the highest ecclesiastical dignity after the Pope and had jurisdiction over a particular territory. The term Patriarch comes from the Greek word for the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Strictly speaking, "by the term 'Eastern Patriarch' is meant the bishop who has jurisdiction over all the bishops, metropolitans (archbishops) not excepted, clergy and people of his own territory or rite, according to the rules of canon law and without prejudice to the primacy of the Roman Pontiff" ("Decree on the Eastern Churches," No. 7). Therefore, the patriarch is the father and head of his patriarchate.

The oldest version of Canon Law in the Church identified three patriarchs: The bishops of Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch. Each patriarch governed a territory of the Church: The patriarch of Rome governed the whole Church in the West; the patriarch of Alexandria, the area of Egypt and Palestine; and the Patriarch of Antioch, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and the remainder of the Church in the East. These three patriarchates were recognized as having a supreme place among the bishops by the Council of Nicea in 325.

With the rise of pilgrims to the Holy Land, the bishop of Jerusalem received greater honor. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 took the area of Palestine and Arabia from Antioch and formed the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.
Since Constantine had made Constantinople the capital of the Roman Empire in the East and called it "New Rome," the Council of Chalcedon (451) eventually elevated it as a patriarchate with jurisdiction over the territories of Asia Minor and Thrace. The New Order of the Patriarchs then became in descending order Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Keep in mind that the patriarchs are considered equal in rank even though they may have a precedence of honor. Moreover, just to underscore an important point, even though the bishop of Rome is a patriarch, as pope he has supreme authority and governance over the whole Church.

Given this history, the differences in culture, language and liturgical practices, and the established hierarchy under patriarchs, the clear presence of defined "rites" arose. Rites basically refer to groups of the faithful who share the same manner of performing services for the worship of God and the sanctification of the faithful. The spiritual head of the rite was the patriarch, who in turn would be under the jurisdiction of the pope.

During the fifth century, the barbarian invasions crippled the western Roman Empire. Rome itself declined in stature. Even though the pope was still the bishop of Rome, the great early Church councils were all convoled in cities of the east – Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon. A rivalry over power, authority, and prestige developed between the pope, bishop of Rome, and the patriarch of Constantinople. In the mind of the patriarch, since Rome had declined in stature and since Constantinople was now the viable capital of the Roman Empire (or what was left of it), he thought he should be recognized as the head of the Church - in a sense, "New Rome" should be the home of the pope. From the pope’s perspective, he was the successor of St. Peter, bishop of Rome, who held the keys of the Kingdom. Theological issues also became subject to debate, especially the adding of the filioque clause to the Creed, i.e. that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. To make a long story short, the mounting tensions finally exploded in 1054 when both the patriarch and the pope issued bulls of excommunication against each other.

The Eastern Church was now in formal schism with the Western Church. Although they acknowledged the pope as the successor of St. Peter, they rejected his binding authority over the whole Church and considered him simply as "the first among equals." Spurning any affiliation with Rome, these Churches identified themselves as the Orthodox. The patriarch of Constantinople was recognized as the spiritual head of the Orthodox Churches, but he did not have any juridic authority over them, except those of his own patriarchate. (Please note that the Maronite Rite Catholic Church whose patriarch resides in Lebanon never severed its ties with Rome.) As time continued, the Roman Catholic Church was identified with the Latin Mass and allegiance to the Holy Father, and the Orthodox Churches with the Eastern Rites and particular ethnic communities, for example the Greek Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church.

Attempts were made to reunite these Orthodox Churches with the Roman Catholic Church. At the Council of Florence (1438-45) which both Emperor John VIII and Patriarch Joseph II of Constantinople attended, the theological questions were debated. The Eastern Orthodox Churches agreed to accept the teaching that the Holy Spirit
proceeds from the Father and the Son, even though they were not required to add this phrase to the Creed. While the agreement was signed and the Churches officially reunited, a large segment of the regular clergy disdained this action. Moreover, when the Moslems conquered Constantinople in 1453, Sultan Mohammed II appointed Gennadios II as patriarch of Constantinople, who in turn repudiated the decrees of the Council of Florence. Once again, the two Churches were officially in schism. The domination of Islam over the territory of the East made future reunification virtually impossible.

In 1596, the first successful reunion occurred between the Ruthenian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Church in Poland with the Union of Brest. Other reunifications then followed. The most recent reunion involved the Church of Malankar, which traces its origins to St. Thomas the Apostle; in 1930, Bishop Ivanios, two other bishops, a priest, a deacon, and a laymen reunited with the Catholic Church and the Malankar Rite of the Catholic Church was born. These reunited Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church, except the Maronite Rite, all have counterparts remaining in the Orthodox Churches.

Vatican Council II recognized in its "Decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches," "The holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government. They combine into different groups, which are held together by their hierarchy, and so form particular churches or rites. Between those churches there is such a wonderful bond of union that this variety in the Universal Church, so far from diminishing its unity, rather serves to emphasize it. For the Catholic Church wishes the traditions of each particular Church or Rite to remain whole and entire, and it likewise wishes to adapt its own way of life to the needs of different times and places" (No. 2). Although these Eastern Rites differ from the Western or Latin Rite in "rite" and liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline and Canon Law and spiritual traditions, they are fully part of the Roman Catholic Church under the leadership and pastoral care of the pope, the successor of St. Peter.

Today, the various Eastern Rites are organized under the four eastern patriarchates. (The following information was gleaned from the Catholic Almanac.)

The **Alexandrian Rite** is officially called the Liturgy of St. Mark. (St. Mark is traditionally considered the first bishop of Alexandria.) Their present liturgy contains elements of the Byzantine Rite of St. Basil and the liturgies of Sts. Mark, Cyril, and Gregory Nazianzen. This parent rite includes the Coptic Rite and the Ge'ez Rite. The Coptic Rite, which is situated primarily in Egypt, reunited with Rome in 1741 and uses the Coptic and Arabic languages in its liturgies. The Ge'ez Rite, based primarily in Ethiopia, Jerusalem, and Somalia, reunited with Rome in 1846 and uses the Ge'ez language in their liturgies. The **Antiochene Rite** is the Liturgy of St. James of Jerusalem. This parent rite includes the following rites: The Malankar Rite is located in India, reunited with Rome in 1930, and uses the Syriac and Malayalam languages in its liturgies.

The Maronite Rite, located primarily in Lebanon, Cyprus, Egypt, and Syria but with large populations of the faithful also in the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Australia, and
Canada, has remained united with Rome since the time of its founder St. Maron, and uses the Syriac and Arabic languages in its liturgies.

The Syrian Rite is located primarily in Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Syria, with healthy communities in Asia, Africa, Australia, and North and South America, reunited with Rome in 1781, and uses the Syriac and Arabic languages in its liturgies.

The Armenian Rite, technically a distinct rite, derived from the Antiochene Rite and is an older form of the Byzantine Rite. Although it uses a different language, this rite is technically called the Greek Liturgy of St. Basil. This rite has jurisdictions primarily in Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, France, Greece, Romania, Armenia, Argentina and the United States. The Armenians reunited with Rome during the Crusades, and the ritual liturgical language is Classical Armenian.

The Chaldean Rite, also technically a distinct rite, also originated from the Antiochene Rite. This rite is also divided into two rites: The Chaldean Rite, located primarily in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Turkey and the United States, reunited with Rome in 1692, and uses the Syriac and Arabic languages in the liturgy. The Syro-Malabar Rite, located in India, claims to have originated with St. Thomas the Apostle, and uses the Syriac and Malayalam languages in the liturgy. Although the Syro-Malabar Rite was never in formal schism, for centuries no communication occurred between them and Rome until the time of the missionaries in the 1500s.

The Byzantine Rite, the largest Eastern Rite, is based on the Rite of St. James of Jerusalem with the later reforms of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom. These rites employ the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. This parent rite comprises many rites, which are themselves highly ethnic oriented. The Albanian Rite, centered in Albania, reunited with Rome in 1628 and uses Albanian as its liturgical language. The Belarussian (formerly titled Byelorussian) Rite, centered in Belarussia with large populations in Europe, North and South America, and Australia, reunited with Rome in the 1600s and uses Old Slavonic as their liturgical language. The Bulgarian Rite, centered in Bulgaria reunited with Rome in 1861 and uses the Old Slavonic language in the liturgy. The Croatian Rite, based primarily in Croatia with a significant population in the United States, reunited with Rome in 1611 and employs Old Slavonic as a liturgical language. The Greek Rite, which is centered in Greece and Turkey with congregations also in Asia Minor and Europe, reunited with Rome in 1829 and uses the Greek language in the liturgy. The Hungarian Rite, situated in Hungary with significant populations throughout Europe and North and South America, reunited with Rome in 1646 and uses Greek, Hungarian, and English in their liturgies. The Italo-Albanian Rite, mainly in Italy with congregations in North and South America, never separated from Rome and uses the Greek and Italo-Albanian languages in the liturgy. The Romanian Rite, centered in Romania with a significant population in the United States, reunited with Rome in 1697 and use Modern Romanian in their liturgy; in 1948, they were forced to join the Romanian Orthodox Church in Romania, but since the fall of communism, the Catholic Romanian Rite has regained independence. The Russian Rite, located mainly in Russia and China with congregations in Europe, Australia, and North and South America, reunited with Rome in 1905 and use Old Slavonic as a liturgical language. The
Georgian Rite, based in the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, reunited with Rome in 1329, severed ties in 1507, then in 1917 broke with the Russian Orthodox Church and again reunited with Rome as the Georgian Byzantine Rite, and has struggled for survival ever since, especially during Communist oppression; the Georgian language is used in their liturgy. The Slovak Rite is based in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Canada, and uses Old Slavonic in its liturgy.

The three largest of the Byzantine Rites are the Melkite, Ruthenian and Ukrainian. The Melkite Rite has strong congregations in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, United States, Brazil, Venezuela, Canada, Australia, and Mexico. The Melkites reunited with Rome during the Crusades but due to impediments caused by the Moslem occupations more officially reunited in the early 1700s and use Greek, Arabic, English, Portuguese, and Spanish in the liturgy.

The Ruthenian or Carpatho-Russian Rite is based in the Ukraine and the United States with strong congregations in Ukraine, United States, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Australia, and North and South America. The Ruthenians reunited with Rome in the Union of Brest-Litovsk in 1596 and the Union of Uzhorod in 1646. They employ Old Slavonic and English in the liturgy.

Finally, the Ukrainian Rite has large populations in the Ukraine, Poland, the United States, Canada, England, Australia, Germany, France, Brazil and Argentina. The Ukrainians reunited with Rome about 1595. However, Stalin forced the Ukrainian Rite Catholics to enter the Russian Orthodox Church in 1943, but since the independence of the Ukraine, they have reunited with Rome. This rite uses Old Slavonic and Ukrainian. In the Diocese of Arlington, we have three Eastern Rite Catholic Churches: Epiphany of our Lord Byzantine-Ruthenian Rite in Annandale under the jurisdiction of the Eparchy of Passaic, N.J.; Holy Transfiguration Melkite Rite in McLean of the Melkite Eparchy of Newton, Mass.; and Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Byzantine Ukrainian Rite in Manassas of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia, Pa. Also, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, the Byzantine Rite communities in the United States funded a chapel which is adorned with beautiful icons. All Roman Catholics are welcome to attend the Divine Liturgy at these Eastern Rite Churches (which does indeed fulfill the Sunday obligation) and may receive Holy Communion. Particulars of Canon Law, however, do regulate marriages between a Latin Rite and an Eastern Rite Catholic. In all, these rites remind us of the universality of our Roman Catholic Church and the rich liturgical traditions we share as Catholics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
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SOURCE: http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/religion/re0246.html
# Rites of the Eastern Catholic Church

## Alexandria Rite (Liturgy of St. Mark)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Area of Practice</th>
<th>Language of Liturgy</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coptic</td>
<td>Egypt &amp; Near East</td>
<td>Syriac &amp; Arabic or Coptic</td>
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<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>Ethiopia &amp; Somalia</td>
<td>Geez &amp; Arabic</td>
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## Antiochene Rite (Liturgy of St. James)

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<th>Area of Practice</th>
<th>Language of Liturgy</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Maronite</td>
<td>Middle East &amp; Diaspora</td>
<td>Syriac &amp; Vernacular</td>
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<td>Malankarese</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>Syriac</td>
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## Armenian Rite (Greek Liturgy of St. Basil)

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<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
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<td>Greek &amp; Armenian</td>
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## Chaldean Rite

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<td>India</td>
<td>Syriac &amp; Malayan</td>
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## Byzantine Rite (Liturgy of St. James, St. Basil & Others)

Please note that the Byzantine Rite is also known as “The Constantinopolitan Rite”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Area of Practice</th>
<th>Language of Liturgy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Old Slavonic &amp; Vernacular</td>
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<td>Georgia &amp; Asia Minor</td>
<td>Georgian &amp; Greek</td>
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<td>Greece &amp; Diaspora</td>
<td>Greek &amp; Vernacular</td>
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<td>Ukrainia &amp; Diaspora</td>
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* The Apostolic Exarchate for Catholics of Byzantine Rite in the Czech Republic was established by Pope John Paul II in his Bull of March 13, 1996.

** The first Catholics of the Byzantine rite in what was Yugoslavia were Serbians living in Croatian territory under Hungarian control in the early 17th century. In 1611 they were given a bishop, who was officially the Byzantine vicar of the Latin Bishop of Zagreb. His headquarters was at March monastery, which became a center of efforts to bring Serbian Orthodox into communion with Rome. After a period of tension with the local Latin bishops, the Serbs in Croatia were given their own diocesan bishop by Pope Pius VI on 17 June 1777, with his See at Krizevci. He was made suffragan at first to the Primate of Hungary, and later (1853) to the Latin Archbishop of Zagreb. The diocese of Krizevci was extended to embrace all the Byzantine Catholics in then-Yugoslavia when this new country was founded after World War I. Thus the diocese included 5 distinct groups: Croatians, Ruthenians who had emigrated from Slovakia around 1750, Ukrainians who emigrated from Galicia in about 1900, Macedonians in the south of the country who became Catholic because of 19th c. missionary activity (who now have their own Apostolic activity), and a few Romanians in what was called the Yugoslavian Banat. Interestingly, Blessed Aloysius Cardinal Stepinac, the Archbishop of Zagreb tried to save Serb converts to the Church from the murderous pro-Nazi Croatian Ustashi. The present Bishop of Krizevci for about 50,000 Byzantine Catholics in former Yugoslavia is Bishop Slavomir Mkilovs who was appointed in 1983 and resides in Zagreb, capital of Croatia.

SOURCE: http://credo.stormloader.com/ritesofc.htm
Chapter Two:
The Antiochian Church
Church of Antioch

The Church of Antioch is one of the five patriarchates (i.e., the Pentarchy) that constituted the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church before the schism between Rome and Antioch in 1098 and between Rome and the other patriarchates at around the same general period. Today it is one of the autocephalous Orthodox churches. In English translations of official documents, the Church of Antioch refers to itself as the **Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East**. The literal translation into English of the Arabic name is "Roman (in Arabic, *Rum*) Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East."

The Church of Antioch is the continuation of the Christian community founded in Antioch by the Apostles Peter (who served as its first bishop) and Paul, who are its patron saints. In terms of hierarchical order of precedence, it currently ranks third among the world's Orthodox churches, behind Constantinople and Alexandria.

The seat of the patriarchate was formerly Antioch (Antakya), in what is now Turkey. Now it is in Damascus, Syria, located on the "street called Straight." The current patriarch is His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV (Hazim) of Antioch and all the East.

Our Lady of Balamand Monastery
**Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Founder(s)</strong></th>
<th>Apostles Peter and Paul</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autocephaly/Autonomy declared</strong></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Autocephaly/Autonomy recognized</strong></td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current primate</strong></td>
<td>Patriarch Ignatius IV (Note: <strong>Patriarch John X (Yazigi) of Antioch</strong> and All The East (born 1955) is now the primate of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All The East.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Headquarters</strong></td>
<td>Damascus, Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary territory</strong></td>
<td>Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE, parts of Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possessions abroad</strong></td>
<td>United States, Canada, Central America, South America, Australia, New Zealand, Oceania, Great Britain, Western Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Litursgical language(s)</strong></td>
<td>Arabic, Greek, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Musical tradition</strong></td>
<td>Byzantine Chant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Calendar</strong></td>
<td>Revised Julian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
History

Early years

The early history of the Church of Antioch is detailed in the Acts of the Apostles, where in Acts 11:26 the Apostle Luke records that it was in that city that the disciples of Christ were first called Christians. Due to the importance of Antioch as a major center in the ancient Roman Empire, many of the missionary efforts of the apostles were launched from that city. In the early centuries of the Church's history, it was natural that the Church sojourning in Antioch would come to be traditionally regarded as one of the centers of world Christianity. The territory that came to be associated with the bishop of Antioch was that of the Roman Diocese of the East (a diocese was originally an imperial governmental division before it became an ecclesiastical one).

The Antiochian school

During the pre-Nicene period and that of the Ecumenical Councils, Christian theology centered in Antioch tended to emphasize the literal, historical facts of the life of Jesus Christ over philosophical or allegorical interpretations of Holy Scripture, contrasted with the more mystical and figurative theology coming from Alexandria. Antiochian theology, though stressing the "earthier" side of interpretation, nevertheless did not neglect the importance of insight into the deeper, spiritual meaning of the Scriptures. These two viewpoints came to be known respectively as the Antiochian school and the Alexandrian school, represented by major catechetical institutions at both places.

Major figures associated with the origin of the Antiochian school include Lucian of Antioch and Paul of Samosata, but its real formation was found with writers such as Diodore of Tarsus, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Nestorius, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus. At times, this difference in emphasis caused conflicts within the Church as the tension between the two approaches came to a head, especially regarding the doctrinal disputes over Arianism and Nestorianism. Saints such as John Chrysostom are somewhat regarded as synthesizers of the Antiochian and Alexandrian approaches to theology, and the Antiochian school of theology, whose more deviant proponents produced Arianism and Nestorianism, also enabled the Orthodox fight against the Alexandrian school's deviances, namely Apollinarianism and Eutychianism.
Schism over Chalcedon

Disputes over the Christology of the Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon—the Monophysite controversy—in 451 led to a schism within the Church of Antioch, which at that same council was elevated to the status of a patriarchate. The larger group at the time repudiated the council and became the Syriac Orthodox Church (also called the "Jacobites" for Jacob Baradeus, an early bishop of theirs who did extensive missionary work in the region). They currently constitute part of the Oriental Orthodox communion and maintain a Christology somewhat different in language from that of Chalcedon.

The remainder of the Church of Antioch, primarily local Greeks or Hellenized sections of the indigenous population, remained in communion with Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Jerusalem. This is the current Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East which is considered by the other bishops of the Orthodox Church to be the sole legitimate heir to the see of Antioch.

The schism greatly weakened the Antiochian church, and in 637 when Antioch fell to the Muslim Arabs, the "Greek" church was perceived by the invaders as allied to the Romano-Byzantine enemies of the Arabs. During the subsequent period, Antiochian Orthodox Christians underwent a lengthy period of persecution, and there were multiple periods of either vacancy or non-residence on the Antiochian patriarchal throne during the 7th and 8th centuries. In 969, the Roman Empire regained control of Antioch, and the church there prospered again until 1085, when the Seljuk Turks took the city. During this period of more than a hundred years, the traditional West Syrian liturgy of the church was gradually replaced by that of the tradition of the Great Church, Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. This process was completed sometime in the 12th century.
Crusader and Muslim conquests

In 1098, Crusaders took the city and set up a Latin Patriarchate of Antioch to adorn its Latin Kingdom of Syria, while a Greek patriarchate continued in exile in Constantinople. After nearly two centuries of Crusader rule, the Egyptian Mamelukes seized Antioch in 1268, and the Orthodox patriarch, Theodosius IV, was able to return to the region. By this point, Antioch itself had been reduced to a smaller town, and so in the 14th century Ignatius II transferred the seat of the patriarchate to Damascus, where it remains to this day, though the patriarch retains the Antiochian title.

The Ottoman Turks conquered the city in 1517, under whose control it remained until the breakup of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. During this period, in 1724, the Church of Antioch was again weakened by schism, as a major portion of its faithful came into submission to the Roman Catholic Church. The resultant Uniate body is known as the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, which in the current day maintains close ties with the Orthodox and is currently holding ongoing talks about healing the schism and returning the Melkites to Orthodoxy.

Fearing for the preservation of the Orthodoxy of the Antiochian see, parishioners and bishops requested the ecumenical Patriarchate to send them a Greek patriarch. The Greek presence on the Antiochian see lasted from 1724 to 1898 until Malathius I (Doumani) the Damascene, an Arab patriarch, was appointed. A renewal movement, involving Orthodox youth in particular, has been under way since the 1940s.

Expansion abroad

![New Antiochian bishops with the patriarch](image)

Left to Right: Bp. Mark (Maymon) of Toledo, Late Patr. Ignatius IV (Hazim) of Antioch, Bp. Thomas (Joseph) of Oakland, Bp. Alexander (Mufarrij) of Ottawa

Extensive 20th and 21st century Arab immigration to the New World has further
increased the size, vigor and influence of the Church of Antioch, and the majority of Antiochian faithful now reside outside the Middle East and include numerous non-Arabic converts to the Orthodox Christian faith. As a result, besides its Middle Eastern territories in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, the Arabian Peninsular, and parts of Turkey, the Church of Antioch also includes missionary dioceses in Central, North, and South America, in Europe, and in Australia and the Pacific. The archdiocese with the largest population is North America. It is also the only one with internal dioceses. The archdiocese with the largest area is Australia and New Zealand. Estimates of the membership of the patriarchate range from 750,000 to over 1,000,000 in Syria alone.
History of the Archdiocese

By way of introduction

THE SELF-RULED ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIocese OF NORTH AMERICA

A Brief History

The City of Antioch on-the-Orontes was the most important city of the Roman Province of Syria, and, as such, served as the capital city of the Empire’s civil “Diocese of the East.” The Church in Antioch dates back to the days of the foremost apostles, SS. Peter and Paul, as is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Scripture refers to Antioch as the place where the followers of Jesus Christ were first called “Christians” (Acts 11:26), and records that Nicholas, one of the original seven deacons, was from that city and may have been its first convert (Acts 6:5). During the persecution of the Church which followed the death of St. Stephen the Proto-Martyr, members of the infant community in Jerusalem sought refuge in Antioch (Acts 11:19), and while St. Peter served as the first bishop of the city, SS. Paul and Barnabas set out on their great missionary journeys to Gentile lands (Acts 13:1) – establishing a tradition which would last for centuries as from Antioch missionaries planted churches throughout greater Syria, Asia Minor, the Caucasus Mountains, Mesoptamia, Greece the Balkans, Italy and most of the Mediterranean Region.

At the first Ecumenical Council, convened in the year 325 by Emperor Constantine the Great, the primacy of the bishop (patriarch) of Antioch over all bishops of the civil Diocese of the East was formally sanctioned. The Great Schism of 1054 resulted in the separation of Rome, seat of the Patriarchate of the West, from the four Eastern Patriarchs of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem¹.

During the reign of the Egyptian Mamelukes, conquerors of Syria in the 13th century, the Patriarchal residence was transformed to the ancient city of Damascus, where a Christian community had flourished since apostolic times (Acts 9), and which had succeeded earthquake-prone Antioch as the civil capital of Syria. The headquarters of the Patriarchate, which has jurisdiction over all dioceses within its ancient geographic boundaries (Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and the Arabic Peninsula) as well as others in the Americas, Australia, and Western Europe, are located in Damascus on “the street called Straight” (Acts 9:11).

The Archdiocese of North America

In the late 19th century, events in their homelands forced Antiochian Christians to join the ranks of Europeans who emigrated to other parts of the world. The spiritual needs of those who settled in North America were first met through the “Syro-Arabian Mission” of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has had a presence in North America since 1794.
In 1895, a —Syrian Orthodox Benevolent Society— was organized by Antiochian immigrants in New York City, with Dr. Ibrahim Arbeely, a prominent Damascene physician, serving as its first president.

Conscious of the needs of his fellow countrymen and co-religionists, Dr. Arbeely wrote to Raphael Hawaweeny, a young Damascene clergyman serving as Professor of the Arabic Language at the Orthodox Theological Academy in Kazan, Russia, inviting him to come to New York to organize and pastor the first Arabic-speaking parish on the continent. Fr. Raphael, a missionary at heart, went to the imperial capital of St. Petersburg to meet with His Grace, Nicholas, ruling bishop of the Russian Diocese of the Aleutian Islands and North America, who was then in Russia to recruit new missionaries. After being canonically received under the omophorion of Bishop Nicholas, Father Hawaweeny arrived in the United States on November 17, 1895.

Upon his arrival in New York, Archimandrite established a parish at 77 Washington Street in Lower Manhattan, at the center of the Syrian immigrant community. By 1900, approximately 3,000 of these immigrants had moved across the East River, shifting the community center to Brooklyn. Accordingly, in 1902, the parish purchased a larger church building in the borough, at 301-303 Pacific Street. The Church, assigned to the heavenly patronage of St. Nicholas, the Wonderworker of Myra in Lycia, was renovated for Orthodox worship and consecrated on October 27, 1902, by Nicholas’ successor, Archbishop Tikhon. St. Nicholas Cathedral later relocated to 355 State Street, Brooklyn, and is today considered the “mother parish” of the Archdiocese.

At the request of Archbishop Tikhon, Hawaweeny was elected to serve as his vicar bishop, to head the Syro-Arabia Mission. His consecration as “Bishop of Brooklyn” took place at St. Nicholas Church on Pacific Street on March 12, 1904. Bishop Raphael thus became the first Orthodox bishop of any nationality to be consecrated in North America. He crisscrossed the United States and Canada, and even ventured deep into Mexico, visiting his scattered flock and gathering them into parish communities. He founded al-Kalimat (The Word) magazine in 1905, and published many liturgical books in Arabic for use in his parishes, in the Middle East, and in emigration around the world. After a brief but very fruitful ministry, Bishop Raphael fell asleep in Christ on February 27, 1915, at the age. In 2000, Bishop Raphael was glorified as a saint by the Orthodox Church in America with participation from hierarchs of the Antiochian Archdiocese. His feast day is celebrated on the first Saturday in November.

Not long afterwards, the tragedy of the First World and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia brought financial and administrative ruin to the Orthodox churches in North America, and shattered the measure of unity they had enjoyed. Movements arose in every ethnic group to divide it into ecclesiastical factions. Deprived of its beloved founder and bishop, the small Syro-Arabian Mission fell victim to this divisiveness, and it would take sixty years from the death of Bishop Raphael – in June of 1975 – for total jurisdictional and administrative unity to be restored to the children of Antioch in North America. Some communities desired to remain under the jurisdiction of the Russian Church, while others opted to be received into the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of
Antioch. The hierarchs of that period were: Metropolitan Germanos (Shehadi), Archbishop Aftimios (Ofiesh), Archbishop Victor (Abo-Assaley), and Bishop Emmanuel (Abo-Hatab). By 1936, all of the parishes were in one of two Antiochian archdioceses – the Archdiocese of New York, headed by Metropolitan Antony (Bashir) and the Archdiocese of Toledo, Ohio, and Dependencies, headed by Metropolitan Samuel (David).

On June 24, 1975, Metropolitan Philip (Saliba) of the Antiochian Archdiocese of New York and Metropolitan Michael (Shaheen) of the Antiochian Archdiocese of Toledo, and Dependencies signed the Articles of Reunification which restored administrative unity among all Antiochian Orthodox Christians in the United States and Canada. This document was presented to the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate, which ratified the contents on August 19, 1975, recognizing Philip as Metropolitan-Primate and Michael as Auxiliary-Archbishop. Archbishop Michael fell asleep in the Lord on October 24, 1992.

In October, 2003, in a history-making decision, the Holy Synod of Antioch unanimously approved a resolution which granted this Archdiocese the status of a self-ruling Archdiocese. Effective with this resolution, the Auxiliary Bishops took their positions as Diocesan Bishops.

Diocesan Bishops serving the Archdiocese are Bishop Antoun (Khouri) of Miami and the Southeast consecrated January 9, 1983, at Brooklyn’s St. Nicholas Cathedral; Bishop Joseph (Al-Zehlaoui) of Los Angeles and the West, consecrated May 8, 1991, at Damascus’ St. Mary Cathedral; Bishop Basil (Essey) of Wichita and Mid-America consecrated May 31, 1992 at Wichita’s St. George Cathedral; Bishop Thomas (Joseph) of Oakland, PA and the East consecrated December 5, 2004 at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Damascus, Syria; Bishop Basil (Essey) of Wichita and Mid-America consecrated May 31, 1992 at Wichita’s St. George Cathedral; Bishop Thomas (Joseph) of Oakland, PA and the East consecrated December 5, 2004 at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Damascus, Syria; Bishop Alexander (Mufarrij) of Ottawa Eastern Canada and Upstate New York consecrated December 5, 2004 at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Damascus, Syria. The Metropolitan is a member of the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Antioch, the chair of the Local Synod, and a member of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA).

Today the faithful of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America are served by seven hierarchs and over four hundred clergy in 238 churches and missions throughout the United States and Canada. In summary, there are Twenty-three established departments and commissions, and four service organizations, which exist on the parochial, diocesan, and Archdiocesan levels: the Fellowship of St. John the Divine, Teen Soyo (Society of Orthodox Youth Organizations), AOCWNA (Antiochian Orthodox Christian Women of North America), and the Order of St. Ignatius of Antioch. The Word magazine, published monthly (except July and August), continues to be the official publication of the Archdiocese.
In 1978, the Archdiocese acquired the Antiochian Village, over 300 acres of property located near the town of Ligonier in the Laurel Highlands of southwestern Pennsylvania. In addition to the popular summer camp program, which attracts children and young adults from throughout the United State, Canada and Mexico, the Village is also the site of the Heritage and Learning Center, a modern conference facility housing one hundred guest rooms, and extensive theological and historical library, and a museum featuring an outstanding Icon collection and cultural displays. The master Plan also foresees a retirement village for senior citizen and a monastic community.

Following the completion of their undergraduate studies, candidates for ordination to the holy priesthood receive their theological education at one of the Orthodox seminaries to which they are assigned by the Archdiocese. Their program is augmented by specialized courses offered annually by the Antiochian House of Studies, held for two weeks at the Heritage Learning Center in Ligonier, PA during the last week of August/first week of September. The Antiochian House of Studies offers a Master of Arts degree (M.A.) in conjunction with the University of Balamand, and a Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) degree in cooperation with the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. This degree is oriented to those clergy who hold at least an M.Div. degree and have served in full time ministry for no less than three years. Classes are held at the Heritage and Learning Center, and are offered on an intensive basis three times each year. Abiennial Archdiocesan Clergy Symposium, under the auspices of the Antiochian House of Studies is convened for continuing education of all priests and deacons in the Archdiocese.

The Archdiocesan Board of Trustees, consisting of over fifty elected and appointed clergy and lay persons, and the Metropolitan’s Advisory Council, consisting of clergy and lay representatives from each parish and mission, meet regularly to assist the hierarchs in the administration of the Archdiocese. Each summer, Parish Life Conferences are convened in each of the following dioceses: New York, Worcester and New England, Ottawa and Upstate New York, Miami and the Southeast, Wichita and Mid-America, Los Angeles and the West, Toledo and the Midwest, Eagle River and the Northwest, and Pittsburgh and Tri-state. These attract thousands of people of all ages from parishes and missions. The largest legislative body of the Archdiocese, the General Assembly, meets in convention biennially.

A pioneer in the use of the English language in the Orthodox churches in the New World, the Antiochian Archdiocese has since 1917 kept in print and available Isabel Hapgood's pioneering English Service Book; it printed the first English music books for choirs in the 1920s; and its Father Seraphim Nassar produced in 1938 the first – and still the only – comprehensive collection of texts needed for the chanting to complete services in English (The Book of Divine Prayers and Services). A full-fledged publishing department was established in 1940, and it has produced and distributed numerous titles in religious education, sacred music, and liturgical services.

Thousands of people of various ethnic and racial backgrounds have “come home” to the Orthodox Church and have found a spiritual home in the parishes of the Antiochian
Archdiocese, joining with Americans and Canadians of Middle Eastern descent to make the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America a vibrant witness for Christ and his Church.

The main chancery of the Archdiocese is located at 358 Mountain Road, Englewood NJ just outside New York City. Diocesan chanceries are located in Toledo OH, Wichita KS, Los Angeles CA, Ligonier PA, and Montreal Canada

Footnotes:

1. The Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East together with the three other ancient Eastern patriarchates (Constantinople, Alexandria and Jerusalem); four modern patriarchates (Russia, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria); five autocephalous churches (Cyprus, Greece, Georgia, Poland and Albania); and four autonomous churches (Sinai, Slovakia the Czech lands, Finland and Japan) – many with dependent bodies through the world – comprise what is known today as the -Eastern Orthodox Church- with an estimated 250 million adherents, of whom, some 5-6 million live in the United States and Canada.

2. In 1917, Archbishop Tikhon was elected Patriarch of Moscow, and steered the Russian Church through the bloody days of the Communist Revolution. In 1991, he was canonized by the Moscow Patriarchate.

3. The member jurisdictions of SCOBA are: The Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America, the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Diocese, the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, the Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, the Orthodox Church in America, the Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese, the Serbian orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

4. The Patriarchate has established separated diocesan structures for the faithful in the countries of Central and South America.

Source: http://www.antiochian.org/668
Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East John X of Antioch

Patriarch John X (Yazigi) of Antioch and All The East (born 1955) is primate of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All The East.

Life
John Yazigi was born in Latakia, Syria. He graduated from the Tishreen University with a degree in Civil Engineering, then he earned a degree in theology in 1978 from the Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology at the University of Balamand and then, in 1983, he graduated from the theological faculty of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki with a focus in liturgics. He also has a degree in Byzantine music from the Conservatory of Byzantine Music of Thessaloniki.

Ordination and Episcopacy
He was ordained to the diaconate in 1979 and the priesthood in 1983. On January 24, 1995, he was consecrated as the vicar bishop of Al-Hosn. After his consecration, Bishop John immediately began to work to revive the patriarchal monastery of St. George in Al-Humayrah, serving as the monastery's abbot from 1995-2002. Through his efforts, the monastery became a center of spiritual and public life in the area. From 1981 until 2008, he was the instructor of liturgics at the Balamand Seminary. From 1989 until 1992, and then again from 2001 until 2005, he was also the rector of the seminary. During his second term as rector, he was also the abbot of the Balamand monastery.

On June 17, 2008, he was chosen as the metropolitan of Western and Central Europe. He was enthroned by His Beatitude, Patriarch Ignatius IV of Antioch. On August 19, 2010, his title was changed to "Metropolitan of Europe."

Patriarchate
On December 17, 2012, twelve days after the death of the previous patriarch, Metropolitan John was elected as the new Patriarch of Antioch. In his installation sermon, Greek Orthodox Antiochian patriarch John X stressed his rejection of every western interference in the armed insurgency in Syria (2011 - ) and its civil conflict as well as his intention to promote peaceful co-existence with Muslims and other Syrians. The ambassador of the Russian Federation in Damascus, Azmatullah Kulmohammadov, stressed the firm support of Russia for Syrian national unity, national peace and an end to the armed insurgency military conflict. The Antiochian Orthodox patriarch in response called upon the entire Syrian people to defend its national unity and to fight instability and insecurity.

His Eminence Metropolitan Joseph

Metropolitan of The Self-Ruled Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

His Eminence, Metropolitan Joseph, was consecrated to the Holy Episcopacy on June 30, 1991 at St. Mary Cathedral in Damascus, after many years of serving as a deacon and priest. His Eminence was born in Damascus, Syria, in 1950. He completed his basic schooling at the St. John of Damascus and al-Assiyeh schools in Damascus and then at Our Lady of Balamand Monastery in Koura, Lebanon. He completed his undergraduate studies at the Lebanese University in Beirut and then earned his Master of Theology (M.Th.) with special studies in music and languages from Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from St. Tikhon Orthodox Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania in May, 2010.

With the blessing of Patriarch Elias IV of blessed memory, Metropolitan Panteleimon (Rodopoulos) ordained him to be a deacon on December 4, 1976 in Thessaloniki, Greece, and Patriarch Ignatius IV, of blessed memory, ordained him a priest on December 10, 1980 in Damascus, Syria. The priest Joseph served as dean of St. Mary Cathedral in Damascus and as overseer of Holy Cross Church and other parishes in the suburbs of Damascus. He served as superintendent of the secondary school in Damascus from 1980 until 1983. He then went abroad to pastor the Antiochian Orthodox Church in London, England, from 1983 to 1986 and the Antiochian Orthodox Church in Cyprus from 1986 until 1991, when he was elected to be a bishop.

Bishop Joseph was consecrated with the title, Bishop of Katana in Syria, and served as Patriarchal Assistant and Secretary of the Holy Synod of Antioch. In 1995, he was sent by Patriarch Ignatius to America. Here, in our Archdiocese, Bishop Joseph was assigned to the West Coast Chancery by Metropolitan Philip of blessed memory. Bishop Joseph was the first Bishop of the Diocese of Los Angeles and the West on September 12, 2004.

On December 11, 2011, at the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos in the Patriarchal Monastery of Our Lady of Balamand in Lebanon, Patriarch Ignatius IV elevated Bishop Joseph to the rank of Archbishop, in honor of his many years of service as a bishop both in our Archdiocese and in the Patriarchate of Antioch. On July 3, 2014, Archbishop Joseph was elected to become the Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America by the Holy Synod of Antioch.
Metropolitan Joseph's achievements in apostolic ministry over the course of almost 20 years of diakonia as Bishop of the Diocese of Los Angeles & the West, as well as the locum tenens of the Diocese of Eagle River & the Northwest, form a solid testimony to his spiritual, ethical, and personal leadership qualifications. Over this vast expanse of the western United States and Canada, including Alaska, Metropolitan Joseph has tirelessly and unrelentingly maintained a personal apostolic presence in the more than 60 parishes under his care. His Eminence has maintained a personal culture of contact, by direct phone, with all his clergy. Many of the clergy and laity testify that Sayidna always remembers and acts on any important issue placed before him. This unique combination of traits, sobriety and blameless familiarity form the bedrock for his personal effectiveness with all.

Based upon his solid spiritual, ascetical, intellectual, and cultural formation and education, His Eminence has effectively established solid and meaningful Annual Clergy Seminars, and deepened the spiritual and educational experience of both clergy and laity at the annual Parish Life Conferences. He has brought in many and diverse Orthodox authors, leaders, and teachers to enrich the clergy and the laity of his two western dioceses. This has served to promote a strong sense of clergy brotherhood, inter-parochial exchanges, and has become the envy of other Orthodox jurisdictions everywhere. Guest speakers and visitors constantly remark that Metropolitan Joseph's clergy are outstanding in their consistent and active involvement in such events. His Eminence has labored intensely to deepen the spiritual life of his clergy, by encouraging frequent confession, personal prayer, continual education, and a heightened sense of the fullness of our Orthodox Christian tradition of interior and ascetical transfiguration in Christ.

His Eminence has demonstrated episcopal hospitality in his way of life and has led the way in cultivating an active pan-Orthodox community in the western United States and Canada. All of the canonical Orthodox hierarchs of the West relate to Metropolitan Joseph in a personal way as an episcopal concelebrant. This episcopal brotherhood has increasingly been reflected in the inter-parochial interaction of the priests and laity of all the parishes, across the western states and provinces.

Metropolitan Joseph has taken care in establishing a strong, clear, and straightforward liturgical guidance for all his parishes. He pioneered the use of the internet in publishing the entire text of all the Sunday and festal services of the Church throughout the year. His love for the divine services inspires him to improve the liturgical praxis of all the clergy, through constant interactions and special teachings. In addition, he constantly promotes the spiritual climate of the dioceses under his care with such things as "the thought of the day."

Sayidna Joseph is fluent in English, Arabic and Greek and is conversant in other European languages.

His name day is the second Sunday after Pascha (Joseph of Arimathea). Source: http://www.antiochian.org/MetropolitanJoseph
Chapter Three:
The Arab Christian Heritage
ARAB CHRISTIANS: AN INTRODUCTION

by Dr Walid Phares

For years, the term "Arab Christians" was used to categorize the Christians in the Middle East. However, the concept instead of being precisely defined was intellectually misused and politically abused. Both Arab regimes and "Arabists" in the West attempted to libel all Christians living under the sovereignty of Arab states, as "Arab Christians."

This denial of identity of millions of indigenous non-Arab nations can be equated to an organized ethnic cleansing on a politico-cultural level. Similarly to the Turkish attempts to eradicate the ethnic identity of the Kurds, whom they call "Mountain Turks," and the Assyrians, whom they define as "Semitic Turks."

Arab-Islamic regimes in the region assert that all those Christians who live within the confines of "Arab borders" are "Arab." With Arab nationalism at its peak, and "Arabist" circles at the apex of their political influence in the West, the pre-Arab ethnicities of the Middle East became the real underdogs of the region. The Arab Israeli conflict increased their crisis. Not only the non-Arab ethnicities, particularly the non-Moslem ones, were denied their basic rights, stripped from their ancestral lands, but they were pressured to participate in the general "war effort" conducted by the Arab regimes against a non-Arab nation, i.e. the Jews of Israel.

The gestalt of global Arab strategy in the region was to pit non-Arabs against other non-Arabs, after demonizing those who have formed their national state Israel, and fragmented those who weren't able to implement self-determination. The Christians in the Middle East are not just a religious group, nor do they form one single community. The overwhelming majority of the Christians in the region are ethnically non-Arab, and their major common characteristic is their subjection to Arab colonialism and Islamic oppression for thirteen centuries. The Christians in the Middle East are not, as it was portrayed by the Arab regimes and many in the West, the followers of Christian faith among the Arab ethnic group. "Arab Christians" exist in few spots in the region, but they are a minuscule minority within the world of Middle Eastern Christianity.

Prior to the Arab Islamic invasion of the upper Middle East--the term invasion is crucial--most of the peoples of the region, with the exception of the ancient Israelites, were Christianized: Copts in Egypt, Assyro-Chaldeans in Mesopotamia, Nubian Africans in Sudan, Armenians in Asia Minor, Phoenicians (Arameans, Canaanites, Amorites) in Syria, and Lebanon. With the dispersion of the Jews by the Romans, limited number of Christians moved to Palestine from the north and the East. In Arabia, the majority was pagan, a large segment of Arab tribes converted to Christianity, and after the dismantlement of ancient Israel, the number of Jewish centers increased in the Peninsula. Therefore, prior to the Arab Islamic Conquest,
the upper Middle East was not Arab, its overwhelming majority was Christian, and many Arabs in the Peninsula were Christians. These are the "Arab Christians."

Since the 7th century the geo-political landscape of the region changed dramatically. The Arab Islamic armies occupied the upper Middle East, the new order implemented an Arabization and an Islamization of the conquered people. The majority of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt, and Nubia, shifted to Arab Moslem. Numerically the native pre-Arab nations were reduced, and politically suppressed. The defeat, Arabization, and Islamization of the pre-Arab cultures, occurred during the dispersion of the Jews. The pre-Arab ethnicities, most of which were Christians, shrunk to enclaves, or to social categories. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the non-Arab Middle Eastern nations reasserted their historic national claims in many areas of their ancestral lands, which they never left. The Assyrians reclaimed their rights in northern Iraq, and north East Syria. The Lebanese Christians reaffirmed their identity in Mount Lebanon; the Copts attempted to reform in upper Egypt, and the Afro-Nubians called for self-determination in southern Sudan. The historic national rights of these native nations were met with radical rejection by the established Arab regimes. Ethnic conflicts exploded in Sudan and Lebanon, while ethnic oppression was implemented in northern Iraq and Egypt. The political suppression of minor Christian communities was also applied in Syria and north Africa.

What happened to the "Arab Christians?" At the onset of Islam, all of the Arab Christian tribes were military defeated or subdued. Numbers of them converted to Islam for socio-political reasons. When the Arab Islamic armies conquered the upper Middle East, the "Christian Arabs" were erased from Arabia, their Churches destroyed or converted to Mosques. Only few clans survived in southern Iraq, southern Syria, and mainly in north west Arabia -which became Trans-Jordan a few centuries later. After the conquest, some of these Arab Christian clans emigrated to Palestine moving in from the East. They joined the non-Arab Christians who were present in Palestine after the Jewish dispersion, and seven centuries before the Arab invasion. There are two types of Christians in Palestine, and later on within the state of Israel. The non-Arab Middle Eastern Christians, and Arabs who are Christians. The largest Christian nation are the Copts, who number about 12 million. The Egyptian government recognize only 2.5 million. The most concentrated and socially organized nation are the Lebanese Christians (mostly Maronites) who number 1.5 million in Lebanon and about seven million in the diaspora. The Assyro-Chaldeans of Iraq are about 1 million in Mesopotamia, and one million in the diaspora. The Christians of Syria are about a million. Non-Arab Syrians (Arameans), Arabized Syrians, and Arab Christians (mostly Orthodox), in addition to Armenians. In southern Sudan the African ethnic nationality is about seven million, Christians and Animists. There are small Christian communities in Iran and Turkey. There are no Saudi or Kuwaiti Christian. The Christian nations living within the confines of Arab states are about twenty million! So who are the "Arab Christians" to whom Arab regimes and Arabists in the West refer? First, they are not recognized as distinct ethnic identities, but rather as segments from the wide "Arab nation" who are "of
Christian faith." This indicates the non-readiness of these regimes and their dominant ideologies to recognize the latter's fundamental, political rights, and subsequently their rights to "national lands." Second, the Arab-Arabist duo do not admit the real numeric size of these so-called "Arab Christians." In Egypt, they are recognized as 2.5 million, in Iraq, 250,000, in Sudan, 2 million, in Syria, 500,000, and in Lebanon, 25% of the population! Not only have the Arab dominant powers subverted the numbers, but they have attempted to subvert the identities of all pre-Arab nationalities in the region, including those who converted to Islam, such as the Berbers of north Africa, and the Kurds.

Where are the real "Arab Christians?" They are dispersed between Jordan, Syria, Israel, and the Palestinian autonomous territories. They are the remnants of the Arab Christian clans who escaped Islamization and more recently the end product of Evangelization. They are estimated to be 200,000 in Syria, a hundred thousand in Jordan and an equal number or more among the Palestinian-Arab populations, including within the Arab--Israeli population. The Christians in Israel are composed of Arabs, Arabized, non-Arabs, and few non-Middle Eastern. Although Arabs and Arabized are the majority (around 70%) the non-Arabs who are the descendants of pre-Arabs are in high numbers. Among them are the Maronites, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syriacs, and Armenians. Ironically many in Israel are not familiar with the existence of non-Arab Christians in their country. This misperception led many to believe that all Christians in the Middle East are "Arabs," and as anti-Israel, as the Arab mainstream in the region. Most of the Israelis, as do most of the Western public opinion simply do not know that there are other "non-Arab" nations in the region, also seeking the establishment of their independent homelands. Many in Israel and the West perceive the Christians of the region as represented by Hanan Ashrawi, George Habash, or Michel Aflaq. Whereas the majority of the Christian nations do not recognize themselves as Arabs. Their causes are not reported, their present or past leaders such as John Garang, Ibrahim Hilal, Bashir Gemayel, Mar Shimun, and others are marginalized. Even the mini-community of Christian Arabs is not at ease with its ethnic brethren. As a result of the surge of Islamic fundamentalism, all the Christians in the Middle East realize that they travel in the same boat. >From the pogroms of Copts in Egypt, the ethnic cleansing of South Sudanese, the oppression of Lebanese Christians, to forced Arabization of the Syro-Mesopotamian Christians, the 20 million non-Arab Christians are systematically targeted. The 0.6 million Arab Christians, including those living within the Jewish state are experiencing one of their most severe choices: Surrender to Islamization, or join the pan-Middle East Christian boat, as a way to survive and maintain their spiritual identity.

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Arab Christians

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Arab Christians (Arabic: Al-'Arab Al-Masihiyin) are ethnic Arabs of Christian faith, sometimes also including those, who are identified with Arab panethnicity. They are the remnants of ancient Arab Christian clans or Arabized Christians (Melchites). Many of the modern Arab Christians are descendants of pre-Islamic Christian Arabian tribes, namely the Kahlani Qahtani tribes of ancient Yemen (i.e. Ghassanids, Lakhmids, Banu Judham and Hamadan). During the 5th and 6th centuries the Ghassanids, who adopted Monophysite Christianity, formed one of the most powerful Arab confederations allied to Christian Byzantium, being a buffer against the pagan tribes of Arabia. The last king of the Lakhmids, Nu'man III, a client of the Sasanian (Persian) Empire in the late sixth century AD, also converted to Christianity (in this case, to the Nestorian sect). Arab Christians played important role in Al-Nahda, as a matter of fact Arab Christians formed the educated elite and the bourgeois class, they have a significant impact in politics and economic and culture, and most important figures of the Al-Nahda movement were Christian Arabs. Today Arab Christians play important roles in the Arab world, and Christians are relatively wealthy, well educated, and politically moderate.

Arab Christians, forming Greek Orthodox (including Arab Orthodox) and Latin Christian communities, are estimated to be 200,000 in Syria, a hundred thousand in Jordan and an equal number or more among the Palestinian Arab population and within the Arab-Israeli population, with a sizeable community in Lebanon and marginal communities in Iraq and Egypt. Emigrants from Arab Christian communities make up a significant proportion of the Middle Eastern diaspora, with sizeable population concentrations across the Americas, most notably in Chile and the US. Arab Christians term is also generally applied to Arabized Melkite societies in Lebanon, Syria, Israel and the Palestinian Authority, who trace their roots to Greek and Aramaic-speaking Byzantine Christians. Some Arab Christians are a more recent end result of Evangelization.

Arab Christians are not the only Christian group in the Middle East, with significant non-Arab indigenous Christian communities of ethnic Armenians, Georgians, Greeks and others. Besides those, large ethno-religious Middle Eastern Christian groups of Copts, Maronites and Syriacs are being argued with a great deal of controversy whether their ethnic identity is Arab or not. Even though sometimes classified as Arab Christians, the largest Middle Eastern Christian groups of Lebanese Maronites and Egyptian Copts often claim non-Arab ethnicity: significant proportion of the Maronites claim descent from ancient Phoenicians, while some Egyptian Copts also eschew an Arab identity, preferring an Ancient Egyptian one. However, both Maronites and Copts had lost their linguistic differentiation during the Ottoman period in favor of the Arabic language. The Syriac Christian groups, composed largely of Chaldo-Assyrians, form the majority of Christians in Iraq, north east Syria, south-east Turkey and north-west Iran. They are generally defined as non-Arab ethnic groups, including by the governments of Iraq, Iran and Turkey.
Assyro-Chaldeans are practicing their own native dialects of Syriac-Aramaic language, in addition to also speaking local Arabic dialects. Despite their ancient pre-Arabic roots and distinct linguo-cultural identities, Assyro-Chaldeans are sometimes related by Western sources as "Christians of the Arab World" or "Arabic Christians", creating confusion about their identity. Syriac Christians were also related as "Arab Christians" by pan-Arab movements and Arab-Islamic regimes against their will.

**History**

**Classic antiquity**

Isaac of Nineveh a Bahrani bishop and theologian, 7th century (orthodox icon).

Arab Christians are indigenous to the Middle East, with a presence there predating the 7th century Islamic expansion into the Fertile Crescent. There were many Arab tribes which adhered to Christianity beginning with the 1st century, including the Nabateans (who incorporated elements of both Arabs and Arameans), the Ghassanids and the Lakhmids. The latter were of Qahtani origin and spoke Yemeni-Arabic as well as Greek, and who protected the southeastern frontiers of the Roman and Byzantine Empires in north Arabia.

Nabateans were possibly among the first Arab tribes to arrive to Southern Levant in the first millennium BC. At first, they were converted to Judaism, during the expansion campaigns of the Hasmonean Kingdom at the first and second centuries BC. However, by the fourth century Nabateans had converted to Christianity. The new Arab invaders, who soon pressed forward into their seats found the remnants of the Nabataeans transformed into peasants. Their lands were divided between the new Qahtanite Arab tribal kingdoms of the Byzantine vassals the Ghassanid Arabs and the Himyarite vassals the Kindah Arab Kingdom in North Arabia.

The tribes of Tayy, Abd Al-Qais, and Taghlib are also known to have included many Christians in the pre-Islamic period. The Yemenite city of Najran was a center of Arabian Christianity, made famous by the persecution by one of the kings of Yemen, Dhu Nawas, who was himself an enthusiastic convert to Judaism. The leader of the Arabs of Najran during the period of persecution, Al-Harith, was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church as St. Aretas. Some modern scholars suggest that Philip the Arab was the first Christian emperor of Rome.[18] By the 4th century a significant number of Christians occupied the Sinai peninsula, Mesopotamia and Arabia.

The New Testament has a biblical account of Arab conversion to Christianity recorded in the book of Acts. When St. Peter preaches to the people of Jerusalem, they ask,
"And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? [. . .] both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." (Acts 2:8, 11, English Standard Version). Arab Christians are thus one of the oldest Christian communities.

The first mention of Christianity in Arabia occurs in the New Testament as the Apostle Paul refers to his journey in Arabia following his conversion (Galatians 1: 15-17). Later, Eusebius of Caesarea discusses a bishop named Beryllus in the see of Bostra, the site of a synod c. 240 and two Councils of Arabia. Christians existed in Arab lands from at least the 3rd century onward.

Also, there were Christian influences coming from Ethiopia in particular in pre-Islamic times, and some Hijazis (including a cousin of Muhammad's wife Khadijah, according to some sources) adopted this faith, while some Ethiopian Christians may have lived in Mecca.

**After Islamic conquest**

Throughout many eras of history, Christians have co-existed fairly peacefully with their fellow non-Christian Arab neighbours, principally Muslims and Jews. Even after the rapid expansion of Islam from the 7th century onwards through the Islamic conquests, many Christians chose not to convert to Islam. Many scholars and intellectuals like Edward Said believed Christians in the Arab world have made significant contributions to the Arab civilization and still do. Some of the top poets at certain times were Arab Christians, and many Arab Christians were physicians, writers, government officials, and people of literature.

However, there have been many periods of persecution also, and Christians were often subject to Jizyah, a discriminatory tax. As "People of the Book", Christians in the region are accorded certain rights under Islamic law (Shari'ah) to practice their religion, strictly conditioned, however, on paying a tax required from non-Muslims called 'Jizyah' (pronounced Jiz-ya), in form of either cash or goods. The tax was not levied on slaves, women, children, monks, the old, the sick, hermits, or the poor. In return, non-Muslim citizens were permitted to practice their faith, to enjoy a measure of communal autonomy, to be entitled to Muslim state's protection from outside aggression, to be exempted from military service and the zakat, a form of tax which is obligatory upon Muslim citizens.

**Role in Al-Nahda**

Renaissance of Arab culture in the nineteenth century began in the wake of exit of Mohammed Ali Pasha from the Levant in 1840 and accelerated in the late nineteenth century. Beirut, Cairo, Damascus and Aleppo were the main centers of renaissance and this led to the establishment of schools, universities, Arab theater and printing presses. It also led to the renewal of literary, linguistic and poetic distinctiveness. The emergence of a politically active movement known as the "association" was accompanied by the birth of the idea of Arab nationalism and the demand for reformation of the Ottoman
Empire. The emergence of the idea of Arab independence and reformation, led to the
calling of the establishment of modern states based on the European-style. It was
during this stage, that the first compound of the Arabic language was introduced and the
printing in Arabic letters. In music, sculpture and history and the humanities generally,
as well as economics, human rights, and a summary of the case that the cultural
renaissance by the Arabs the late Ottoman rule was a quantum leap for them to post-
industrial revolution, and can not be limited to the fields of cultural renaissance of Arab
in the nineteenth century these categories only as It is extended to include the spectrum
of society and the fields as a whole, and is almost universal agreement among
historians on the role played by the Arab Christians in this renaissance, both in Mount
Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and their role in the prosperity through participation
not only from home but in the Diaspora also, as the fact that Christians in the modern
era the educated elite and the bourgeois class, making their contribution to the
economic boom with a significant impact, as they were the owners of a significant
impact in the cultural renaissance, and in the revolt against colonialism Pfim, writings,
and their work. is noteworthy for example, in the press sound Anjoa founder of the
«mirror the Middle» in 1879 and the Secretary of Saal founder of the Journal of Law and
George Michael Knight founder of the «Egyptian newspaper» in 1888 and Alexander
Shallhoub founder of the Journal of the Sultanate in 1897 and Selim Takla and his
brother Bishara Takla founding Al-Ahram newspaper, and in the jurisprudence of the
Arabic language The Abraham Yazigi Yazigi and Nassif and Peter Gardener. At the
same time entered into by the Archbishop of Aleppo Mlatios grace of the printing press
letters to Arab Levant and continued in print until 1899. On the other hand, contributed
to Arab Christians in fighting policy Turkification pursued by the Assembly of the Union
and Progress and has emerged in Aleppo, in particular, Bishop Germanos Farhat and
Father Boutros Tallawy, and the school was founded the Patriarchate in the prolific that
came out a multitude of flags of the Arab at that point, an
d played coll
lege Christian
university of St. Joseph and the American University of Beirut and Al-Hikma University
in Baghdad and other leading role in the development of civilization and Arab culture. In
Iraq, an active father Anastas Marie Carmelite, and in the literature mentioned Gibran
Khalil Gibran and Mikhail Naima Lomé increase and Ameen Rihani and Shafiq Maalouf
and Elias Farhat. The answer, in politics and Alazuri Shokri Ghanem and Jacob Abov,
Faris Nimr and Boutros-Ghali, in Lebanon and Egypt. Given this growing Christian role
in politics and culture, governments began to turn contains the Ottoman ministers from
the Arab Christians and all of them epic in Lebanon. In the economic sphere, a number
of Christian families, including Al Sursock and all stockist and all Websters in the Levant
and all Sakakini, and all-Ghali, and all fixed in Egypt, Thus, the Arab Middle East led the
Muslims and Christians a cultural renaissance and national general despotism which
formed Rkizath Society of Union and Progress and Policy Turkification, and established
this renaissance as seen Paul Naaman "Arab Christians as one of the pillars of the
region and not as a minority on the fringes.

In the post-Ottoman era

Some of the most influential Arab nationalists were Arab Christians, like George
Habash, founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and Syrian
intellectual Constantin Zureiq. Many Palestinian Christians were also active in the
formation and governing of the Palestinian National Authority since 1992. The suicide bomber Jules Jammal, a Syrian military officer who blew himself up while ramming a French ship, was also an Arab Christian.

**Arab Christians today**

Most Egyptian Christians are Copts, who are mainly members of the Coptic Orthodox Church. Although Copts in Egypt speak Egyptian Arabic, many of them do not consider themselves to be ethnically Arabs, but rather descendants of the Ancient Egyptians. The Copts constitute the largest population of Christians in the Middle East, numbering between 6,000,000 and 11,000,000. The liturgical language of the Copts, the Coptic language, is a direct descendant of the Ancient Egyptian language. Coptic remains the liturgical language of all Coptic churches inside and outside of Egypt.

**Iraq**

If excluding Syriac groups, the Arab Christian community in Iraq is relatively small, and further dwindled due to the Iraq War to just several thousands. Most Arab Christians in Iraq belong traditionally to Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches and are concentrated in major cities such as Baghdad, Basra and Mosul.

The vast majority of the 400,000 Christians in Iraq are ethnic Assyrians (also called Chaldeans and Syriacs), who follow Syriac Christian churches, most notably the Chaldean Catholic, Assyrian, Syriac Catholic and Orthodox churches. Some followers of Syriac Churches may also self-identify as Arabs in the pan-ethnic sense.

**Israel**

With 122,000 Arab Christians living in Israel, as Arab citizens of Israel, out of a total of 151,700 Christian citizens, this is one of the biggest Arab Christian communities in the world. It is also the only Arab Christian community in the Middle East, which experiences a net population growth. Arab Christians form an 80% majority of the Christians in Israel, with smaller Christian communities of ethnic Russians, Greeks,
Armenians, Maronites, Ukrainians and Assyrians. The majority of Arab Christians in Israel belong to the Greek Orthodox Church, with a sizable minority belonging to the Greek Catholic (Melkite) and Latin Churches. Other denominations are the Anglicans who have their cathedral church in the contested territory of East Jerusalem. Baptists in Israel are concentrated in the north of the country, and have four churches in the Nazareth area, and a seminary.

Some of the Arab Christians in Israel self-identify as Palestinian Arab Christians. Christian Arabs are considered to be the most educated community in Israel and they have attained more bachelor’s degrees and academic degrees than Jewish, Muslims and Druze per capita. Christian Arabs also have the highest rates of success in the matriculation examinations, both in comparison to the Muslims and the Druze and in comparison to all students in the Jewish education system.

Jordan

Jordanian Christians are the among the oldest Christian community in the world Christians have resided in Jordan since the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, early in the 1st century AD. Jordanian Christians now number at about 400,000 people, or 6% of the population of approximately 6,500,000, which is lower than the near 20% in the early 20th century. This is largely due to lower birth rates in comparison with Muslims and to a strong influx of Muslim immigrants from neighboring countries. Also, a larger percent of Christians compared to Muslims emigrate to western countries, resulting in a large Jordanian Christian diaspora.

Christians are well integrated in the Jordanian society and have a high level of freedom. Nearly all Christians belong to the middle or upper classes. Moreover, Christians enjoy more economic and social opportunity in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan than anywhere in the Middle East and North Africa, except for Lebanon. They have a disproportionately large representation in the Jordanian parliament (10% of the Parliament) and hold important government portfolios, ambassadorial appointments abroad, and positions of high military rank. Jordanian Christians are allowed by the public and private sectors to leave work to attend Divine Liturgy or Mass on Sundays. All Christian religious ceremonies are publicly celebrated. Christians have established good relations with the royal family and the various Jordanian government officials and they have their own ecclesiastical courts for matters of personal status.

Most native Christians in Jordan identify themselves as Arab, though there are also significant non-Arab Assyro-Chaldean, Syriac and Armenian ethnic groups in the country. Christian ex-Muslims are not permitted to legally convert, and do not enjoy the same rights as other Christians in Jordan.
Lebanon

The earliest indisputable tradition of Christianity in Lebanon can be traced back to Saint Maron in the 4th century, the founder of national and ecclesiastical Maronitism. Saint Maron adopted an ascetic, reclusive life on the banks of the Orontes river near Homs–Syria and founded a community of monks who preached the Gospel in the surrounding area. The Saint Maron Monastery was too close to Antioch, making the monks vulnerable to emperor Justinian II’s persecution. To escape persecution, Saint John Maron, the first Maronite patriarch-elect, led his monks into the Lebanese mountains; the Maronite monks finally settled in the Qadisha valley.

During the Muslim conquest, Muslims persecuted the Christians, particularly the Maronites, with the persecution reaching a peak during the Umayyad caliphate. Nevertheless, the influence of the Maronite establishment spread throughout the Lebanese mountains and became a considerable feudal force. After the Muslim Conquest, the Maronite Church became isolated and did not reestablish contact with the Church of Rome until the 12th century. According to Kamal Salibi some Maronites may have been descended from an Arabian tribe, who immigrated thousands of years ago from the Southern Arabian peninsula. Salibi maintains "It is very possible that the Maronites, as a community of Arabian origin, were among the last Arabian Christian tribes to arrive in Syria before Islam". Many Lebanese Christians reject this, however, seeing themselves instead as being of non-Arab origin.

Lebanon holds the largest number of Christians in the Arab world proportionally and falls just behind Egypt in absolute numbers. It is known that Christians made up between 65%-85% of Lebanon's population before the Lebanese Civil War, if not more, and they still form 30%-38% of the population today. The exact number of Christians is uncertain because no official census has been made in Lebanon since 1932. Lebanese Christians belong mostly to the Maronite Catholic Church and Greek Orthodox, with sizable minorities belonging to the Melkite Greek Catholics. Lebanese Christians are the only Christians in the Middle East with a sizeable political role in the country. The Lebanese president, half of the cabinet, and half of the parliament follow one of the various Lebanese Christian rites.

State of Palestine

Most of the Palestinian Christians identify themselves as Arab Christians culturally and linguistically, claiming descent from the early Jews and Gentiles, who converted to Christianity during the Roman and Byzantine rule, as well as Christian Ghassanid Arabs and Greeks who settled in the region since. Between 36,000-50,000 Christians live in the Palestinian Authority, most of whom belong to the Orthodox (Greek Orthodox and Arab Orthodox) and Catholic (including Melchite) churches. The majority of Palestinian Christians live in the Bethlehem, Ramallah and Nablus areas.

Many Palestinian Arab Christians hold high-ranking positions in Palestinian society, particularly at the political and social levels. Israeli historian Benny Morris writes that
Christian-Muslim relations constitute a divisive element in Palestinian society.

Christian communities in the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Strip have greatly dwindled over the last two decades. The causes of the Palestinian Christian exodus are widely debated. Reuters reports that many Palestinian Christians emigrate in pursuit of better living standards, while the BBC also blames the economic decline in the Palestinian Authority as well as pressure from the security situation upon their lifestyle. The Vatican and the Catholic Church saw the Israeli occupation and the general conflict in the Holy Land as the principal reasons for the Christian exodus from the territories. There have also been cases of persecution by radical Islamist elements, mainly in the Gaza Strip. Palestinian Christian human rights activist Hanna Siniora has attributed local harassment against Christians to "little groups" of "hoodlums" rather than to the Hamas or Fatah governments. The West Bank barrier and restrictions on Palestinian movement were cited by the former Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs' chief liaison to Christians as the primary issues facing local Christians.

The decline of the Christian community in the Palestinian controlled areas follow the general trend of Christian decline in the Muslim dominated Middle East.

**Gaza Strip**

In 2007, just before the Hamas takeover of Gaza, there were 3,200 Christians living in the Gaza Strip. Half the Christian community in Gaza fled to the West Bank and abroad after the Hamas take-over in 2007.

**Syria**

In Syria, according to the 1960 census, Christians formed just under 15% of the population (about 1.2 million people). Due to political reasons, no newer census has been taken since. Current estimates suggest that overall Christians comprise about 10% of the overall population (2,000,000), due to having lower birth rates and higher emigration rates than their Muslim compatriots. The Arab Christians in Syria are Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, with some Roman Catholics. The largest Christian denomination in Syria is the Greek Orthodox church, formerly known as the Melkite church after the 5-6th centuries Christian split, in which they stayed loyal to Constantinople ("melek" = king, is the Aramaic denomination for the Byzantine Emperor). The appellation "Greek" refers to the liturgy they use, sometimes used to refer to the ancestry and ethnicity of the members, however not all members are of Greek ancestry; in fact, the Arabic word used is "Rum", which means "Byzantines", or Eastern Romans. Overall, the term is generally used to refer mostly to the Greek.
liturgy, and the Greek Orthodox denomination in Syria. Arabic is now its main liturgical language. Today, a minority of Syrian Christians hold on to their ethnic Syriac (also called Assyrians or Chaldo-Assyrians) and Armenian origins, with a major influx of Iraqi Christian refugees into these communities.

Turkey

Antiochian Greeks who mostly live in Hatay Province, are one of the Arabic speaker community in Turkey. They are Greek Orthodox. However, they are known as Arab Christians, because of their language. Antioch (capital of Hatay Province) is also historical capital of Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch

Diaspora

Hundreds of thousands of Arab Christians also live in the diaspora, outside of the Middle East. These are residing in such countries as Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, the United States and Venezuela among them. There are also many Arab Christians in Europe, especially in the United Kingdom, France (due to its historical connections with Lebanon and North Africa), and Spain (due to its historical connections with northern Morocco), and to a lesser extent in Ireland, Germany, Italy, Greece and the Netherlands. Among those, across Europe and the Americas, an estimated 400,000 Arab Christians are living in the Palestinian diaspora.

North Africa

There are tiny communities of Roman Catholics in Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, and Morocco due to colonial rule - French rule for Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, Spanish rule for Morocco, and Italian rule for Libya. Most Christians in North Africa are foreign missionaries, immigrant workers, and people of French, Spanish, and Italian colonial descent. These mostly converted during the modern era or under French colonialism. Arguably, many more North African Christians of Berber or Arab descent live in France than in North Africa, due to the exodus of the pieds-noirs in the 1960s. Charles de Foucauld was renowned for his missions in North Africa among Muslims, including African Arabs.

Question of identity

Arab Christians include descendants of ancient Arab tribes, who were among the first Christian converts, as well as some recent adherents of Christianity. Sometimes, however the issue of self-identification arises regarding specific Christian communities across the Arab world.

Assyrians

After the ascend of the nationalist Ba'ath party in Iraq in 1963 Assyrian Christians were referred to as "Arab Christians" by Arab nationalists who deny the existence of an
Assyrian identity. In 1972 a law was passed to use Syriac language in public schools and in media, shortly afterwards however Syriac was banned and Arabic was imposed on Syriac language magazines and newspapers.

By the time of the 1977 census, Assyrians were being referred to as either Arabs or Kurds. Christians were forced to deny their identity as Assyrian nationalism was harshly punished. One example of this "Arabization" program was Iraqi deputy prime minister, Tariq Aziz, a Chaldean Christian who changed his surname from Youkhana upon joining the Baath.

By the 1990s those Christians who still referred to themselves as "Assyrians" were exempt from the Oil-for-Food program and did not receive their monthly food rations. Many Assyrians were expelled from their villages in northern Iraq, others were forced to replaced their names with Arab ones.

They likewise pointed out that Arab nationalist groups have wrongly included Assyrian-Americans in their head count of Arab Americans, in order to bolster their political clout in Washington. Some Arab American groups have imported this denial of Assyrian identity to the United States. In 2001, a coalition of Assyrian, Chaldean and Maronite organizations, wrote to the Arab-American Institute, to reprimand them for claiming that Assyrians were Arabs. The asked the Arab-American Institute “to cease and desist from portraying Assyrians and Maronites of past and present as Arabs, and from speaking on behalf of Assyrians and Maronites.”

Copts

The Copts are the native Egyptian Christians, a major ethnoreligious group in Egypt. Christianity was the majority religion in Roman Egypt during the 4th to 6th centuries and until the Muslim conquest and remains the faith of a significant minority population. Their Coptic language is the direct descendant of the Demotic Egyptian spoken in the Roman era, but it has been near-extinct and mostly limited to liturgical use since the 18th century. In current times the spoken language of Copts is Arabic, and a significant number of Coptic Christians self-identify as part of the Arab nation.

Copts in Egypt constitute the largest Christian community in the Middle East, as well as the largest religious minority in the region, accounting for an estimated 10% of Egyptian population. Most Copts adhere to the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. The remaining (around 800,000) are divided between the Coptic Catholic and various Coptic Protestant churches.

As a religious minority, the Copts are subject to significant discrimination in modern Egypt, and the target of attacks by militant Islamic extremist groups.

Maronites

At the March 1936 Congress of the Coast and Four Districts, the Muslim leadership at this conference made the declaration that Lebanon was an Arab country,
indistinguishable from its Arab neighbors. In the April 1936 Beirut municipal elections, Christian Maronite and Muslim Politicians were divided along Phoenician and Arab lines in concern of whether the Lebanese coast should be claimed by Syria or given to Lebanon, increasing the already mounting tensions between the two communities.

Lebanese nationalism, which rejects Arab identity, has found a strong support among some Maronites and even other Orthodox Christians. However, this form of nationalism, nicknamed Phoenicianism, never developed into an integrated ideology led by key thinkers, but there are a few who stood out more than others: Charles Corm, Michel Chiha, and Said Aql in their promotion of Phoenicianism.

In post civil-war Lebanon, since the Taif agreement, politically Phoenicianism, as an alternate to Arabism, has been restricted to a small group. Phoenicianism is deeply disputed by some scholars, who have on occasion tried to convince these claims are false and to embrace and accept the Arab identity instead. This conflict of ideas of an identity is believed to be one of the main pivotal disputes between the Muslim and Maronite Christian populations of Lebanon and what mainly divides the country from national unity. It's generalized that Muslims focus more on the Arab identity of Lebanese history and culture whereas Christians focus on the pre-arabized & non-Arab spectrum of the Lebanese identity and rather refrain from the Arab specification.

During a final session of the Lebanese Parliament, a Marada Maronite MP states his identity as an Arab: "I, the Maronite Christian Lebanese Arab, grandson of Patriarch Estefan Doueihy, declare my pride to be a part of our people’s resistance in the South. Can one renounce what guarantees his rights?"

**Pan-Syrian identity**

Although the majority of the followers of Greek Orthodox and Catholic Churches in the Levant adhere to Arab nationalism, some politicians reject Arabism, such as the secular Greek Orthodox Antun Saadeh, founder of the SSNP, who was executed for advocating the abolition of the Lebanese state by the Kataeb led government in the 1940s. Saadeh rejected Arab Nationalism (the idea that the speakers of the Arabic language form a single, unified nation), and argued instead for the creation of the state of United Syrian Nation or Natural Syria encompassing the Fertile Crescent. Saadeh rejected both language and religion as defining characteristics of a nation, and instead argued that nations develop through the common development of a people inhabiting a specific geographical region. He was thus a strong opponent of both Arab nationalism and Pan-Islamism. He argued that Syria was historically, culturally, and geographically distinct from the rest of the Arab world, which he divided into four parts. He traced Syrian history as a distinct entity back to the Phoenicians, Canaanites, Arameans, Babylonians etc.

**Church affiliation**

The Arab Christians largely belong to the Greek Orthodox or Antiochian Orthodox Churches, though there are also adherents to other churches: Melkite Greek Catholic
Church, Latin Catholic Church, and Protestant Churches.

**Doctrine**
Like Arab Muslims, Arab Christians refer to God as Allah, as an Arabic word for "God". The use of the term Allah in Arab Christian churches predates Islam by several centuries. In more recent times (especially since the mid-19th century), some Arab speaking Christians from the Levant region have been converted from these native, traditional churches to more recent Protestant ones, most notably Baptist and Methodist churches. This is mostly due to an influx of Western, predominantly American Evangelical, missionaries.

**Genetic Studies**
**Relation of Levantine populations to Phoenicians**

A study in the genetic marker of the Phoenicians led by Pierre Zalloua, showed that the Phoenician genetic marker was found in 1 out of 17 males in the region surrounding the Mediterranean and Phoenician trading centers such as the Levant, Tunisia, Morocco, Cyprus, and Malta. The study focused on the male Y-chromosome of a sample of 1,330 males from the Mediterranean. Colin Groves, biological anthropologist of the Australia National University in Canberra says that the study does not suggest that the Phoenicians were restricted to a certain place, but that their DNA still lingers 3,000 years later.

In Lebanon, almost 1 in 3 of Lebanese carry the Phoenician gene in their DNA. This Phoenician signature is distributed equally among different groups (both Christians and Muslims) in Lebanon and that the overall genetic makeup of the Lebanese was found to be similar across various backgrounds. The Phoenician gene in this study refers to haplogroup J2 plus the haplotypes PCS1+ to PCS6+, however the study also states that the Phoenicians also likely had other haplogroups.

In addition, the study found that the J2 ("old levantine haplogroup") was found in an "unusually high proportion" (about 20-30%) among Levantine people such as the Syrians, Lebanese and the Palestinians. The ancestor haplogroup J is common to about 50% of the Arabic-speaking people of the Southwest Asian portion of the Middle East. A Lebanese Christian who was tested as having the J2 haplogroup stated that "It carries no big meaning," and added he views himself as "Lebanese, Arab and Christian -- in that order."

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Christians
Arab Christian Heritage  
Vital Presence of Christian Arabs Among Moslem Arabs  

By Dr. Wajih Saadeh

Dr. Saadeh show in this article the great contribution of the Arab Christians, on different fields as the social, political, national, thinking, literature, Arab language etc looking from the "tower of the twentieth century" back

Previous centuries

If we look at previous centuries and back to ancient history, we see from the end of the twentieth century many events and unlimited number of things taking place in one form or another, and leading us to where we are now. In this survey we remember names of men and women in history, places and cities that vanished or are still here. Also we remember dates, thoughts, battlefields, and conquests which were important and changed the social structure of human society. In such a case, a historian or a writer can give the reader a clear outlook to these facts and the events which stemmed from them, also we give these facts special, convenient and logical historical analysis and interpretations.

From the tower of the twentieth century, or the end of the last decade of it, we want to make a review to Arab history beginning of past times to present, by way of Christian Arab presence and the effectiveness of this presence in the Arab society as a whole. Things look very clear as we advance in life, and as scholars, authors and students of learning uncovered so much in Arab history by way of research, writings, archeology and travel.

There is abundance of material in this historical search which we cannot handle when writing a few pages about any topic in history, or in the learning process in general. It is my desire to concentrate in this writing on the Christian Arabs and their vital presence among their brethren the Moslem Arab majority. Also, let us not forget the impact of non- Arab Christianson Arab mind and behavior, though Christian Arabs had a unique status, and being a true positive factor in the makeup of the Arab society as a whole.

The Christian Arab, a minority in the Arab society adds an essential touch to the Moslem Arab majority. Being in coordination and in association, the equalization of give and take between them enhanced in time and duration, and led to coherent mutual trust between them to become a bulwark and a moving force manifested in one destiny, and that is, of Arab independence, leading to norms and ideals for national unity. Christian Arab thinking was fundamental and positive in this order of circumstances.

The Christian Arab gives to his capable brethren a different keen farsightedness, different valid directions, and unique thoughts to public and state of affairs. Being in his
Christian Arab milieu, the Christian Arab approach to things and events takes a different universal impression, different political dress, patience, and special directions and judgment, particularly in facing and solving obstacles and problems, and more important in upbringing and in nurturing the human element. This Christian Arab thinking and behavior are enlightening to Arab society in general and at all times, they are basic and constructive and well planned.

In modern times, Christian Arabs were the first to send their sons and specially their daughters to schools and universities to learn and be enlightened. Arab Moslems followed suit. This is one of many examples. Arab Christians opened significant cultural circles in Arab society, and being a continuous chain of actions and events, they will remain the torch bearers in future developments.

Christian Arabs were and are always good and sincere citizens, and never betrayed the Arab nation in spite their persecution for being Christians, at occasions in history. Similarly, mistreated were the Assyrian and Chaldean Christians and other minorities during Arab and Moslem rule. Even in the absence of social justice and equality, all those Christian groups would not separate themselves from the Arab nation. Arab Christians consider themselves, truly, the essence of the Arab nation and Arab nationalism be it now, or in past times during the Arab Christian kingdoms, of the Ghassanids, the Montherits, or the Nabateans and Tadmurits (Palmyra) and others. They, at all times, view themselves as essential part of their great Arab nation and its national movement. They remained Arabs in thought, conviction, and in spirit. They continue to be an enlightening candle to their brethren the Moslem Arabs, and worthy partners in the building of Arab society and in making of the factors that form a nation. They always made successful endeavors in serving the Arab nation, and in giving their love, their best advice and plan, to advance the cause and the unity of the Arab nation.

Though many Christian Arabs and eastern Christians like Assyrians, Chaldeans and others left the Arab countries to the Americas, or Australia and other areas, due to religious intolerance or persecution or for living opportunities, the fact is, they remained faithful and are still bent in their love to their origin and to the land they had to leave. Meanwhile, the Arab world is kindled with a religious intolerance which is electrifying our atmosphere and the air we breathe, and in consequence, Christian families began leaving their houses and properties to find new abodes far away from the country of their origin. What a pity, to reach a dangerous and inhuman state of emergency.

Let there be love among the Arabs, let them be more attentive. Let there be equality and social justice among the Arabs, otherwise they are done with, for the danger is domiciling in every corner of Arab society. This last decade of the twentieth century is a period of life and death to the Arab nation, and without unity, love and resolve, we will never succeed in preserving our sacred land and honor, or to be able to overstep the dangers and obstacles this nation is facing. The enemy of this nation, like any other enemy, is fierce and knows no mercy, and world history foretells of many inhuman actions and cruelty in wars and international disputes.
Arab countries are in a state of shock due to the scheme of their thinking and belief and close to desperation for they try to remedy the problems facing them with the wrong medicine. They must change their thinking and directions, their approach to world problems and their social behavior and the routine of their daily life, and without which they shall remain under international control and separated, and under international pressure and subdued. The Arab states must separate religion from state. The state is to serve social, political and economic purposes, or material things. The state is to rule. Religion is to serve and fulfill the faith, or spiritual things. Religion is to worship God. The combination of both makes religion a political instrument in the hand of the ruler who is a political creature, and religion therefore becomes an ideology like liberalism, socialism or communism. The only set up that advances Arab society and improves its standing is the separation of religion from state. "Give what is for God to God, and what is for Caesar to Caesar."

In Islam, religion and state are combined, and that combination is distorting Moslem approach to daily life and to social and international problems.

This combination is affecting the spirituality of Islam, and thus severs its extension and stretch from Christianity, to remain in itself a political endeavor.

SOURCE: http://www.al-bushra.org/arbhrtg/arbxtn02.htm
The Christian Arab Heritage

By Dr. Fr. Labib Kobti

1- Introduction:

We are absolutely in need here in America to know about our Christian heritage. Al-Bushra will help you discover that "Heritage".

We all know that the Arabs existed before Islam. They were mentioned in history and in the Bible centuries before the coming of the Arab Prophet Muhamed.

Kingdoms like the Gassanids and the Muntherites were Christian kingdoms (from the third century to the eighth century) modeled after the Roman and the Byzantine Empires. Some Bedwin tribes were also Christians. They had a common language, the Arabic language.

We know also that mainly the Christian tradition at that time was using the Aramean and Syriac languages in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, the Chaldean and Assyrian languages in Iraq, the Coptic language in Egypt, the Arabic in those kingdoms mentioned above and between Arab bedwins. Those languages are used still now in the liturgy of the Eastern Churches. Greek and Latin were the languages of culture and philosophy. They were used everywhere in the Roman or the Greek Empire had their colonies or influence. Latin and Greek are used in the liturgy of the Latin Catholic Church (the Roman Catholic), Greek is used in the liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church.

2- What is the Arab Christian Heritage?

The "Arab Christian Heritage" is mainly known in the period between 750-1350 A.D. At that time our Arab Christian Fathers started to use the Arabic language so as to defend their Christian faith and believes against the Muslims. They wrote in different issues: theology, philosophy, interpretation of scriptures, apologetics, liturgy, history of the church, and many other things that do not concern faith like medicine, history, chemistry, geography etc. They used their old languages: Aramean, Syriac, Chaldean, Assyrian, Coptic and translated into Arabic a lot of their books on different issues.

They translated from Greek and Latin as well what the Greek Fathers and Latin Fathers wrote. Then after the coming of Islam they started to write in Arabic to their people and to the Muslims in order to speak about their faith. Many Christians at that time, because of certain unfair treatment from the Muslin Califs or governors and under certain pressure became Muslims.

The Arabic language was imposed first in Egyptian the year 780 (about 140 years after the coming of Islam). Then slowly and slowly other Arabic Countries of today started to
use the Arabic language as an official language, as in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon etc.

The "Arab Christian Heritage" is the heritage that covers mainly the period between the **8th century to the 14th**. This heritage is the third heritage after the Greek and Latin. It is in some words the writings that we have in Arabic language, translated from other languages: Greek, Latin, Aramean, Syriac, Coptic, Chaldean, Assyrian, Persian, Armenian etc.) or produced properly in Arabic. The recent European languages (Italian, French, German English etc) started at the 14th century to become official languages, about 600 years after our Christian Heritage.

It is the writings of the Christian Fathers. They gave us a full idea about their faith, beliefs, liturgy, way of life, traditions, history of the Church, apologetics etc. They wrote also on issues other than faith, like medicine, philosophy, geography, history, chemistry etc.

By "Arab Christian heritage," Arab means: the Arabic language known and spoken in the Arabian peninsula and by the Arab kingdoms before Islam. It means also the regions that used the Arabic language since 8th century as their official language. Arabic covers also beside the language, the traditions, the culture the way of life, the food, the folklore, the civilizations etc. It covers today the "Arabic Countries." They have in common those issues mentioned above.

Arab does not mean Islam, even though Islam used the Arabic language since its origin. You can find today millions and millions of Muslims who do not relate to the Arabic language. They are Muslims but not Arabs, like Indonesia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, Turkey, Iran etc. It is known that the Arabic Northern characters used by the Quran were created by the Christian Missionaries of Hira, centuries before Islam, as says C. Rabin in art."Arabiyya, in "Encyclopedie de l'Islam", 2nd ed.,I (Leyde et Paris, 1960, pp.579a-622b).

That the first Northern Arabic letters were found on the church doors in Zabad on the South East of Aleppo in Syria on 512 A.D. And another in Ir. Haran on 568 A.D. In Mecca itself centuries before Islam the Arab people used the Northern Arabic letters. Christians there, had their schools and churches, they used Arabic in their liturgy poetry and in commerce.

Prophet Mohamed, and after him the Califs used these characters to write the Quran as says Jawad Ali, in his book "The history of Arabs before Islam" volume 8 pp. 178-179, and Vol 6, page 689. We can find the sites of the churches, temples and houses of our ancestors everywhere in today Arabic Countries especially in Syria, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine. Recently Father Pecerillo, a famous Franciscan Archeologist, found more than twenty churches in Madaba at the south of Jordan. From the Forth Century we found houses in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Palestine with this inscription in Arabic: "Bism El-Lah al Rahman al Rahim" that showed that Christians were the first to use this name so as to indicate their belief in the Holy Trinity, more than two hundred years before Islam.
In different regions of the actual Arabic Countries, Christians had Eparchies (dioceses and bishops). All over the actual Iraq, Syria Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia: (Mekka itself), Algeria, Tunisia, Lybia, Palestine, etc. you can find the sites of churches, convents and Christian centers and schools. Today, archaeology tells us a lot about these monuments. Recently a convent was discovered in Karbala (Iraq) that returns to the 1st century of Christianity. The oldest one that was discovered ever since was in the Fourth Century. We, Arab Christians of today, who live in the Middle East, are the real heirs of that "Heritage". In our way of thinking, worshiping, doing things, we reflect what our ancestors had lived centuries before us. We are the heirs of the first Christians, the heirs of both Old and New Testaments. We are the first Communities: of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria.

3- Who are the Arab Christian Fathers?

"Father" is a bishop, a priest, or a simple lay man who wrote in Arabic or translated to Arabic from the 8th to 14th Century what we call today the "Arab Christian Heritage". A lot of those Fathers were martyred with their folk defending their Christian faith and traditions. Arab Christian means then these Christians who first came from the Syriac, Chaldean, Assyrian, Arabic, Coptic, Greek or Latin traditions, they are the first converted to Christianity, "the first Christians ever" and who spoke Arabic, wrote in Arabic, translated into Arabic and declared their faith in Arabic language later on between the 8th and 14th centuries.

4- Conclusion

"Al-Bushra" is willing to serve the Christians all over the world and tell them about the Arab Christian Heritage. We would like also to serve the unity of the Church, as well as the dialogue with Muslims and Jews. We will try to give scientific studies about our "Arab Christian Heritage". We want you to be proud of our traditions. Some times because of events in our today's Arabic Countries and because of a lot of misleading in the Media about the Arabs, and under unfair claims against Arabic Countries or traditions, a lot of people do not know the truth about our Arabic language, tradition, history, Arab Christians, Islam, harmony between Muslims and Christians. Some young Arab generations feel ashamed of their Arab origin because of what the Media created in the mentality of people about Arabs.

Al-Bushra will tell you about our Arab common heritage so as to serve the truth and serve the harmony between the five components of our Middle East society: Jews, Christians and Muslims, Israelis and Arabs. Al-Bushra calls everybody to know us more and to find in us friends, brothers and sisters of the same God, Allah, Yahweh, Adonai. It calls Arab Christians and Muslims, the blood brothers, to be proud of our Arab language, history and traditions. It calls Arabs and Israelis: the Semites, sons of Abraham to find peace of heart as a start of Justice and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, where Jews, Christians and Muslims, Israelis and Arabs should live in harmony, cooperation and love, when they recognize in the others their equal in duties and responsibilities. SOURCE: http://www.al-bushra.org/arbhrtg/arbxtn04.htm
Dr. Khoury Georges speaks about the contribution of the Melkites, the Jacobites, the Nestorians, The Copts and the Maronites to the Arab Christian Heritage.

1- Introduction
Arabic at the time of the Abbasids had become a language of full maturity, unchallenged mistress in the school, the mosque, and in the offices of the administration. It prevailed in all parts of the Muslim world, not only as an ornament of great value for the pen, but also as a generous nurse of thought. The Iranians themselves, who later succeeded in giving life to their nationalism and in reviving anew a literature in Persian language, were unable to garble the Arabic language as a language of science and religion. They also had to keep its strong mark on their own vocabulary and on the alphabet. If Baghdad was an aging city hardly a century after its founding, it was nonetheless under the first Abassids the symbol of a new civilization and the home of the shining Arabic language which had become a language of thought and culture.

The irruption of foreign nations reached its height during the Abassid caliphate, with their cultural contributions and their specific gifts to the social and intellectual life of Arab Islamism. It also provoked a great effervescence of thought and an intense literary activity which poured into the Arabic language and brought about a development of prose. The vocabulary waxed richer thanks to new terms it borrowed from other cultures; the syntax became suppler, and the style clearer. Literary genres were either recovered or created. Ideas, new doctrines and research required more suitable expression.

Thanks to some talented writers of prose there was now a neat prose, eloquent in its simplicity, without affectation or mannerism, fluent and clear, without neither rhymes nor embellishment. From this period of Arab history, we have works in theology, law, ethics, Qu’ranic exegesis, traditions, philology (i.e., grammar, lexicography, prosody), philosophy, history, geography, the exact sciences, and mystical theology.

2- The Melkites
Melkites means those Christians who adhered to the Calcidonian faith, 451 AD, which was supported and defended by the Bysantine Basileus in Constantinople. Connecting Greek with Syriac as a language of life and as expression of thought, Arabic became first and little by little the prevailing form and later the only form of Christian literature in the Melkite community, whereas the Syriac and Coptic communities kept for a longer time their respective languages. One must distinguish, however, between two literary forms of Arabic in the Melkite literature of this period. This diversity is to be explained by the destination of Melkite literature.
One form uses the literary language—a language in no way inferior, from the point of view of stylistic purity, to that used by the Muslims. This is used in translating the Greek heritage of philosophy and science, in the chancellories, in the writing of history, and in the Isamo-Christian controversies. This literary Arabic is addressed to a Christian as well as a Muslim elite. It is not contaminated with vernacular dialect nor with foreign terms, except when these are required by technical needs or by the lively evolution of the language, especially in the field of philosophy.

A second, different Arabic is addressed to the people; this is the language used in hagiography, ascetic literature, and liturgy. Its users also enjoyed a bilingual education, Greek and Arabic, sometimes trilingual, Greek, Arabic, and Syriac, but its destination was the people and the monasteries. Its form of expression often deviated from grammatical norms and from syntax in order to borrow the suppler and livelier forms of the local dialect. Thus it frequently used foreign terms, mostly from Greek and Syriac. It was a language half-way between classical and local dialect. Here are some of the most famous and representative Christian Arab writers and thinkers who issued from the different Christian communities in Syro-Mesopotamia and Egypt, and who wrote during the Abassid era. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

a) Qusta Ibn Luqa (835-912)

Qusta Ibn Luqa was a Melkite from Baalbeck. He was an eminent translator and a theoretician of medicine. In addition, he was mathematician, physician, philosopher, apologist, and musician. Of him Ibn an-Nadim says: "He is an excellent translator; he knew well Greek, Syriac, and Arabic; he translated texts and corrected many translations. Many are his medical writings." (see Ibn an-Nadim, Fihrist, ed. Fugel, p. 234.) Qusta was with Hunain Ibn Ishaq the author who best served Greek culture in the Arab civilization.

b) Al-Bitriq (8th century)

Al-Bitriq lived during the caliphate of al-Mansur (754-775), who commissioned him to translate numerous ancient medical works. He translated Galian's Simplicia under the name of al-adwiat al-mufrada; the De Prohibenda Sepultura and the De Cura Icteri of the pseudo-Galian under the name of Maqala fi l-yaraqan. He also works attributed to Hippocrates: De Alimento, Kitab al-gida': De Septimanis, Kitab al-asabi, and he translated the Quadripartus of Ptolemeus, Kitab al-arabi'a. There was also Sa'id ibn al- Bitriq, Patriarch of Alexandria from 933 to 940 and whose works put him on equal footing with Qusta ibn Luqa. In the field of medicine he wrote Kitab fi t-tibb(lost), in history, Kitab at-tarih al-magmu' ala t-tahqiq wa t-tasdiq, more commonly known under the name, Nazam al-gawahar. As apologist, he wrote in defense of Christianity, Kitab al- gadal baina l-muhalef wa n-nasrani.

3- The Jacobites

Habib Abu Ra'itah Al-Takriti (early 9th century) is a contemporary and a theological
opponent of Theodore Abu Qurrah, Bishop of Harran. He is the author of four important theological treatises. 1. A letter on the Trinity addressed to a Muslim and in which he attempts to explain the mystery of the Trinity with the help of philosophical concepts of substance, hypostasis and essential attributes, such as life, knowledge, and wisdom, and with natural analogies, such as light, sun, man. He also quotes the Bible and the Qur’an. 2. A letter on the Incarnation in which he tries to explain the mystery of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. 3. Demonstration of the truth of the Christian religion and of the doctrine of the Trinity. 4. Proof of the truth of the Christian religion (however, this treatise may be inauthentic). There were also Musa al-Hagari (known as Moses Bar Kepha, died 903), and Al-Harith ibn Sinbat from Harran who were great biblical translators. But the most prestigious among them was Yahya ibn Adi (d. 974): philosopher, polemist, and theologian. His literary corpus comprises 40 philosophical treatises, several treatises of apologetics, and his refutation of al-Kindi’s refutation of the Christians. He was also a skilled translator of Plato and Aristotle. Issa ibn Zurah (Baghad, 1008), in addition to being an apologist and theologian, was also physician, philosopher, and scientist. Yahya ibn Garir from Takrit was physician, astronomer, philosopher, and theologian. His compendium in theology is call Kitab al-murshid.

4- The Nestorians
Because of their number and importance in Mesopotamia, the Nestorians contributed more than any other Christian community to the Christian Arab literary heritage. Their activity comprises all the literary genres. In the first place stands out the Catholicos Timothy 1 (728-823). He was the protagonist and author of an interesting Muhawarah (debate) with the caliph al-Mahdi (775-785). Next to him stands Abu Nuh Ibn Al-Salt Al-Ambari, translator of Greek works and author of Tafnid al Qur’an (Refutation of the Qur’an), Maqalat fi al-tawhid and Maqalat fi al-tatlit (Essay on God’s Unity and Trinity). Ammar al-Basri (1st half of the 9th century) was a contemporary of the Melkite Abu Qurrah and the Jacobite Abu Ra’itah al-Takriti, and of the Nestorian Timothy 1. Al-Basri wrote two apologetics: Book of the Demonstration and the Book of Questions and Answers. Hunayn Ibn Ishaq (808-837) was a famous physician, philosopher, and translator of Greek works under several caliphs. He is the author of a Letter to Yahya ibn al-Munaggim. Yahya ibn al-Munaggim was a Muslim who invited Hunayn to convert to Islam. He also wrote a Letter on how to attain to the True Religion in which he shows that Christianity corresponds to the criteria of the true religion. His son Ishaq continued in his father’s footsteps as translator and writer. From him we have Maqalah fi al-tawhid (Essay on Unity). There was also Abd al-Masih al-Kindi (end of 9th or 10th century) known for his Letter of Abd al-Masih to Abdallah al-Hashimi which became a classic in the annals of the Islamo-Christian polemics. There were also the members of the Bahtishu’ family who, in addition to their medical profession, produced during three centuries an abundant philosophical and theological literature. Elias of Nisibis (Metropolitan of Nisibis (d. ca. 1049), known also as Elias bar Senaya, wrote as a dogmatic theologian two significant theological treatises: Letter on the Unity of the Creator and the Trinity of Persons and Letter on the Creation of the World. As apologist he wrote The Justification of Faith and Treatise on the Happiness of the Other World.
He also bequeathed the report of Seven Sessions with the vizir al-Magribi. In the field of exegesis he wrote a Letter on the Difficulties of the Gospel. Another important figure in the first half of the 11th century is Abdallah ibn al-Tayyib, physician, commentator of the Greek classics, philosopher and a prolific Christian writer. He wrote several treatises in systematic theology, one on moral theology and one on law. As biblical commentator he wrote more commentaries than any other Christian writer.

5- The Copts

The Copts, who were of the Monophysite faith, adhered to their own language longer, and were almost one century later than the other Christian communities in expressing themselves in Arabic. Their contribution to the Arab Christian literature began with a great figure: Bishop of Asmunayn (Upper Egypt) Severus Ibn Al-Muqaffa (d. ca. 987). In theology, he wrote three important works: Book of the Exposition, Order of the Priesthood, and Precious Pearl. In apologetics he wrote: Book of the Councils and Brief Explanation of the Faith. He is best known though for his monumental History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria which was continued and completed in the 11th century by Michael, bishop of Tinnis and by Mawhub Ibn Mansur, deacon of Alexandria. In the 12th century the Patriarch Christodule (d. 1077), Cyril Second (d. 1092), and Yunus Ibn Abdalah wrote abundantly in the field of legal and liturgical literature. In the 13th century there was Simon Ibn Kalil (d. 1206), author of a treatise On the Unity of the Creator and of the Trinity. He also wrote a Commentary on the Gospel of St. Mathew and an Introduction to the Psalms. In ascetic theology he left us a beautifully written work, Garden of the Hermit and the Consolation of the Solitary. The 13th century was also called the century of "Awlad Al-Assal", Al-Safi, Al-Assad, and Al-Mu'taman, who distinguished themselves in this golden century with a rich literary production. Al-Safi was a great translator and author of many works, among them: Al-Sahahih fi gawab al-nassa'ih (The Correct Answers), and Al- Kitab al-awsat (The Middle Book). Al Mu'taman was a philosopher, theologian, exegete, a homiletic and liturgical writer.

6- The Maronites

The Maronite community kept longer than the other Christian communities to the Syriac language and literature. However, two Maronite names stand out during the classical period of Arab patrology. The first is Thomas, bishop of Kafartab, who composed in the 11th century a theological work The Book of Treatises. The other name is Bishop David who in the 11th century translated from Syriac to Arabic Kitab al-Huda (The Book of Guidance). It is a collection of canons and laws, of liturgical rules and short theological treatise dealing with trinitarian and christological problems.

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Chapter Four:

The Armenian Heritage
THE ARMENIAN APOSTOLIC ORTHODOX CHURCH

By Hratch Tchilingirian

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1- History
2- The Faith of the Armenian Church
3- The Armenian Catholic Church
4- The Armenian Evangelical Church
5- Functional Structure of the Armenian Church
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1-HISTORY

The Church was founded by Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 16:18; 28:19-20). According to tradition, two of His Apostles--St. Thaddeus and St. Bartholomew--preached His Gospel in Armenia as early as the second half of the first century. Then in 314, St. Gregory the Illuminator formally established the Church in Armenia, when King Tiridates III was baptized and declared Christianity as the state religion. St. Gregory (c. 240-325 AD) was a descendant of a noble house in Parthia, who was brought up as a Christian in Cappadocia. He was consecrated a bishop by Leontius, the metropolitan of Caesarea, as the first Bishop of Armenia. The origin of the Armenian liturgical and sacramental tradition is ascribed to him. He began his missionary work in Armenia during the first decade of the 4th century, while a layman, and upon is consecration as Bishop he established the Armenian nation's Holy See in Vagharshapat (Etchmiadzin). He is called Illuminator because he "enlightened the nation with the light of the gospel" through baptism.

The Christianization of Armenia "determined the entire future course of Armenian history." The Armenian nation embraced Christ in its own land, where God himself "descended". Etchmiadzin, literally, means "the only begotten descended." According to tradition, St. Gregory saw Christ in a vision who indicated to him where to build His Church, the first Armenian Church. As the new Faith took roots in the life of the nation, the invention of an Armenian alphabet was necessitated. Realizing the needs of the Armenian faithful, in 406, St. Mesrob Mashdotz (ca. 355-439) created the Armenian alphabet, under the auspices of Catholicos Sahag (ca. 348-438), in order to make the Christian faith accessible to the people in a written form. Greek and Syriac were the languages used in the church services. Soon after the invention of the alphabet, St. Mesrob together with St. Sahag and a group of associates--known as Holy Translators--translated the Holy Scriptures into Armenian, followed by the biblical, theological and liturgical writings of eminent church fathers. This most important era is known as the Golden Age of Armenian history. "The missionary and literary labors [of this period] shaped the destiny of the Armenian people and Church for succeeding generations. ... [St. Mesrob and St. Sahag, their disciples and co-workers] spearheaded the creation of the Armenian Christian culture under the patronage of the King Vramshapuh (ca 389-
This period was one of intense activity and rapid development for the Church and was decisive in its consolidation and nationalization.

One of the most significant events in Armenian Christianity is the battle of Avarair. Toward the middle of the fifth century, Armenia faced growing pressures from the Persian King Yazdegerd II, who had issued an edict bidding the Armenians to renounce Christ and embrace Zoroastrianism. The Armenians remained loyal to their faith, repeatedly refused to disavow Christ. In 451, headed by the commander-in-chief Vartan Mamikonian, Armenians fought against the Persians to preserve their faith. Yeghishe, the historian who wrote The History of Vartan and the Armenian War, in a dialogue between the Persian Tenshabuh (ambassador) and the Priest Ghevont, expresses the profundity of this faith, “Christ, the living and life-giving true God, by His beneficent will became the healer of souls and bodies and Himself first suffered tortures and pains to cure the entire human race. …He granted us second birth in health without pains and afflictions.” St. Vartan fell in the battle field of Avarair and Armenians were physically defeated. For the next thirty years oppression and resistance followed, until 484 A.D., when under the leadership of Vahan Mamikonian, Vartan's nephew, the Persian King Peroz reversed course and declared full toleration of Christian faith and the formal recognition and establishment of the Church, in the treaty of Nuarsak.

The following centuries were difficult periods for the Armenian nation--Persian rule (430-634) and later Arab domination (c. 654-851). In the 9th century (c. 885) there was an independent kingdom of the Bagratids in Armenia; however it ended in 1079. In the medieval Kingdom of Cilicia or Lesser Armenia, there was an independent entity from the end of the 12th century to 1375. Persecution and martyrdom had become common occurrences in the life of the Armenian nation. A larger proportion of Armenians were massacred by the Turks in the Ottoman Empire starting in the late 19th century to early 20th century. Armenians also suffered under the Russians starting in 1893 until the early 1980s.

In assessing history and the role of the Armenian Church in the life of the Armenian nation, Abp. Aram Keshishian writes: “Confessing Christ has become the quintessence of our history. The history of the Armenian Church in all its manifestations and achievements, conflicts and struggles, is in the fullest sense of the term the history of confessing Christ in action. …All the spheres of our life were touched by the transforming power of Christ. The Armenian culture in particular with its spiritual depth and transcendent dynamism has provided the Church with creative insights and new perspectives and horizons in terms of integrating Christ into the ethos of the Nation.”

2-THE FAITH OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

The Faith of the Armenian Church is transmitted through the church’s Holy Tradition, i.e., the ongoing life of the church from the time of Christ to our times. The Bible, liturgy and worship, writings of the church fathers, church councils, saints, canons, religious art and rituals--organically linked together--formulate the Holy Tradition of the Church.
This Faith is articulated in the Creed of the Armenian Church, which in turn defines the church's raison d'être and sets the parameters of its modus operandi.

The Armenian Church professes her faith in the context of her worship. Theologically, whatever the church believes, the church prays. Therefore, the Armenian Church's worship and liturgy constitute a prime source for teaching her faith. History, i.e., Tradition, on the other hand, defines and formulates the "articles of faith" and transmits them from generation to generation.

The Armenian Church believes in One God, the Father Almighty who is the Creator of heaven and earth, of all things visible & invisible. Humanity (male and female) is created in the image and likeness of God, and as such is a special creature. However, because of the Fall of man, sin entered the world.

The Church believes in Jesus Christ, "the only begotten Son of God...who came down from heaven, was incarnate, was born of the Virgin Mary, by the Holy Spirit. He became man, was crucified for us and suffered and was buried. He rose again from the dead on the third day and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead."

The Armenian Church believes in the Holy Spirit – "uncreated and perfect, who proceeds from the Father– and together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified. The Holy Spirit spoke to the prophets and apostles and descended into the Jordan, witnessing Christ's Baptism."

The Armenian Church is One Holy Apostolic Catholic, Church.

She believes in one Baptism with repentance for the remission and forgiveness of sins. On judgment day, Christ will call all men and women who have repented to eternal life in His Heavenly Kingdom, which has no end. Christ overcame the power of death with His own and gave salvation to all mankind.

The dogmas of the Armenian Church are based on these "articles of faith."

The Armenian Church belongs to the Orthodox family of churches, known as the Oriental Orthodox, or Non-Chalcedonian, Churches, i.e., the Armenian, Coptic, Syrian, Ethiopian and Indian Malabar churches.

Generally, Christianity is divided mainly between Eastern and Western churches. The relationship between Byzantium (East) and Rome (West) deteriorated gradually. In the ninth century a schism between the Byzantine Church and the Church of Rome started to shape during the time of Patriarch Photius. Then in 1054, anathemas were declared by both sides (Patriarch Michael and Cardinal Humbert), which lasted for centuries. By 1204, when the Crusaders captured Constantinople, the schism had become final. In
1965, following the Vatican II Council, the anathemas were lifted by both sides in a spirit of ecumenism and understanding among the churches.

The main theological differences and disagreements between the Eastern (including the Armenians) and the Church of Rome (Catholics) are in the following issues:

Filioque: according to the teachings of the Church of Rome, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, proceeds from the Father and the Son, while the Orthodox teach that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father only;

Papal Supremacy: the Roman Catholics consider the Pope the —Vicar of Christ, while the Orthodox churches consider him only as “first in honor” and in pastoral diakonia.

Papal Infallibility: The Catholics follow a "monarchical" model of ecclesial polity, while the Orthodox follow a “conciliar” model, i.e., church councils determine church dogma, canons and policies.

There are also other minor differences among these two branches of churches, such as the rules of fasting; unleavened bread at Eucharist (West); manner of conferring confirmation; celibacy of clergy; divorce (not sanctioned in Roman Catholicism); purgatory (East doesn't teach it); West has "scholastic' approach, East has "mystical" approach to theological issues.

The main difference between the Byzantine tradition, also known as Chalcedonian churches, and the Armenian Church, (together with other non-Chalcedonian churches) has been on the issue of Christology, i.e., the dogma related to Christ's Divine and Human natures.

Abp. A. Keshishian writes, "the Christology of the Armenian Church is fundamentally in line with the Alexandrian Theological School. In fact, the Cyrillian formula of 'One Nature of the Incarnate Word' constitutes the foundation stone of her Christology. [It should be noted that] first, 'One Nature' is never interpreted in the Armenian Christology as a numerical one, but always a united one. This point is of crucial importance [for the Armenian Church] particularly in its anti-Eutychian and anti-Chalcedonian aspects. Second the term 'nature' (ousia, in Armeian brni'iun) is used in Armenian theological literature in three different senses: (a) as essence, an abstract notion, (b) as substance, a concrete reality, (c) as person. In the context of anti-Chalcedonian Christology 'one nature' is used in a sense of 'one person' composed of two natures."

The Christological controversy continued for centuries, often becoming a matter of political influence and expediency. However, in 1990, the theologians and official representatives of both Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches--after years of dialogue and consultations--agreed in a formal statement that their theological understanding, especially their Christology, is "orthodox." The statement called for unity and communion among the Eastern and Oriental Churches and as such, the
While the overwhelming majority of Armenians are members of the Armenian Church (also known as the —Mother Church), a number of Armenians belong to the Armenian Catholic and Protestant (Evangelical) churches.

3-THE ARMENIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Beginning in the 12th century, Armenians came into contact with the Roman Church through their ties with the Crusaders in Cilicia. Later in the 14th century, through the missionary activities of the Franciscan and Dominican orders, a "Latinizing movement" gained ground among "liberal elements in the Armenian Church." However, it was only in the 19th century, during the Ottoman period, that the Armenian Catholics became a millet--an autonomous Church affiliated with Roman Catholicism. In 1831, when a new constitution for Christians living in the Ottoman Empire was instituted, "the (Armenian) Catholic Church Community" was created and legally recognized to form the Armenian Rite Catholic segment of the Roman Church, with its own hierarchy and its own Catholicos-Patriarch. In the early 18th century, two Mekhitarist monastic congregations were established in Venice and Vienna, which have "rendered inestimable service to Armenian letters and scholarship fostering and enriching the religious and cultural heritage of Armenians."

4- THE ARMENIAN EVANGELICAL CHURCH

The Armenian Evangelical community was formally recognized in 1846 by the Ottoman government, after "painful clashes" between church authorities and the "reformers"--those within the Mother Church who wished to "reestablished" the church's true evangelical mission. The beginning of Armenian Protestantism is traced back to the 19th century missionary activities of the American Board of Missions, which expanded an aggressive mission throughout Asia Minor. As a result of the continued affiliation of the Armenian Evangelicals with American missionary organizations, many schools and colleges were established during the second half of the 19th century, which benefited thousands of Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire.

5- THE FUNCTIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH

The functional structure of the Armenian Church is primarily based on the canons and established traditions of the Armenian Church, which were formulated over the centuries. One of the most important aspects of the Armenian Church administration is its Conciliar System; i.e., the administrative, as well as doctrinal, liturgical, and canonical norms are set and approved by a council--collective and participatory decision making process. The Council of Bishops (or the Synod) is the highest religious authority in the Church.
The “norms” of the administrative structure of the church go back to the Apostolic times. A point could be made by the fact that there was a quasi-organizational structure in Christ’s group of twelve apostles. Perhaps not as clearly defined, but nevertheless, it was an organizational subsystem that was endowed with a specific task and purpose. While the Scriptures do not record the organizational aspect of the “apostolic college,” their activities and interaction underline the existence of certain “norms.” For example, the group of the twelve had a treasurer (Judas Iscariot) and a “natural” division of labor based on the talents or the personality of each apostles. Matthew was a tax collector (a “government employee”) and had certain familiarity with management practices of the time. In fact, Matthew was “sitting in his office,” when Christ met him and asked him to “follow” him (Matthew 9:9). Then we read that “Jesus called his twelve disciples together and gave them authority...” (Matthew 10:1) to carry out their mission. We also find certain “rules” for carrying out Jesus’ instructions: “The twelve men were sent out...with instructions,” (Matthew 10:5ff). One could even see traces of “bureaucracy” (as defined by Max Weber) as early as Christ’s time – i.e., a) recruitment and hierarchy, b) division of labor, c) set of rules.

After Jesus had “left” the twelve, the mission had to continue by the apostles. The first thing that the apostles did was to elect a replacement for Judas. “...A few days later there was a meeting of the believers...so they proposed two men...then they drew lots to choose between the two men, and the one chosen was Matthias, who was added to the group of eleven apostles” (Acts 1:15ff). Interestingly, this “democratic” election and the proposal process, is indicative of yet another bureaucratic norm, namely “promotion based on merit and qualification.” Eventually, as the church progressed from being a persecuted entity of believers to an institutionalized organization, the rules and admonitions of “the apostles and the elders” (Acts 15:6) were integrated in the canon books of Christian churches, including the Armenian Church. A significant aspect in Acts 15 is the “conciliarity” of the decision-making process.

6-THE HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF THE ARMENIAN CHURCH CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Clerical Hierarchy
  Catholicos
  Bishop
  Priest

- Lay Representation
  National Ecclesiastical Assembly
  Diocesan Assembly
  Parish Assembly
The Catholicos

First on the hierarchical ladder is the Catholicos, as the Chief Bishop and Supreme head of the Armenian Church. The Catholicos is elected by a National Ecclesiastical Assembly (NEA), consisting of lay and clergy representatives of the Armenian Churches from around the world. Working closely with the Catholicos is the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council, (the administrative arm of the NEA) which carries out the overall administration of the Armenian Church throughout the world.

The Bishop

Second on the hierarchical ladder is the bishop, who is “elected” by the people and consecrated by the Catholicos with the aid of two other bishops (according to current practice, the Catholicos has exclusive right to consecrate bishops). A bishop in a given diocese is the “chief executive officer” of the region, who works in cooperation with a Diocesan Council (consisting of clergy and lay members), who in turn are elected by the Diocesan Assembly of the region. The Bishop is the ex-officio president of each and every Diocesan organization.

The Priest

Third on the hierarchical ladder is the priest, who is appointed by the Bishop and accepted by the Parish Assembly of a given parish. The parish priest is the ex-officio president of each and every Parish organization. (In the case of “monastic priests,” as it is the case in Etchmiadzin, Antelias, Jerusalem and Constantinople, they are under the jurisdiction of the Catholicos or the Patriarch of the given See).

The National Ecclesiastical Assembly

The National Ecclesiastical Assembly (NEA) consists of lay and clergy delegates elected by the diocesan Assemblies of the dioceses of the Armenian Church around the world. Every bishop in the Armenian Church is automatically a member of the Assembly. The Catholicos—or in his absence the Locum Tenens—is ex-officio president of the NEA. The primary function of the NEA is to elect a successor to a deceased Catholicos. The last NEA was convened in April 1995, when it elected His Holiness Karekin I as Catholicos of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin.

The Diocesan Assembly

The Diocesan Assembly consists of lay delegates elected by the Parish Assemblies. Every diocesan clergy is automatically a member of the Assembly. The Diocesan Primate is ex-officio president of the Diocesan Assembly.
The Parish Assembly

The Parish Assembly consists of all baptized and/or dues paying members of a given parish in a given diocese. The Pastor is the ex-officio president of the Parish Assembly.

On each level on the hierarchical structure of the Armenian Church, clergy and lay cooperation is central to the overall administration and ministry of the church. While the Church is governed according to the standards set forth in the Canons, there are complementary By-Laws in most dioceses that further define the role and relationship of each functionary in the church within a given region.

There are four hierarchical Sees in the Armenian Church:
- The Catholicosate of All Armenians in Etchmiadzin (established by St. Gregory the Illuminator in the fourth century).
- The Patriarchate of Jerusalem (the St. James Brotherhood established the Patriarchate at the beginning of the 14th century).
- The Patriarchate of Constantinople (established in 1461 by Sultan Mehmet II).

Each See has its own brotherhood, ecclesiastical jurisdiction and internal administrative by-laws. They are not separate churches, but are part of the One Holy Apostolic Church—the Armenian Church—and are one in dogma, theology, liturgy and in their service to the Armenian nation. Church, Yegheghetzi in Armenian (from Greek Ekklesia) literally means assembly, gathering—coming together for a common purpose, i.e., to worship God and hear His words. [Cf. Nor Baragirk Haygazian Lezvi, Vol. 1, Yerevan 1979, p. 651; also Abp. Khoren Narbey, A Catechism of Christian Instruction According to the Doctrine of the Armenian Church, (New York: Diocese of the Armenian Church, 1964), p 75.]

Although 301 has been traditionally accepted to be the date of conversion, recent critical studies by notable scholars (H. Manandian, G. Garitte and B. Ananian) have shown that 314 is the actual date [cf. Tiran Abp. Nersoyan, Summary Topics of Armenian Church History (New Rochelle: St. Nersess Armenian Seminary, 1986), p. 3. Also see Agathangelos, History of Armenians, [in Armenian] (Tbilisi, 1914), p. 782.]

According to archaeological findings, the present Cathedral of Etchmiadzin is where St. Gregory built an edifice over a pagan sanctuary. Before that, St. Gregory founded a Christian sanctuary at Ashtishat in Taron. [Malachia Ormanian, The Church of Armenia, (London, 1910) p. 10]

St. Mesrob Mashdotz (ca 355-439) was born in the village of Hatzegyats in Daron, Armenia. After formal education in Armenia, he studied in Antioch, where he learned Greek, Syriac and Persian. Upon his return, he worked as a secretary in the Royal Court. In 394, he left the palace and became a monk and was eventually ordained a
priest. St. Mesrob is also credited for assisting in the formulation of the Georgian and Albanian alphabets.

St. Sahag (ca 348-438) was born in Caesarea. He was the only son of Catholicos Nersess the Great, whom he succeeded in 386. He was educated in Caesarea and Byzantium. Besides his important role in the invention of the Armenian alphabet, St. Sahag is also famous for organizing the Church and establishing learning centers, where the development of a rich Tradition became possible.

Zoroastrianism was the dominant religion of Persia, especially during the Sassania dynasty (211-640 A.D). It is a system of religious doctrine ascribed to Zoroaster. He taught that the world was made by one "Wise Lord" with the help of his Spirit and six other divine spirits or attributes of god. These spirits work against the Evil spirit, who is also helped by six other spirits and tempts man to wrong. [Yeshisheh, History of Vartan and the Armenian War, Trans. Dikran Boyajian, (New York: The Delphic Press, 1952), p. 110.]

The Creed of the Church is the formal declaration of her faith and belief – as expressed in the Constantinopolitan formulary. The dogmas and teachings of the Armenian Church are based on the declarations of the first three Ecumenical Councils of the Church – Nicea, in 325 A.D., defined the divinity of the Son of God; Constantinople, in 381, defined the divinity of the Holy Spirit; Ephesus, in 431, defined Christ as the Incarnate Word of God and Mary was declared Theotokos (Astoua’a’in). Subsequent "Ecumenical" Councils, which are accepted by the Byzantine and Roman churches, defined other theological issues – Chalcedon 451, Constantinople II 555, Constantinople III 680, Nicea II 787 – however, they are not formally recognized by the Armenian Church. Nevertheless, the decision of Council of Nicea II (787) to uphold the veneration of the holy icons is in conformity with the Armenian tradition already articulated by Catholicos Vrtanes Kertogh in the seventh century.

Lex orandi est Lex credendi et agenda in Latin translates to "the rule of prayer is the rule of belief and of action." This simple rule is the essence of liturgical theology. According to the patristic understanding, "the man of prayer is the true theologian; the true theologian is the man of prayer."

The word Ish and Ishah in Hebrew are the masculine and feminine of the same word human. An exhaustive discussion of this topic is found in Claus Westermann, Genesis 1-11: A Commentary, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), pp. 201-208. S. Verhovskoy writes, "The profound thought of Genesis lies in the indissolubility of man and woman…in the very moment of creation. God created not one man but two, in combination and mutual dependence." For a theological discussion of this topic see Serge Verhovskoy, "Creation of man and the Establishment of the Family in the Light of the Book of Genesis," St. Valdimir's Theological Quarterly 8:1/64, pp. 5-30.

Theologically, in the image of God means sharing the spiritual attributes of divinity. Likeness is the potential of humans to become Godlike, through His grace. From a
theological point of view, human development and growth is a continuous process in life.

Sin in the original Greek (hamarthia) means "missing the mark," failure to be what one should be and to do what one should do.

ONE--the Church is one because Christ founded one church. There can only be one Church and not many, as such the Church is indivisible. HOLY--the holiness of the Church comes from God. "The members of the Church are holy to the extent that they live in communion with God.... Within the earthly Church, people participate in God's holiness. Sin and error separate them from this divine holiness as it does from the divine unity. Thus, the earthly members and institutions of the Church cannot be identified as such with the Church as holy." CATHOLIC--the catholicity of the Church is understood in terms of the Church's universality throughout time and space. Also, the term catholic should not be confused with the Roman Catholic Church. APOSTOLIC--the term apostolic, traditionally, affirms the establishment of the Armenian Church by Sts. Thaddeus and Bartholomew. However, the fact that the word apostolic describes that which has a mission, that which has "been sent" to accomplish a task should not be overlooked. "As Christ was sent from God, so Christ Himself chose and sent His apostles." He said, "as the Father has sent me, even so I send you... receive ye the Holy Spirit." Just as the apostles were sent by Christ to preach the word of God, the Church, i.e., its earthly members, is also sent by God to bear witness to His Kingdom, to keep His word and to do His will and His works in this world. [cf. Thomas Hopko, Doctrine (New York: OCA, 1981), pp. 123-128.]

The major sacraments of the Armenian Church are: Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Holy Communion, Matrimony, Holy Orders, Unction with Oil. Sacrament (Khorhoort) means mystery, i.e., something that cannot be explained in "human terms." St. Paul uses the word mystery to explain God's desire to save, renew and unite all things in Christ. Jesus is mystically present in all the sacraments of the church and is Himself the officiate through the person of the priest. The sacraments are outward signs that give grace and blessings to the person receiving the sacrament. For a more detailed discussion of sacraments in the Armenian Church, see Garabed Kochakian, The Sacraments: The Symbols of our Faith, (New York: Diocese of the Armenian Church, DRE, 1983); Bp. S. Kaloustian, Saints and Sacraments, (New York: Diocese of the Armenian Church, ACYOA, 1964), pp. 37-58. Also, see Ormanian, The Church of Armenia, pp. 114-117. For a historical survey and study of the Armenian Church's sacraments, see F. C. Conybeare, Rituale Armenorum, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905).

Most other traditional churches are also governed by the same principles, e.g., the Eastern Orthodox Churches).

SOURCE: http://www.sain.org/Armenian.Church/intro.txt
Catholicos Karekin II

**Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians**

Catholicos Karekin II (Armenian: Կարեգին II) (born August 21, 1951) is the current Catholicos of All Armenians, the supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

**Biography**

Karekin II was born as Ktrij Nersessian in Voskehat, Armenia, on August 21, 1951. He entered the Gevorkian Theological Seminary at Echmiadzin in 1965 and graduated with honors in 1971. He was ordained to the diaconate in 1970. Later he became a monk and was ordained a priest in 1972. In the late 1970s the Catholicos of that period encouraged him to study outside of Armenia. This led to him continuing his studies in Vienna, Bonn University, and Zagorsk, Russia. On October 23, 1983, he was consecrated bishop at Echmiadzin. He became an archbishop in 1992.

Karekin II speaks fluent German from his time in Germany and Austria. In 1975 during his time in Cologne he was the spiritual representative of nine Armenian congregations in Germany.

In 1988 Karekin took an active role in helping his people overcome the Armenian earthquake. He oversaw the construction of a number of churches and schools in Armenia. He also showed an interest in using modern technology and telecommunications to help the life of his churches as well as dealing with the legacies of the Soviet era.

In 1999 he was elected Catholicos of All Armenians at the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin, succeeding Karekin I. His relations with Pope John Paul II were generally positive. When the Pope visited Armenia in 2001, he stayed with the Catholicos.

In 2006 Karekin made a week-long visit to Istanbul, Turkey, to meet with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and to visit the city’s Armenian community. During his visit, he caused controversy by speaking out about the Armenian Genocide, which Turkey vehemently denies, and insisting on its recognition by Turkey.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karekin_II
The Armenian presence in the Holy Land dates back to the earliest years of Christianity, even before the conversion of Armenian King Tirdat the Third on or about 301 A.D. There is recorded historical evidence that as early as 254 A.D. bishops of the Armenian Church, in cooperation with bishops of the Greek Orthodox Churches in Jerusalem and Alexandria, Egypt, were actively engaged in the discovery and confirmation of Holy Places deemed to be related to the activities of Jesus Christ, and the construction of edifices for the preservation of these early Christian treasures.

Further, from the inception of Christianity, Armenian pilgrims began trekking to the Holy Land on spiritual journeys in steady and continuous numbers, braving disruptive political upheavals and other hardships. A large number of them chose to remain in Jerusalem, and to take up residence in the proximity of the sanctuaries owned by the Patriarchate (the Armenian Convent), with the St. James Cathedral as its centerpiece. Eventually, these areas near the Patriarchate, located in the southwestern corner of the Old City of Jerusalem, constituted the Armenian Quarter, which today takes up one-sixth of the geographic area within the walls of the Old City. The pilgrims also built houses, churches, and convents in other areas, some no longer standing, like the one at the Musrara Quarter, a stone's throw from the 15th Century walls of the Old City where, in 1991, archaeologists uncovered an incomparable mosaic, laid down by an unknown Armenian priest, Eustadius, in the 7th century. At its peak, the Armenian presence in Jerusalem numbered 25,000.

According to historical records, as early as the 3rd century A.D., the Armenian Church, under the uninterrupted leadership of successive bishops, not only maintained the integrity of the Holy Places, but also had a leading role in their protection and reconstruction following their repeated destruction by invading armies.

From the 4th through the 8th century A.D., monasticism took strong root in the Christian world, from the mountains of Asia Minor through the Holy Land, the Sinai Peninsula and the deserts of Egypt. Considered to be an honorable profession in the service of God, it attracted scholars, educators and artisans of all kinds. With the influx of thousands of monks and pilgrims from Armenian cities, Armenian monasteries were established in the Holy Land, particularly in the hills outside Jerusalem, near the Dead Sea, and the Sinai Desert in the south. The monks became an influential creative force and pioneered the enrichment of the Church with an invaluable trove of manuscripts and archives. The development of the Armenian Lectionary, consisting of a comprehensive anthology of Armenian church readings, hymns and celebration of feasts, liturgical calendar, and numerous saints' days, was a unique accomplishment. These elements and others have become an integral part of the tradition of the Armenian Church in the Holy Land thus making the Armenian Patriarchate a very unique institution throughout the world.

Because of the Armenian Church’s enhanced prestige, the leading bishop of the Church
was elevated to the status of Patriarch sometime in the 5th century A.D. The first formally recorded Patriarch of Jerusalem was named Abraham who, in the middle of the 7th Century A.D., received a charter and official recognition from the Arab Caliph Omar Ibn-Il-Khattab of the Omayyad (Damascus) Dynasty. The charter enumerated the rights and privileges of the Armenian Church in the Holy Land, guaranteeing its integrity and security.

On the back wall facing the main entrance to the St. James Convent there is an elaborately carved inscription in Arabic which, loosely translated, warns all intruders: `This decree from our Lord Sultan and King Al-Daher Abu Sayid Mohammed, cursed be to all those and their sons through generations, and may Almighty God curse whoever harms or inflicts any injustice to this Holy Place. Abu Kheyer Razan hereby guarantees this to the St. James Armenian Convent in Jerusalem. In the year of Mohammed 854 (1488 A.D.)'. This and previous protective edicts have helped strengthen and perpetuate the integrity of the Patriarchate and have provided a basis for succeeding conquerors to honor these pledges.

The final and most important pledge was made by the written declaration of the Turkish Sultan, Abdul Majid, in 1852. This declaration officially established the principle of "Status Quo" (i.e. existing "as is" condition) in the Holy Places, which defines, regulates and maintains, without change, the proprietary rights in the Holy Places granted exclusively to the three major Christian rites--Greek, Armenian and Latin Catholic--thus making the Armenian Church equal in stature to the Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches despite its relatively small size.

As a result of the "Status Quo", one interesting aspect unique to the Holy Places is the cadre of guards, caretakers, called "Kawasses" who were primarily Moslem, a choice seemingly inspired by logic. Not being Christian, they could impartially administer any Holy Place, thus eliminating points of contention between the three major Christian rites. Over the centuries, these functions were passed from father to son throughout succeeding generations. The Kawasses protecting the Armenian Patriarch have become such familiar figures over the past hundreds of years that the successive generations have learned Armenian and speak it fluently.

Throughout the ensuing decades, the resident Armenian community continued to grow and prosper, yielding tradesmen and merchants who shared their prosperity with their Church by donating land and assisting in the construction of new churches, commercial buildings and housing. The need for printed materials in the Armenian language resulted in the establishment of the first printing press in Jerusalem in 1833 within the walls of the St. James Convent. The first issue of "SION", the official monthly publication of the Armenian Patriarchate was first distributed to the public in 1866. In 1841 the first Armenian Theological Seminary was founded just north of Jerusalem, in the town of Ramle, and in 1845 that Seminary was physically moved to a newly-built complex within the confines of the Convent.
As World War I ended, and Palestine was liberated from the Ottoman Turks by the British, there was a large influx of Armenian refugees who were welcomed by the Patriarchate and settled in available facilities. With the increased population in and around the Patriarchate, children's education became a growing matter of concern. Fortunately, the Seminary afforded a ready-made system for the education of boys at the elementary level. This approach, by its nature, must have provided future candidates for the Seminary and subsequent ordination into the priesthood. However, without the inclusion of girls in the scheme, the endeavor was not deemed to be complete. Finally, in the 1860's, a small building was erected adjacent to the Seminary, thus creating the first girls’ elementary school in Jerusalem. These schools continued to operate well into the early 1920's.

In 1925, through the efforts of the newly-elected Patriarch Yeghishe Tourian, a staunch believer in education, a unified elementary school came into existence. Patriarch Tourian set about modernizing the curriculum of the Seminary and acquiring highly-qualified instructors from the cadre of talented teachers and educators who had come to Jerusalem as refugees. He envisioned the construction and establishment of an educational institution under one roof to accommodate the growing number of children in the community. In 1929, the unified elementary school officially opened its doors. By consolidating disparate locations, including the St. Gayane Girl's School, this elementary school became the first co-educational institution in the Holy Land and was renamed School of the Holy Translators ("Serpots Tarkmantchats Varjaran") after the Sts. Sahag and Mesrob, the inventors of the Armenian alphabet in approximately 400 A.D. It is in existence today.

These organs of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem -- the School, the St. James Cathedral, the Patriarchate, the Armenian Seminary, the Calouste Gulbenkian Library, and the Edward and Helen Mardigian Museum -- together with its custodianships of the Holy Places -- form the core of the Armenian presence in Jerusalem today.

St. James Cathedral

The Cathedral of St. James, the jewel of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem, lies just beyond its entry gate. It has been built on the site of the tombs of St. James, the Apostle, and St. James the brother of the Lord. A magnificent edifice dating from the 12th century with mostly 18th century decoration because of the renewal work carried out by the late Patriarch, Gregory the Chainbearer (1715-1749), it ranks as one of the most awe-inspiring in all of the Middle East.

At the entrance to the Cathedral, a large plaque marks the site of the grave of Jerusalem's 94th Armenian Patriarch, the late Archbishop Guregh Israeliian. One of the
city's most popular and charismatic men of the cloth. Israeli died in 1949, of a broken heart it is said, after witnessing the intolerable suffering of his war-ravaged flock, caught in the crossfire of war-time hostilities. More than once, he would cradle in his own arms, the shrapnel-shredded body of an Armenian who had been the latest casualty in the unrelenting war.

Another unpretentious grave sits under an archway a few paces away, at the other end of the vestibule. This one is the last resting place of the Armenian Patriarch, Abraham, a contemporary of Saladdin.

Upon entering the Cathedral, one is immediately captivated by the interior bedecked by centuries old "ganteghs" (oil lamps) dangling from the soaring vaulted dome and tallow candles dotting the three altars. The only source of light, the oil lamps, are still lovingly tended by altar boys who replenish them with oil at regular intervals. The candles, made by the Patriarchate's own candle-maker, try vainly to dispel the elemental darkness that pervades the church, imparting a mystical significance to Armenian church rites.

To the left of the entrance are three small chapels. The first from the entrance contains the tomb of Makarios, the bishop of Jerusalem in the fourth century. The third from the entrance is the shrine where the head of St. James the Apostle is entombed. Armenians believe that he was buried here in the first century after his execution by King Herod Agrippa I.

In the chancel, beyond the fence, are two thrones. The one closest to the pier with the canopy is the symbolic throne of St. James, the brother of the Lord, and first bishop of Jerusalem, who is buried beneath the high altar. The Patriarch stands in front of this throne once a year on the feast of St. James in early January to symbolize his place in the succession of the bishops of Jerusalem. The other throne is the one normally used by the Patriarch.

The Cathedral has in the past also served as a bomb shelter. During the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, the only sanctuary from the daily bombardment of the city that the Armenians could find was within the solid, reassuring confines of their Cathedral, with its one-meter thick walls. During one particularly memorable night, over 1,000 shells of all kinds, including the dreaded mortar, landed on and around the Cathedral. But not a single casualty did they claim. Many believers would later swear that they had seen a mysterious figure, dressed in white, standing vigil on the roof of the Cathedral, warding off the shower of missiles with his hands. Believers assert that it was none other than St. James the Elder.
The Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate (Convent) of St. James is the home of the Brotherhood of the St. Jameses, a monastic order of the Armenian Church with about 60 members worldwide. Within the compound of the Patriarchate, also lie the private residences of 2,000-3,000 Armenian families and hence public access to the grounds of the Patriarchate are restricted to the Cathedral itself. This residential enclave was, at one time, the largest single compound that housed Armenian pilgrims, and represented the demographic and spiritual core of the newly established colony. Today, together with its adjoining outcrop, the Armenian Quarter, which skirts the northern edge of the Convent, it represents one-sixth of the territory of the Old City. Another 2,000 Armenians are scattered in various other parts of the Holy Land, mainly in Bethlehem, Jaffa, Haifa, Ramleh and Ramallah, where viable communities have evolved around the periphery of their ubiquitous nucleus, a church or convent.

The compound of the Patriarchate, which enjoys a strict curfew of 10 p.m. when the massive doors are closed and locked until the early morning, also houses the administrative offices and residences of the Patriarch and the clergy. It also comprises the Cathedral of St. James, the Church of the Archangels, the second major Armenian church in Jerusalem, and the church of St. Toros, which is home to the precious illuminated Armenian manuscript collection, the second largest in the world (over 4,000).

The Convent itself occupies the southwestern corner of the Old City and is situated on the site of the encampment of the Tenth Legion of Rome. As you tread the cobblestone alleys of the entryway of the Convent, you are taken back more than a thousand years into the distant, idyllic past of the community's forefathers who laid the foundation stones of the Convent's present existence for all generations to come.

At its peak, the Armenian presence in Jerusalem, where they were most densely concentrated, numbered 25,000. But the havoc caused by half a century of bloodshed and the perennial political and economic instability in the region have decimated the colony. Most of its former members now reside in more placid capitals of the world.

This fact notwithstanding, Armenians have continued to be a dynamic presence in Jerusalem and are in a unique situation. Their Patriarchate enjoys a semi-diplomatic status and is one of the three major guardians of the Christian Holy Places in the Holy Land (the other two are the Greek Orthodox and Latin Patriarchates). Among these sites are the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in the Old City, the Church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, the Tomb of Virgin Mary in the Valley of Gethsemane, and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The Patriarchate exercises a paternalistic care of the members of its community and provides a medical service for a symbolic fee at a clinic donated by the Jinishian...
Medical Fund. Free meals to the aged and invalid pensioners and indigent members of the community are also provided.

Other branches of the Patriarchate located within the compound include The Calouste Gulbenkian Library of over 100,000 volumes, half in Armenian and the rest in English and half a dozen European languages; the Edward and Helen Mardigian Museum of Armenian Art and Culture housing historical and religious artifacts including precious rugs, Armenian coins and scraps of evidence of the presence at the site of the Tenth Legion of Rome; and the St. Tarkmanchatz School, a leading co-educational private school and the only one that teaches Arabic, Armenian, English, French and Hebrew. Rounding out this vast accumulation of treasures of all kinds is the complex of the Theological Seminary of the Patriarchate, located a hundred yards from the entrance of the compound, a gift of the late Armenian-American philanthropists Alex and Marie Manoogian. Armenian youths from all over the world, including the United States and Armenia, come to study for the priesthood here, and after ordination, help infuse new blood into the ranks of Armenian clergy worldwide.

Not to be overlooked is the Patriarchate's printing press, the first to be established in Jerusalem, which has now become a modern, state-of-the-art facility capable of undertaking commercial color printing. This was the first facility within the Armenian compound to adopt the concept of computerization on a dedicated scale.

The present Patriarch, His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, was elected to the Throne of St. James in 1990 and is the 96th successive Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem. He, along with a Synod of seven clergymen elected by the Brotherhood, oversees the Patriarchate's operations.
Chapter Five:
The Assyrian Heritage
Geography

Assyria is located in north Mesopotamia and spans four countries: In Syria, it extends west to the Euphrates river; in Turkey, it extends north to Harran, Edessa, Diyarbakir, and Lake Van; in Iran it extends east to Lake Urmi, and in Iraq it extends to about 100 miles south of Kirkuk. This is the Assyrian heartland, from which so much of the ancient Near East came to be controlled.

Two great rivers run through Assyria, the Tigris and the Euphrates, and many lesser ones, the most important of which being the Upper Zab and Lower Zab, both tributaries to the Tigris. Strategically surrounding the Tigris and the two Zabs are the Assyrian cities of Nineveh, Ashur, Arbel, Nimrod and Arrapkha.

To the north and east of Assyria lie the Taurus and Zagros mountains. To the west and south lies a great, low limestone plateau. At the southern end of Assyria, the gravel plains give way to alluvium deposited by the Tigris, and farther south there is insufficient rainfall for agriculture without irrigation. These two features create a geographical boundary between Assyria and the neighboring land to the south.

To the south of Baghdad lies Babylon. There is a stark geographical distinction between Babylonia and Assyria. To quote Saggs,

A journey in spring from Baghdad, the capital of modern Iraq and within the Area of Ancient Babylonia, to Mosul [Nineveh], which is near several old Assyrian
capitals, takes the traveler into what is manifestly a different country. In the region of Baghdad and southwards the predominant vegetation is palm trees. The terrain is flat to the horizon, and for most of the year its sun-parched earth is arid and dead wherever irrigation ditches do not reach. Approaching Mosul [Nineveh] the traveler finds a striking change. The flat terrain gives way to undulating plains, in spring green with pasturage or cereal crop and gay and scented with flowers and clover. The rolling plains are cut with wadis, aflow after spring rains, with higher ranges of hills on the horizon. The traveler has reached Assyria. [Might that was Assyria, page 5]

The Assyrian land is rich and fertile, with growing fields found in every region. Two large areas comprise the Assyrian breadbasket: the Arbel plain and the Nineveh plain. To this day these areas remain critical crop producers. This is from where Assyria derived her strength, as it could feed a large population of professionals and craftsman, which allowed it to expand and advance the art of civilization.

**Racial Type**

Assyrians are a Semitic people indigenous to Mesopotamia. They are Mediterranean Caucasoids, and are ethnically distinct from Arabs and Jews.

**Language**

The Assyrian Alphabet

Assyrians have used two languages throughout their history: ancient Assyrian (Akkadian), and Modern Assyrian (neo-syriac). Akkadian was written with the cuneiform writing system, on clay tablets, and was in use from the beginning to about 750 B.C. By 750 B.C., a new way of writing, on parchment, leather, or papyrus, was developed, and the people who brought this method of writing with them, the Arameans, would eventually see their language, Aramaic, supplant Ancient Assyrian because of the technological breakthrough in writing. Aramaic was made the second official language of the Assyrian empire in 752 B.C. Although
Assyrians switched to Aramaic, it was not wholesale transplantation. The brand of Aramaic that Assyrians spoke was, and is, heavily infused with Akkadian words, so much so that scholars refer to it as Assyrian Aramaic.

Religion

Assyrians have practiced two religions throughout their history: Ashurism and Christianity. Ashurism was, of course, the first religion of the Assyrians. The very word Assyrian, in its Latin form, derives from the name of Ashur, the Assyrian god. Assyrians continued to practice Ashurism until 256 A.D., although by that time, most Assyrians had accepted Christianity. Indeed, Assyrians were the first nation to accept Christianity, and the Assyrian Church was founded in 33 A.D. by Thomas, Bortholemew and Thaddeus.

History of Assyrians

It is convenient to divide Assyrian history into six periods:

1. Emergence: beginnings to 2400 B.C.
2. First Golden Age: 2400 B.C. to 612 B.C.
3. First Dark Age: 612 B.C. to 33 A.D.
4. Second Golden Age: 33 A.D. to 1300 A.D.
5. Second Dark Age: 1300 A.D. to 1918 A.D.

Diaspora: 1918 A.D. to the present:
1. Emergence: beginnings to 2400 B.C.

In 1932, Sir Max Mallowan, the eminent British archaeologist, dug a deep sounding which reached virgin soil ninety feet below the top of the mound of Nineveh; this gave a pottery sequence back to prehistoric times and showed that the site was already inhabited by 5000 B.C. Very soon after that, the two other great Assyrian cities were settled, Ashur and Arbel, although an exact date has yet to be determined. Arbel is the oldest extant city, and remains largely unexcavated, its archaeological treasures waiting to be discovered. The same holds for Ashur. It is clear that by 2500 B.C., these three cities were well established and were thriving metropolis.

This period of history saw the development of the fundamentals of our civilization: animal domestication, agriculture, pottery, controllable fire (kilns), smelting, to name but a few. As regards Assyrians, because of it rich corn fields, Arbel was one of the very earliest permanent agricultural settlements.

Between 4500 and 2400 B.C., complex societies appear in the form of cities, with craft specialization and writing. These features were associated with the Sumerians, but they quickly spread to other parts of Mesopotamia, including Assyria. In Assyria, settlements had become large and guarded by fortifications walls, which implies the risk of attack from outside, and hence the need for defense and warfare.

2. First Golden Age: 2400 B.C. to 612 B.C.

We enter into an extremely fruitful period in Assyrian History. This period would see 1800 years of Assyrian hegemony over Mesopotamia, beginning with Sargon of Akkad in 2371 B.C. and ending with the tragic fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.

Sargon of Akkad established his kingdom in 2371 B.C., becoming the first king to assert control outside of his city-state. His model would be followed by all succeeding empires, down to our times. From his base at Akkad, south of Baghdad, Sargon would come to control territories stretching north to Ashur and west to the Mediterranean. Shamshi-Adad I would establish his kingdom in 1813 B.C. Shamshi-Adad forever united the three cities of Ashur, Nineveh and Arbel into one cohesive unit, and brought Arrapkha firmly into the Assyrian sphere, so that henceforth these four cities, and Nimrod, would constitute the very core of Assyria. Under Shamshi-Adad I, the long established Assyrian merchant colonies of Cappadocia saw renewed activity. Shamshi-Adad accomplished this through his administrative efficiency and political skill.

In 1472 B.C. or there about, a Mittanian king annexed Assyria, and this lasted for about 70 years. Mittanian control was decisively thrown off by about 1365 B.C. by Ashuruballit, who laid the foundation of the first Assyrian empire. Invaders from the Taurus mountains, north of Assyria, posed a significant threat to Assyria, and occupied Arik-den-ili for a
number of years, but were successfully repelled, paving the way for
Adad-narari (1307 B.C.) to establish the first Assyrian empire, which lasted until
approximately 1248 B.C.

A new power from south-west Iran, the Elamites, would assert control over Babylon for
30 years. This affected Assyria slightly. The death of Ashurdan in 1135 B.C. brought
instability as his two sons vied for the crown. Their terms only lasted one year, and
Ashur-resh-ishi I ascended to the throne in 1133 B.C.

The Middle Assyrian empire began in 1307 B.C. with Tiglath-Pileser, who greatly
expanded Assyrian territory. It is also during his reign that a significant development
occurs, that of the Aramean migrations into Assyria. This would have a profound impact
on Assyria and Assyrians, as we shall see. Tiglath-Pileser states "I crossed the
Euphrates twenty-eight times...in pursuit of the Arameans." This would ultimately prove
unsuccessful.

Tiglath-Pileser was not only a military man, but also a sportsman. Upon reaching the
Mediterranean, he took the time, he tells us, to go dolphin hunting. He also established
several zoos in Assyria, as he had a fascination with foreign animals.

The Aramean problem persisted during the reign of Tiglath-Pileser's successor and son,
Ashur-bel-kala (1074-1057), who tells us that the Arameans were penetrating deep into
Assyrian territory, including Tur Abdin, Harran and Khabur. For the next century, Assyria
decayed, the Aramean disruptions being the principal cause. It was not until 934 B.C.,
by which time the Arameans had settled into stable kingdoms in Mesopotamia, that
Assyria would reemerge.

Ashur-dan II would concentrate on rebuilding Assyria within its natural borders, from Tur
Abdin to the foothills beyond Arbel. He built government offices in all provinces, and as
an economic boost, provided ploughs throughout the land, which yielded record grain
production. He was followed by four able kings, who used the foundation which he had
laid to make Assyria the major world power of its time.

The four Kings that followed Ashur-dan II were Adad-nerari II (his son), Tukulti-Ninurta
II, Ashur-nasir-pal II, and Shalmaneser III. Adad-nerari would provide the final solution
to the Aramean problem. He defeated the paramount Aramean chief at Nisibin and,
marching up and down the Khabur, he obtained formal submissions from a series of
Aramean controlled cities.

Ashur-nasir-pal II would bring under Assyrian control the area from south Lebanon to
the Zagros mountains, with loose control over the Taurus region. Diyarbekr was under
direct Assyrian control.

We come now to the beginning of greatest expansion of the Assyrian empire with
Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727); through a series of able kings, Sargon II, Sennacherib,
Esarhaddon, Ashurbanipal, Assyria would extend its rule over a vast area, from Egypt
up to Cyprus to the west, through Anatolia, to the Caspian in the east.

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The Assyrian empires, particularly the third one, had a profound and lasting impact on the Near East. Before Assyrian hegemony would come to an end, the Assyrians would bring the highest civilization to the then known world. From the Caspian to Cyprus, from Anatolia to Egypt, Assyrian imperial expansion would bring into the Assyrian sphere nomadic and barbaric communities, and would bestow the gift of civilization upon them.

And though today we are far removed from that time, some of our most basic and fundamental devices of daily survival, to which we have become so accustomed that we cannot conceive of life without them, originated in Assyria. One cannot imagine leaving his home without locking the door; it is in Assyria where locks and keys were first used. One cannot survive in this world without knowing the time; it is in Assyria that the sexagesimal system of keeping time was developed. One cannot imagine driving without paved roads; it is in Assyria where paved roads were first used. And the list goes on, including the first postal system, the first use of iron, the first magnifying glasses, the first libraries, the first plumbing and flush toilets, the first electric batteries, the first guitars, the first aqueducts, the first arch, and on and on.

But it is not only things that originated in Assyria, it is also ideas, ideas that would shape the world to come. It is the idea, for example, of imperial administration, of dividing the land into territories administered by local governors who report to the central authority, the King of Assyria. This fundamental model of administration has survived to this day, as can be seen in America's federal-state system.

It is in Assyria where the mythological foundation of the old and new testament is found. It is here that the story of the flood originates, 2000 years before the old testament is written. It is here that the first epic is written, the Epic of Gilgamesh, with its universal and timeless theme of the struggle and purpose of humanity. It is here where civilization itself is developed and handed down to future generations. It is here where the first steps in the cultural unification of the Middle East are taken by bringing under Assyrian rule the diverse groups in the area, from Iran to Egypt, breaking down ethnic and national barriers and preparing the way for the cultural unification which facilitated the subsequent spread of Hellenism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The Assyrian empire collapsed in 612 B.C. The Assyrian people survived the loss of their state, and they remained mostly inconspicuous for the next 600 years. The Persians mention employing Assyrians as troops, and there is the failed attempt at reestablishing an Assyrian Kingdom in 350 B.C.; the Persians squelched this attempt and castrated 400 Assyrian leaders as punishment.

3. Second Golden Age: 33 A.D. to 1300 A.D.
Assyrians continued living in their homeland throughout this dark age, until that momentous moment in human history, when the Lord Son of God gave himself for the salvation of mankind. Very soon after the crucifixion, the bulk of the Assyrian population converted to Christianity, although there remained to be Ashurites, until 256 A.D. It was the Apostle Thomas, with Thaddeus and Bartholomew who came to the Assyrian city of Edessa and founded the Assyrian Church of the East, the first and oldest church in the world.

Armed with the word of God, and after 600 years of dormancy, the Assyrians once again set out to build an empire, not a military empire, but a religious empire founded on divine revelation and Christian brotherhood. So successful was the Assyrian missionary enterprise, by the end of the twelfth century the Assyrian Church was larger than the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches combined, and it spanned the Asian continent, from Syria to Mongolia, Korea, China, Japan and the Philippines.

When Marco Polo visited China in the thirteenth century, he was astonished to find Assyrian priests in the Chinese royal court, and tens of thousands of Chinese Christians. The Assyrian missionaries had reached China in the sixth century. With only the bible, a cross, and a loaf of bread in hand, these messengers had walked thousands of miles along the old silk road to deliver the word of God. So successful were the missionaries, when Genghis Khan swept through Asia, he brought with him an army over half of which belonged to the Assyrian Church of the East. So successful were the missionaries, the first Mongolian system of writing used the Assyrian alphabet.

Armed with the word of God, Assyrians once again transformed the face of the Middle East. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries they began a systematic translation of the Greek body of knowledge into Assyrian. At first they concentrated on the religious works but then quickly moved to science, philosophy and medicine. Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Galen, and many others were translated into Assyrian, and from Assyrian into Arabic. It is these Arabic translations which the Moors brought with them into Spain, and which the Spaniards translated into Latin and spread throughout Europe, thus igniting the European renaissance.

By the sixth century A.D., Assyrians had begun exporting back to Byzantia their own works on science, philosophy and medicine. In the field of medicine, the Bakhteesho Assyrian family produced nine generations of physicians, and founded the great medical school at Gundeshapur. Also in the area of medicine, Hunayn ibn-Ishaq’s textbook on ophthalmology, written in 950 A.D., remained the authoritative source on the subject until 1800 A.D.

In the area of philosophy, the Assyrian philosopher Job of Edessa developed a physical theory of the universe, in the Assyrian language, that rivaled Aristotle’s theory, and that sought to replace matter with forces.

One of the greatest Assyrian achievements of the fourth century was the founding of the first university in the world. The School of Nisibis had three departments: theology, philosophy and medicine, and became a magnet and center of intellectual development.
in the Middle East. The statutes of the School of Nisibis, which have been preserved, later became the model upon which the first Italian university was based.

When Arabs and Islam swept through the Middle East in 630 A.D., they encountered 600 years of Assyrian Christian civilization, with a rich heritage, a highly developed culture, and advanced learning institutions. It is this civilization which became the foundation of the Arab civilization.

But this great Assyrian Christian civilization would come to an end in 1300 A.D. The tax which the Arabs levied on Christians, simply for just being Christian, forced many Assyrians to convert to Islam to avoid the tax; this inexorably drained the community, so that by the time Timurlane the Mongol delivered the final blow in 1300 A.D., by violently destroying most cities in the Middle East, the Assyrian Christian community had dwindled to its core in Assyria, and henceforth the Assyrian Church of the East would not regain its former glory, and the Assyrian language, which had been the lingua franca of the Middle East until 900 A.D., was completely supplanted by Arabic (except amongst the Assyrians). This, from 1300 A.D. until World War One, became the second Assyrian dark age.

4. Second Dark Age: 1300 A.D. to 1918 A.D.
The Assyrian missionary enterprise, which had been so successful throughout the Asian continent, came to an abrupt end with the coming of Timurlane the Mongol. The indiscriminate destruction leveled by Timurlane against the civilizations he encountered put to a permanent end the Assyrian missionary enterprise. A large segment of the Assyrian population escaped the ravages of Timurlane by fleeing into the Hakkary mountains (present day eastern Turkey); the remaining Assyrians continued to live in their homelands (presently North Iraq and Syria), and Urmia. The four Assyrian communities, over time, begin defining themselves in terms of their church affiliation. The western Assyrians, all of whom belonging to the Syrian Orthodox Church, began Assyrian Church of the East. After the division of the Church of the East in 1550 A.D., the Chaldean Church of Babylon, a Roman Catholic Uniate, was created, and members of this church began to call themselves Chaldean. By the end of the nineteenth century, these three communities no longer saw themselves as one and the same.

5. Diaspora: 1918 A.D. to the present:
In this century, Assyrians have suffered massive genocide, have lost control of their ancestral lands, and are in a struggle for survival. The Assyrian nation today stands at a crossroad. One third of is in a diaspora, while the remaining two-thirds lives perilously in its native lands. These are some of the dangers facing the Assyrians:

- *Denominationalism and fragmentation*
- *Islamic fundamentalism*
- *Arabization*
- *Cultural immersion and absorption into Arab societies Mass emigration to the West, and absorption into Western societies*

SOURCE: http://www.aina.org/aol/peter/brief.htm
The Assyrian Church of the East

It is not known exactly when Christianity first took root in upper Mesopotamia, but a Christian presence had certainly been established there by the mid-2nd century. In the 3rd century, the area was conquered by the Persians. Although this was to be a multi-ethnic church, the Assyrian people traditionally played a central role in its ecclesial life. Its geographical location caused it to become known simply as “the Church of the East.”

Around the year 300, the bishops were first organized into an ecclesiastical structure under the leadership of a Catholicos, the bishop of the Persian royal capital at Seleucia-Ctesiphon. He later received the additional title of Patriarch.

In the 5th century, the Church of the East gravitated towards the radical Antiochene form of Christology that had been articulated by Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius, and fell out of communion with the church in the Roman Empire. This was due in part to the significant influx of Nestorian Christians into Persia that took place following the condemnation of Nestorian Christology by the Council of Ephesus in 431, and the expulsion of Nestorians from the Roman Empire by Emperor Zeno (474-491). In addition, the Persian Christians needed to distance themselves from the official church of the Roman Empire, with which Persia was frequently at war. In this way they were able to maintain their Christian faith while avoiding suspicions that they were collaborating with the Roman enemy.

Synods in the 5th century also decreed that celibacy should be obligatory for no one in this church, including bishops. A number of bishops and even patriarchs were married until the early 6th century, when the decision was taken to ordain only celibate monks to the episcopate. Priests, however, have always been allowed to marry, even after ordination.

The Church of the East was always a minority in largely Zoroastrian Persia, but nevertheless it flourished for many centuries, with its rich scholarly activity centered on the famous school of Nisibis. The church expanded through missionary activity into areas as far away as India, Tibet, China, and Mongolia. This continued even after the Mesopotamian homeland was conquered by the Muslim Arabs in the 7th century. The Patriarchate was moved to the new city of Baghdad after it became the capital in 766. By 1318 there were some 30 metropolitan sees and 200 suffrage dioceses. But during the invasions of Tamerlane in the late 14th century, these Christians were almost annihilated. By the 16th century, they had been reduced to a small community of Assyrians in what is now eastern Turkey. The church was then further weakened by the formation of a Catholic counterpart known as the Chaldean Catholic Church.

During World War I, the Assyrians suffered massive deportations and massacres at the hands of the Turks who suspected them of supporting the British enemy. About one third of the Assyrian population perished. Most of the survivors fled south into Iraq,
hoping to be protected by the British. But in 1933, after the end of the British mandate in Iraq, a clash between Assyrians and Iraqi troops ended in another massacre and a further scattering of the community. The Iraqi authorities then stripped Assyrian Patriarch Mar Simon XXIII of his citizenship and expelled him. He went into exile in San Francisco, California, USA.

In 1964 a dispute arose within the church, triggered by Mar Simon’s decision to adopt the Gregorian calendar. But the real issue was the person of Mar Simon and the centuries-old practice by which he was elected. By 1450, the office of Patriarch and some other Episcopal sees had become hereditary within one family, usually being passed down from uncle to nephew. This often produced unqualified leaders of the church who at times were elected at a very young age: Mar Simon himself had been elected at age 12. The dissidents also held that a Patriarch was needed who could live with his community in Iraq.

Those opposed to Mar Simon were supported by Mar Thomas Darmo, the Assyrian Metropolitan of India. In 1968 he traveled from India to Baghdad and ordained three new bishops. They then met in synod and elected him Patriarch over against Mar Simon. Mar Thomas Darmo died in the following year, and was succeeded in 1970 by Mar Addai of Baghdad.

But in 1973 Mar Simon resigned as Patriarch and married. As no successor could be agreed upon, the Assyrian bishops in communion with him attempted to persuade him to resume his office despite his marriage. But in the midst of these negotiations, on November 6, 1975, Mar Simon was assassinated in San Jose, California. The bishop of Tehran, Iran, was elected Patriarch in 1976 and adopted the name Mar Dinkha IV. He took up residence in the United States.

Mar Dinkha made it clear that with his election, the patriarchal dynasty had ended. This removed the major reason for the schism between the two groups. Although the rift has not yet been healed, recent meetings between bishops of the two sides appear to have made substantial progress towards resolving the dispute. Currently Mar Dinkha’s side has twelve bishops and Mar Addai’s side has seven bishops.

Meeting in Australia in July 1994, the Assyrian Holy Synod reached a number of important decisions concerning the life of this church. The bishops established a Commission on Interchurch Relations and Education Development under the guidance of Bishop Bawai Soro to prepare for theological dialogues with other churches and develop programming in religious education. The Synod also officially sanctioned the residence of the Patriarch in Morton Grove, Illinois, USA.

A milestone in relations with the Roman Catholic Church was reached on November 11, 1994, when Mar Dinkha IV and Pope John Paul II signed a Common Christological Declaration in the Vatican. The statement affirms that Catholics and Assyrians are “united today in the confession of the same faith in the Son of God...” and envisages broad pastoral cooperation between the two churches, especially in the areas of
catechesis and the formation of future priests. The Pope and Patriarch also established a mixed committee for theological dialogue and charged it with overcoming the obstacles that still prevent full communion. It began meeting annually in 1995.

This international theological dialogue between the Assyrians and the Catholic Church as a whole has been accompanied by an improvement in relations between the Assyrian Church of the East and its Catholic counterpart, the Chaldean Catholic Church. In November 1996 Mar Dinkha IV and Chaldean Patriarch Raphael I Bidawid met in Southfield, Michigan, and signed a Joint Patriarchal Statement that committed their two churches to working towards reintegration and pledged cooperation on pastoral questions such as the drafting of a common catechism, the setting up of a common seminary in the Chicago-Detroit area, the preservation of the Aramaic language, and other common pastoral programs between parishes and dioceses around the world.

On August 15, 1997, the two Patriarchs met again, in Roselle, Illinois, and ratified a “Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity," that had been signed by the members of both Holy Synods. It restated the areas of pastoral cooperation envisaged in the Joint Patriarchal Statement, recognized that Assyrians and Chaldeans should come to accept each other’s diverse practices as legitimate, formally implemented the establishment of an Assyrian-Chaldean “Joint Commission for Unity,” and declared that each side recognized the apostolic succession, sacraments and Christian witness of the other. The text also spelled out the central concerns of both sides in the dialogue. While both churches wanted to preserve the Aramaic language and culture, the Assyrians were intent on retaining their freedom and self-governance, and the Chaldeans affirmed the necessity of maintaining full communion with Rome.

In mid-1997 it was announced that the Assyrian Church of the East and the Syrian Orthodox Church had agreed to establish a bilateral theological dialogue. As a gesture to foster better relations with the Oriental Orthodox churches, the Assyrian Holy Synod decided in 1997 to remove from the liturgy all anathema directed against others.

Although the Assyrians accept only the first two ecumenical councils, recent ecumenical discussions held under the auspices of the Pro Oriente foundation have concluded that in substance the faith of the Assyrian Church is consistent with the Christological teaching of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Officially the church adheres to extreme Antiochian Christological terminology, according to which in Christ there are two natures and two qnoma (a Syriac term with no Greek equivalent that refers to an individual but never personalized concrete nature) in one person. The synod of bishops has requested that their church not be called Nestorian, since this term has been used in the past to insult them. The Assyrians are not in communion with any other church.

The East Syrian rite of the Assyrian Church appears to have been an independent development from the ancient Syriac liturgy of Edessa. It may also preserve elements of an ancient Persian rite that has been lost. Services are still held predominantly in Syriac.
The Patriarch (8908 Birch Avenue, Morton Grove, Illinois 60053) is also the administrator of the Diocese of the Eastern USA. Mar Aprim Khamis is Bishop of the Western United States (18221 N. 59th Drive, Glendale, Arizona 85308). Altogether there are about 20 parishes in the country. Mar Emmanuel Joseph is Bishop of Canada, where there are four parishes and two missions (16 Hibiscus Court, Toronto, Ontario M9M 1R9). The Diocese of Australia and New Zealand (with four parishes and three missions in Australia and two missions in New Zealand), is headed by Mar Meelis Zaia (PO Box 621, Fairfield NSW 2165). There is also one Assyrian parish in London (St Mary’s Church, Westminster Road, Hanwell, W7 3TU) under the jurisdiction of Mar Odisho Oraha, who resides in Sweden.

Location: Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, North America, Australia, India

Head: Mar Dinkha IV (born 1935, elected 1976)

Title: Catholicos-Patriarch of the Church of the East

Residence: Morton Grove, Illinois, USA

Membership: 400,000

The Late Patriarch Dinkha IV of the Assyrian Church of the East

Mar Dinkha IV, born Dinkha Khanania (born 15 September 1935-26 March 2015), is the current Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. He was born in the village of Darbandokeh (Derbendoki), Iraq, and was baptized in the Church of Mar Qaryaqos located in the village of his birth. He is the fourth in the line of succession to the Bishopric of Urmia.

Tenure as Catholicos-Patriarch

After the assassination of Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, the Church of the East had an urgent need to restore its leadership. In 1976, the prelates of the church convened in London to elect a new Catholicos Patriarch and chose Dinkha as the most qualified candidate to fill the post. He was consecrated on 17 October 1976, in the West London Church of St. Barnabas, Ealing. With this consecration, Mar Dinkha IV became the successor to the Apostolic See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon (Babylon). He also announced that the hereditary line of succession for the Patriarchy which had existed for 500 years was discontinued with his tenure, allowing any cleric from the Church of the East to be elevated to Catholicos-Patriarch.

Dinkha established headquarters—along with four other houses of worship—in Chicago, Illinois, United States, in part due to the instability of the Iran–Iraq War. This conflict as well as Saddam Hussein’s policy of Arabization in Iraq, the Gulf War and subsequent sanctions against Iraq intensified the Assyrian diaspora from the region. Meanwhile, the Islamic Revolution and Shi’a emphasis in Iran created a tense situation for Assyrians in the Middle East. During the reign of Shimun XXIII and Dinkha IV, American membership in the Church of the East has gone from 3,200 in the 1950s to approximately 100,000 in 2008.

In 2005, the Patriarch conducted discussions with President of Iraqi Kurdistan Massoud Barzani on returning to the Apostolic See in northern Iraq and constructing a new residence in Ankawa. On 15 July 2007, Mar Dinkha celebrated 50 years of his priesthood. A ceremony was held at St. George Cathedral in Chicago, where a portion of Ashland Avenue was renamed "His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV Blvd". In 2008, he received an honorary degree from the University of Chicago, in part because of his emphasis on education—he has a stated goal of only appointing theologians with doctoral degrees to the position of bishop.

Ref:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarch_Dinkha_IV_of_the_Assyrian_Church_of_the_East
His Holiness Mar Gewargis III

His Holiness, Mar Gewargis III, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, born Gewargis Sliwa, is the current Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East. On 18 September 2015, the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East elected His Beatitude Mar Gewargis Sliwa, to succeed the late His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, as Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East.

On 27 September 2015, in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Erbil, he was consecrated as Catholicos-Patriarch in a ceremony headed by Mar Aprem Mookem, Metropolitan of Malabar and India. Mar Gewargis Sliwa formally assumed the ecclesiastical name Mar Gewargis III.

Prior to his election, Mar Gewargis Sliwa was Metropolitan of Iraq, Jordan and Russia. He had been consecrated Metropolitan of Iraq on 14 June 1981 by His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV in Chicago, Illinois and until his election, administered to the faithful of Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, Mosul and their surroundings with the title Metropolitan of Iraq, Jordan and Russia.

Patriarch Sliwa was born on November 23, 1941 in Habbaniya, Iraq. He was consecrated Metropolitan of Iraq on June 14, 1981 in Chicago, Illinois by his predecessor, Patriarch Dinkha IV. Since his consecration, the Metropolitan has made his headquarters in the Iraqi capital Baghdad, and has witnessed political upheaval, displacement and persecution of Assyrians.

Patriarch-elect Sliwa, the 112th patriarch of the Church of the East, will be consecrated at St. John's Cathedral in Arbel on Sunday, September 27, and will assume the name Mar Gewargis III. The Patriarchal See of the Assyrian Church of the East will return to Iraq after having been established in-exile in the United States since 1933.

SOURCES: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gewargis_III;
Chapter Six:
The Ancient Church of the East [Assyrian]
The **Ancient Church of the East** was established in 1964. It follows the traditions of one of the oldest Christian churches, the Church of the East, whose origins trace back to the See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in central Mesopotamia. But as a result of the schism, it became independent of the Assyrian Church of the East.

Baghdad is the seat of the Ancient Church of the East. After the position of Catholicos-Patriarch, the head of the church remained vacant for 4 years, Mar Thoma Darmo became the Church’s first Catholicos-Patriarch (1968–1969). The present head of the church is Catholicos-Patriarch Mar Addai II Giwargis since 1970. It is considered the most traditionalist in the Eastern Rite churches.

**Establishment**

The Ancient Church of the East was established in opposition to a reform introduced in the Assyrian Church of the East of using the Gregorian Calendar rather than using the traditional Julian calendar that is off by 13 days. The schism arose in the Assyrian Church of the East in 1964 in resistance to these changes made to the church traditions, thereby causing a separate Ancient Church of the East to be established and headquartered in Baghdad.
In 1968, the followers of the newly established church elected a rival catholicos-patriarch Mar Thoma Darmo while Mar Shimun XXIII continued as the official head of the Assyrian Church of the East. The elected catholicos-patriarch Mar Thoma Darmo was a native of Mesopotamia, a former Metropolitan of the Assyrian Church of the East in India from 1952 to 1968 based at Thrissur, India. He became the head of the Ancient Church of the East in October 1968 and relocated to Baghdad.

Following Patriarch Mar Thoma Darmo's death in 1969, Mar Addai II was elected to head the Ancient Church of the East in February 1970.

**Organization**

The head of the church is the Patriarch of the Church of the East, who also bears the title of Catholicos, presently Mar Addai II. The Ancient Church of the East has an ordained clergy divided into the three traditional orders of deacon, priest (or presbyter), and bishop. It also has an episcopal polity, meaning it is organized into dioceses, each headed by a bishop and made up of several individual parish communities overseen by priests. Dioceses are organized into provinces under the authority of a metropolitan bishop.

**Hierarchy**

In September 1968 Mar Addai Giwargis was consecrated Metropolitan of Iraq, Mar Aprem Mookken was consecrated Metropolitan of India, and Mar Pouluse Pouluse was consecrated Bishop of India. These prelates in turn consecrated Mar Thoma Darmo Catholicos-Patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East during the first week of October 1968. H.H. Mar Thoma Darmo passed away in September 1969, and Mar Addai Giwargis became Acting Patriarch. Mar Addai Giwargis consecrated two Metropolitan in December 1969, Mar Narsai Toma for Kirkuk, and Mar Toma Eramia for Mosul and Northern Iraq. Mar Addai’s jurisdiction now was Baghdad.

In February 1972, Mar Narsai Toma of Kirkuk and Mar Toma Giwargis of Nineveh consecrated Mar Addai Giwargis as Catholicos-Patriarch.

Mar Daniel Yakob, Bishop of Kirkuk for the Assyrian Church of the East was accepted in the Ancient Church of the East, in 1985, to head the North American parishes. In July 1992, Mar Yacoub Daniel was consecrated Bishop for Syria by H.H. Mar Addai II. Also in June 1993, H.H. Mar Addai II consecrated Mar Emmanuel Elia Bishop for the Patriarchate of Baghdad. In 1994, Mar Emmanuel Elia shifted his residence and became Bishop of USA and Canada, while Mar Daniel Yakob became Bishop of California due to his illness.

Several changes occurred in the church hierarchy during November–December 1995. Mar Aprem Mookken, Mar Pouluse Pouluse and the Church in India united with the Assyrian Church of the East. Timothaus Mar Shallita was accepted into the Holy Synod and appointed Metropolitan of Europe, and Mar Yacoub Daniel was elevated to the rank of Metropolitan. In July 2005, Mar Yacoub Daniel was transferred from Syria to serve in Australia and New Zealand.

Church hierarchy as of August 2011 include:

- H.H. Mar Addai II, Catholicos-Patriarch
- Mar Narsai Toma (Metropolitan of Kirkuk)
- Mar Toma Giwargis (Metropolitan of Mosul and Northern Iraq)
- Mar Yacoub Daniel (Metropolitan of Australia and New Zealand)
- Mar Zaia Khoshaba (Metropolitan of Europe)
- Mar Daniel Yakob (Bishop of California)
- Mar Zaia Khoshaba (Bishop of Baghdad)
- Mar Mari Emmanuel (Bishop of Australia and New Zealand)

Syria, USA and Canada are under the spiritual care of Mar Yacoub Daniel and Mar Zaia Khoshaba.

Calendar issues

In June 2010, the Ancient Church of the East Synod officially declared that the church will begin starting 2010 to celebrate Christmas on the 25 December of each year according to the Gregorian calendar. From its establishment, the church had continued to celebrate Christmas on January 7 of each year. This move will mean that both the Ancient Church of the East and the Assyrian Church of the East will follow the same calendar. The calendar issue was one of the main reasons the Church of the East had split. Easter will continue to be celebrated according to the Julian calendar.

This latest move by the Ancient Church of the East comes as a reconciliatory gesture to encourage efforts for talks for reunification. A joint holy synod between the two churches was postponed and is expected to be held at some future date.

**List of Catholicoi-Patriarchs of the Ancient Church of the East**

1964–present

- *Vacant* (1964–1967) – first period of the schism
- Mar Thoma Darmo (1968–1969)
- Mar Addai II (1972–present)

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Church_of_the_East#1964.E2.80.93present
His Holiness Patriarch Mar Addai II

Mar Addai II, born Shleumun Giwargis, (born in Iraq on 1 August 1950, although some sources cite 1946 or 1948) is the incumbent Catholicos Patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East and resides in the Apostolic See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in Baghdad, Iraq.[1]

Tenure as Metropolitan

Prior to being elected as Catholicos-Patriarch, Mar Addai II served as Bishop of Baghdad. He was later elevated to the rank of Metropolitan of Iraq in September 1968, after the schism separating the Ancient Church of the East from the Assyrian Church of the East. Together with Mar Aprem Mookan and Mar Poulose Poulose, Mar Addai consecrated Mar Thoma Darmo as the Patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East in October 1968.

Mar Thoma Darmo died the following year in September 1969, falling one month short of the first anniversary of his consecration as Catholicos-Patriarch. Mar Addai II was then selected to serve as Acting Patriarch.

Tenure as Catholicos-Patriarch

In December 1969, as Acting Patriarch, Mar Addai II elevated Mar Narsai Toma to Metropolitan of Kirkuk and Mar Toma Eramia as Metropolitan of Mosul and Northern Iraq. He was officially elected to the position of Catholicos-Patriarch in February 1970, several months after the death of Mar Thoma Darmo. Two years later, on February 20, 1972, he was consecrated as Patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East by Mar Narsai and Mar Toma. The ordination took place at St. Zaia Cathedral in Iraq.[2]

Expansion of the Holy Synod

The Ancient Church of the East has seen many changes during Mar Addai's tenure, namely the consecration of a number of new Bishops and Metropolitans. Since his elevation to the rank of Patriarch, the church has consecrated the following prelates: Mar Daniel Yakob (Auxiliary Bishop of California), Mar Yacoub Daniel (Metropolitan of Australia and New Zealand), Mar Emmanuel Elia (Bishop of Baghdad - resigned), Timotheus Mar Shallita (Metropolitan of Europe), Mar Zaia Khoshaba (Bishop of Baghdad), Mar Aprem Daweed (Bishop of Duhok - resigned), Mar Mari Emmanuel (Bishop of Australia and New Zealand), and Mar Gewargis Younan (Bishop of Chicago).
Gestures Towards Reconciliation

Between November and December 1995, Mar Aprem Mookan and Mar Pouluse Pouluse left the Ancient Church of the East for external reasons, and reunited with the Assyrian Church of the East. Mar Addai II has also shown interest in reuniting the sister churches. A meeting between both Holy Synods is expected in the near future, as the Ancient Church of the East has made gestures towards reconciliation. The most prominent of these is undoubtedly the declaration made in June 2010 in which Mar Addai II announced that the church would officially recognize Christmas on December 25 starting that year, in accordance with the Gregorian Calendar. This was a historic move, as calendar issues were one of the primary reasons leading to the schism.

Despite this move, the Holy Synod of the Ancient Church of the East has maintained that they will continue celebrating Easter in accordance with the Julian Calendar.

Advocacy for the rights of Christians in Iraq

On Sunday, September 24, 2006, St. Mary's Cathedral, the home of Mar Addai II, was bombed. The cathedral, located in the Riyadh district of Baghdad, experienced dual bombings: A small IED explosion preceded a car detonation setting off a large number of explosives. The bombings occurred within minutes of each other. The bombing was carefully timed to occur just as parishioners exited the church following Sunday morning services. Two civilians were killed in the attacks, in addition to the twenty that sustained injuries.\(^3\)

The Patriarch was also attacked on another occasion in his own courtyard. Though his life was spared, he was robbed.

Mar Addai II's tenure as Patriarch comes at arguably the darkest time for Assyrian Christians since the Assyrian Genocide also known as Seyfo. Mar Addai has stressed the importance of maintaining the Assyrian Christian presence in Iraq. Despite attacks against his life and the threat facing all Christians in the country, he has refused to relocate and continues to reside in Iraq.

On May 18, 2007 Mar Addaiii II called on the Prime Minister of Iraq and the Iraqi Parliament to put an end to the tragic situation Christians in Iraq were forced to endure as a result of constant threats and assaults against them.

References

- St. Mary's Cathedral, the home of His Holiness Mar Addai II, Patriarch of The Ancient Church of the East, was bombed Sunday morning.
- *History of Eastern Christianity* (Malayalam) by Dr. Mar Aphrem Metropolitan. The Theological Literature Council, Thiruvalla, Kerala, India
- Church Bombings in Iraq

Chapter Seven:

The Chaldean Heritage
The Chaldean Catholic Church

As early as the 13th century, Catholic missionaries – primarily Dominicans and Franciscans – had been active among the faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East. This resulted in a series of individual conversions of bishops and brief unions, but no permanent community was formed.

In the mid-15th century a tradition of hereditary patriarchal succession (passing from uncle to nephew) took effect in the Assyrian church. As a result, one family dominated the church, and untrained minors were being elected to the patriarchal throne.

When such a patriarch was elected in 1552, a group of Assyrian bishops refused to accept him and decided to seek union with Rome. They elected the reluctant abbot of a monastery, Yuhannan Sulaka, as their own patriarch and sent him to Rome to arrange a union with the Catholic Church. In early 1553 Pope Julius III proclaimed him Patriarch Simon VIII "of the Chaldeans" and ordained him a bishop in St. Peter's Basilica on April 9, 1553.

The new Patriarch returned to his homeland in late 1553 and began to initiate a series of reforms. But opposition, led by the rival Assyrian Patriarch, was strong. Simon was soon captured by the pasha of Amadya, tortured and executed in January 1555. Eventually Sulaka's group returned to the Assyrian Church of the East, but for over 200 years, there was much turmoil and changing of sides as the pro- and anti-Catholic parties struggled with one another. The situation finally stabilized only on July 5, 1830, when Pope Pius VIII confirmed Metropolitan John Hormizdas as head of all Chaldean Catholics, with the title of Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, with his see in Mosul.

The Chaldean Catholics suffered heavily from massacres during World War I (1918) when four bishops, many priests, and about 70,000 faithful died.

The location of the Patriarchate shifted back and forth among several places over the centuries, but gained a measure of stability after it was set up at Mosul in 1830. In 1950 it moved to its present location in Baghdad after substantial migration of Chaldean Catholics from northern Iraq to the capital city.

The Chaldean Catholic Church's relationship with the Assyrian Church of the East improved dramatically after the signing of a joint Christological agreement between the Pope and the Assyrian Patriarch in Rome in November 1994. In August 1997 the Holy Synods of the two churches formally instituted a commission for dialogue to discuss pastoral cooperation at all levels.

Chaldean candidates for the priesthood study at St. Peter's Patriarchal Seminary in Baghdad. In 1991 the Chaldean Holy Synod established Babel College for Philosophy and Theology next to St. Peter's Seminary. It aims to provide a higher scientific education for priests, monks, nuns and interested lay people, and is affiliated with the
Pontifical Urban University in Rome. Today the largest concentration of these Catholics remains in Baghdad. There are ten Chaldean dioceses in Iraq, four in Iran, and four others in the Middle East.

The Chaldean liturgy can be traced back to the Syriac Christian culture of Edessa, and attained its present basic structure in the 7th century. The liturgical language is Syriac, and a number of Latin customs have been adopted.

The war in Iraq that has been in progress since 2003 has dealt a heavy blow to the Chaldean Catholic community there. In 2007 Patriarch Emmanuel III said that large number of Chaldeans had left Iraq because of various forms of persecution. He spoke of internal persecution by Muslim extremists who were chasing Christians out of their homes and lands, and external persecution by the occupying armies. He cited in particular the decision by American troops to transform Babel College into a military base against the wishes of the Patriarchate.

There are two Chaldean Catholic dioceses in the United States. The Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle of the Chaldeans was established in 1982, and is under the leadership of Bishop Ibrahim Ibrahim (25585 Berg Road, Southfield, Michigan 48034). It has five parishes in the Detroit area and two in Chicago. The Eparchy of St. Peter the Apostle of the Chaldeans in San Diego (established in 2002) has six parishes in California and one in Arizona, and is headed by Bishop Sarhad Jammo (1627 Jamacha Way, El Cajon, California 92019). In 2006 a new eparchy of Saint Thomas the Apostle of Sydney was established for Chaldeans in Australia and New Zealand, led by Bishop Djibrail Kassab. There are eight worshipping communities for approximately 29,000 Chaldeans in the two countries. In other areas of the world, Chaldeans are under spiritual supervision of the local Latin ordinaries.

Location: Iraq, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, France, USA

Head: Patriarch Emmanuel III Delly (born 1927, elected 2003)

Title: Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans

Residence: Baghdad, Iraq

Membership: 419,000


NOTE: NEW PATRIARCH OF BABYLON OF THE CHALDEANS:
Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako was elected on February 1, 2013 to replace Patriarch Emmanuel III Delly
Chaldean Americans are descendants of people from the northern Tigris-Euphrates Valley, presently located in the Middle Eastern nation of Iraq. The majority of Chaldean Americans live in Detroit, Michigan, although there are also Chaldean Americans in Chicago, Illinois; El Cajon, San Jose, and Turlock, California; and Oaxaca, Mexico. It is difficult to determine the exact number of Chaldeans in the United States because they are not represented as such in the U.S. Census. According to statistical projections from previous data on the Chaldean American community, however, it is estimated that Chaldeans in the Detroit metropolitan area may number as many as 70,000 to 80,000; in California they are projected at 2,000 to 3,000 persons.

Although Chaldean Americans constitute the bulk of Iraqi immigrants living in the United States, they represent less than 10 percent of the population of Iraq. While the vast majority of Iraqis, like residents of other Arabic nations, are Muslim, Chaldeans are Roman Catholic, and practice one of the 18 to 20 separate rites of the Catholic Church. They also differ from other Iraqis in that their ancestral language is not Arabic but a dialect of Aramaic, also referred to as Chaldean, Assyrian, or Syriac. As a result of their religious and linguistic differences from other Iraqi immigrants, Chaldeans tend not to identify themselves either with Iraq or the Arab world, but prefer being called Chaldean Americans.

HISTORY

Chaldean Americans are a highly religious people proud of their Christian heritage. According to legend, they were converted to Christianity by the Apostle Thomas on one of his missionary journeys to the East. (St. Addai, an associate of Thomas, is revered as a Chaldean patron.) In the third century, they were followers of Nestorius, a patriarch of Constantinople who was declared a heretic by the Roman Church for teaching that Jesus Christ was not concurrently God and man. This division between the followers of Nestorius in the East and the Roman Church lasted until 1445, when some Chaldeans were received into the Roman Church by Pope Eugenius IV. They were permitted to retain their historic rituals and the Chaldean/Aramaic language for mass and other ceremonies. Searching for an appropriate name to call this new Catholic rite, the Pope focused on their historic homeland, which in ancient times had been the land of the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Chaldeans. It was also the historic homeland of the prophet Abraham, who came from Ur, a city of the Chaldeans. Hence, the Pope chose "Chaldean" as the name for the new Catholic rite.

Over 95 percent of Chaldeans in the Detroit community can trace their origin to a single town, Telkaif, which is one of several Christian towns in the northern Iraqi province of Mosul, near the ruins of the ancient city of Nineveh. Some of the earliest members of Detroit's Chaldean American community recall hearing stories from their grandparents
about the conversion of their town from Nestorianism. This occurred in about 1830, when the town recognized the Roman Pontiff as the head of the Church.

MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

While Chaldeans are believed to have immigrated to the United States as early as 1889, the first significant migration wave did not occur until around 1910, when Chaldeans began settling in metropolitan Detroit. At the time, Detroit was popular among a number of immigrant groups because of the growing automobile industry. It also had an established Middle Eastern community during this period, consisting primarily of Christian immigrants from Lebanon.

In 1943 community sources listed 908 Chaldeans in the Detroit area; by 1963, this number had tripled, to about 3,000 persons. An even greater number of Iraqi citizens immigrated to the United States due to changes in U.S. immigration laws during the mid-1960s, and growth in Detroit's Chaldean American community became even more dramatic, increasing to about 45,000 in 1986, and approximately 75,000 by 1992. (These figures are based on the statistical projections and estimates of Chaldean American community leaders.) This period also saw an increase in immigration to other parts of the country, particularly California.

The majority of Chaldean Americans left their homeland for economic and religious reasons. Telkaif in the early 1900s was a poor, non-industrialized village. Many left the town for nearby cities such as Mosul, Baghdad, Basra, or Beirut. Only later did some of them decide to migrate to the United States, or simply to North America. At the time the earliest settlers came, the United States had not yet introduced restriction on immigration, making entry relatively easy. Migration at that time was largely a male phenomenon; women and children generally stayed behind until their husbands, fathers, and brothers became established.

Chaldeans also fled their homeland to escape religious persecution from the Muslim majority in the Middle East. The combination of religious freedom, an established Lebanese Moronite community, and economic opportunity made the United States, particularly metropolitan Detroit, inviting. Once members of the Telkaif community had settled in the area, they encouraged others from their homeland to join them. Thus began an immigration process, known as "chain migration," between Telkaif and Detroit, that continues to the present.

In this process, members of a community who have already established themselves in a new location assist relatives and friends left behind to migrate as well. The assistance they provide can take many forms, including the provision of jobs, a place to stay, or, at the very least, information and advisement. Close relatives may even provide money for passage. In a typical chain, a man migrates first; later he sends home for his wife and children, or if he is not married, he may return to find a bride. As he and his wife become citizens, they arrange for the migration of their parents and siblings as well. And these, in turn, arrange to assist their spouses, in-laws, and other relatives.
This type of assistance became especially important in the 1920s, after the passage of U.S. quota limitations on migration. Under quota restrictions, only 100 immigrants from Iraq were allowed to enter the United States each year. These quotas reinforced the chain migration process by giving preference to the families of persons already in America, under the assumption that such persons would have assistance in the United States and were less likely to become indigent and require public assistance.

Migration of all types largely ceased during World War II when travel became difficult. It commenced again following the war, particularly with the introduction of the student visa, which allowed migrants to enter the United States for educational purposes, on the assumption that they would return home following their training. Many Chaldean Americans entered as students and later married members of the community, thus allowing them to remain in the country.

The 1968 change in U.S. migration law allowed for a significantly larger number of immigrants from Iraq, and the migration of Chaldeans increased substantially. A steady stream of Chaldean immigrants came to the United States, until the onset of the Gulf War when the United States placed restrictions on immigration from Iraq.

**ACCULTURATION AND ASSIMILATION**

The steady rate of Chaldean migration has had a profound effect on the assimilation of Chaldeans in American society because it has provided a constant influx of Chaldean culture. However, many changes have taken place in Iraq since the first Chaldean settlers came to the United States, which, in turn, has greatly altered Chaldean American communities.

Like most ethnic groups, Chaldean Americans have also been affected by cultural differences between the immigrant generation and their children and grandchildren born in the United States. Chaldean Americans reared in the United States are more comfortable speaking English than the language of their parents. They attend school with non-Chaldeans, watch television, and adopt an American lifestyle.

Recent Chaldean immigrants were more likely to have been born and reared in one of modern Iraq's major cities, such as Baghdad, Mosul, or Basra. They are better educated and many have attended college or professional schools. The two groups differ socioeconomically as well; many of the earlier immigrants, and their children born in the United States, have prospered and moved into more affluent suburbs, while more recent immigrants, despite their educational background and general understanding of the English language, struggle among the nation's poor. Yet perhaps the most dramatic difference between older and newer Chaldean immigrant groups is language. Since World War II, Iraq has taught Arabic, the national language, in schools throughout the country. As a result, the Chaldean/Aramaic language of early immigrants has largely been replaced by the Arabic tongue of the newcomers. In fact, few immigrants know Chaldean at all.
Chaldean Americans are often mistaken for other ethnic groups in the United States, specifically Arab Americans. Like Arab Americans, Chaldeans tend to have large families, own independent businesses such as grocery or party stores and gas stations, and they even share some foods. On a deeper level, however, there are important distinctions between the two immigrant groups. The large patriarchal families of Muslim Arabs have traditionally allowed a man to take multiple wives, a pattern forbidden for centuries in the Christian tradition. Chaldeans also contend that women are accorded a higher place in their social structure than in the Arabic tradition. In the Chaldean community, many young women are encouraged to attain higher education. Even in the area of food there are important distinctions; Arabs do not consume alcohol and pork, which are forbidden in the Muslim faith. Chaldeans have no such restrictions. Many of these distinctions clearly flow from religious differences, but they are important distinctions in their own right.

LANGUAGE

Most modern-day immigrants speak Arabic, the dominant language of the Iraqi nation, but the earliest Chaldean immigrants spoke only Chaldean, which they also call "Jesus language," since it is believed to be the language that Jesus Christ spoke during his life. Some Chaldeans resent the fact that they were forced to learn Arabic in Iraqi schools. Inquiring which language Chaldean American children should learn usually provokes a debate. Practical thinkers consider the Arabic language more useful in today's world. More nostalgic individuals assert the importance of learning their original tongue. Hence, while most Chaldean Americans speak Arabic, they do not necessarily take pride in it.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

The Chaldean American family is not limited to the nuclear family of husband, wife, and children. Rather, it includes grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Indeed, Chaldeans are quick to point out that their shared ancestry means that everyone is at least distantly related to everyone else. Family names are recognized by everyone and enable members of the community to place everybody in relation to everyone else. Therefore, a Chaldean's family ties constitute a major source of identity within the community.

Chaldeans tend to have large families, in keeping with Catholic tradition. In the past, the number of children per couple averaged from five to six, with some couples having as many as 12 or 15 children. This number has decreased with second and third generations, but Chaldean families continue to be somewhat larger than the national average.

Ties to one's extended family are close and involved. Visiting between a married couple and the parents and siblings of both husband and wife are frequent, occurring at least several times each week, even daily. Extended Chaldean American families also perform numerous functions together, such as cooking, child care, or cleaning. Cooking
and eating together several times each week is common. Child care is often shared by sisters, sisters-in-law, or grandmothers. Yard work for older relatives may be managed by younger members of the extended family.

Because of the importance given to family and community, Chaldeans prefer to have their children be endogamous, or marry within the community, as occurred in Telkaif. In the United States, many Chaldeans marry someone from outside the community, but the rate of endogamy continues to be high. Even those who marry non-Chaldeans (exogamy) usually remain close to their parents and siblings. Among Chaldeans, most exogamous marriages bring an outsider into the community, rather than resulting in the loss of a member.

Chaldean families exercise great influence over the individual. One example of this is the expectation that family preferences will be considered in the choice of a spouse. Chaldeans are also expected to open their homes to other members of the family, should that be necessary. This means that young people are expected to welcome their elderly parents or a visiting relative from Iraq into their homes, for periods which may last from a few weeks to several months or even years.

In its initial years, the Chaldean American community was a small and highly unified group. All but one or two families could trace their origin to the town of Telkaif; all were interrelated; and marriages were frequently arranged within the community or with persons in the original town. Moreover, they spoke a common language, Chaldean/Aramaic, which they shared with few other Americans. Common interests in the Church and a community economic system also served to draw the members into a closely knit unit.

Over the past eight decades, however, significant changes have occurred in the Chaldean American community. What was, in 1960, a community of about 3,000 members has multiplied to nearly 25 times that size. Differences and divisions are inevitable. Many such divisions arise from the varying places of birth among Chaldeans. While early Chaldean immigrants were born in small, rural communities, more recent groups are from Iraq's large, industrialized cities. Moreover, many Chaldeans were born in the United States and are therefore heavily influenced by American culture. Other problems arise from economic wealth. Many established Chaldean families have obtained significant wealth in the United States. Several more recent immigrants, however, struggle well below the poverty level. Language too, tends to divide Chaldean American communities. Early immigrants maintain their ancestral Chaldean/Aramaic language, but more recent immigrants speak Arabic. At the same time, numerous American-born Chaldeans favor English. Such differences have torn communities, and even families apart. Nonetheless, Chaldean Americans remain somewhat unified by their common heritage and Catholic faith. Jobs, income, and other needs of recent immigrants are paramount in community priorities. Also, problems of the homeland, such as Iraq's recent wars, first with Iran and then with the United States, assume a prominent role in community concerns.
INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS

Many Americans have difficulty distinguishing Chaldean Americans from other American ethnic groups, particularly Arab Americans and Iraqi Americans, much to the dismay of the members of these groups, who are quite aware of the differences among them. While they share similar physical traits, they differ linguistically, culturally, and most importantly, in terms of religion. During the early years of the twentieth century, a period about which many Chaldeans have heard from their parents and grandparents, Arabic-speaking Muslims were abusive oppressors of Christians in the area in which Telkaif was located. Many Chaldeans have negative memories of treatment by Iraqis as well. In fact, from a political standpoint, many Chaldeans are more supportive of Israel than Arab countries in the Middle East.

Many Chaldean Americans remain resentful of their constant identification with the Arab American community. Most simply reassert their identity as Chaldeans. Others, however, have attempted to develop links with groups that share their religious, linguistic, and cultural heritage, though not necessarily their Roman Catholic faith. Chaldeans who follow this tactic have attempted to link with other groups sharing the Aramaic language and the historic tie to the Assyrian or Babylonian heritage. Examples are Nestorian Christians in the Chicago Area, and a community of Assyrian Christians of several denominations, including Chaldean Catholics, living in Turlock, California.

For a variety of reasons, however, most Chaldean Americans have not embraced this identity. Perhaps the most important reason is the salience of the Roman Catholic faith for so many Chaldeans. For them it is preferable to relinquish the Chaldean identity for the dominant Roman Catholic designation, rather than exchange their religious tie for a linguistic one.

A more consequential factor, however, may lie in the size of the Chaldean American community in the Detroit area. Chaldean Americans do not need to find another group with which to link themselves. With over 70,000 of their background in a relatively limited geographic area, they are able to find many others who share not only a general but a very specific historic, linguistic, religious, and ancestral heritage. As the major concentration of Chaldeans in the United States, they need look no further than each other for a meaningful ethnic identity.

The media has recorded many cultural clashes between blacks and Chaldeans in the United States, which have resulted from Chaldean Americans operating stores in fundamentally urban, African American communities. The large grocery chains have found these areas unprofitable and have largely abandoned them, but they can be quite profitable when run as an extended family business. Many blacks feel that these stores overcharge, only hire Chaldeans, and neglect to reinvest into the community. The high prices usually result from having to make purchases in smaller quantities. Chaldeans also hire members of their own ethnic group because they are usually family members who demand less income. Some improvements have been made, however, as many
Chaldean stores are increasingly hiring more African Americans, thus contributing to the community.

REligion

Religion is of such importance in the Chaldean community that their name and identity derives from it. As full members of the Roman Catholic Church, Chaldeans follow the same rules and hold the same beliefs as other Catholics. However, they have their own leader, or patriarch, and the rituals used in their mass and other ceremonies are quite different from those practiced in the Western Church. Originally, they conducted services in the historic Chaldean/Aramaic language, but many services are now conducted in Arabic. Occasionally, masses are given in English for American-born persons of Chaldean ancestry.

The first Chaldean Church in the United States was founded in 1947 in Detroit. It was named "Mother of God," thus reaffirming the Chaldean split with their Nestorian heritage and their unity with Catholicism. More recently, the Church moved to Southfield, Michigan and was elevated to the status of a cathedral (Our Lady of Chaldeans Cathedral) when the Chaldean diocese of the United States was formed under the leadership of Chaldean Bishop Ibrahim Ibrahim. Prior to 1947, Chaldean immigrants usually attended services at Western rite Catholic Churches. For special events, such as weddings and holidays, many Chaldeans attended services at Lebanese Catholic Churches (of the Moronite Eastern rite), which share more in common with the Chaldean Church than Western rite Churches.

Chaldean children often attend Western rite Catholic Schools because the Chaldean rite does not offer such schools. This often requires parents to support two parishes, their own Chaldean church and the parish in which their children attend school. However, many children also attend special instruction in their own rite at the Chaldean Church.

According to Roman Catholic rules, members of the Catholic Church are expected to attend services and receive sacraments in their appropriate rite whenever possible. In practice, however, Catholics attend services at whichever Catholic Church is most convenient. Moreover, many priests of the Western rite can usually be persuaded to perform special ceremonies, such as weddings and funerals. Consequently, many Chaldeans have found it more convenient to attend Western rite Catholic Churches, especially in areas where there is a small Chaldean population. As a result, many second and third generation Chaldean Americans are likely to prefer the more "American" services of Western Catholic Churches. Nonetheless, Chaldean Churches remains important for recent immigrants, for whom the Arabic language and the familiar rituals are still meaningful.

The Chaldean Church has also served as the center of community social life for the bulk of its existence. In addition to weddings, funerals, and baptisms, the Church offers special ceremonies for Chaldean children who received First Communion during the year and, in recent years, a graduation ceremony each spring honoring all Chaldean
young people who graduated from high school or college during the year. Sunday services provide an opportunity for members of the community to meet one another and exchange greetings and gossip. The church is also responsible for the formation of numerous organizations serving the community, including parish councils, family clubs, a men’s club, a women’s group, a business association, and youth groups.

EMPLOYMENT AND ECONOMIC TRADITIONS

Chaldean Americans have traditionally owned and operated their own businesses, primarily grocery stores. As early as 1923, when only seven Chaldean men lived in the Detroit area, there were four Chaldean-owned stores. In the 1980s, it was estimated that over 1,000 Chaldean-owned grocery stores were located in Detroit and its environs. Because the grocery industry has become saturated, however, many Chaldean Americans have moved into related areas. Newer immigrants often own party stores and gas stations. Immigrants who have been here many years, or their children and grandchildren, have moved into fields which serve the retail grocery trade, including wholesale food supply, marketing and maintenance of store fixtures (such as refrigeration equipment, freezers, burglar alarms), commercial real estate, business financing, and so on.

These are largely family-owned businesses. In some instances, two stores owned by close relatives may work together in joint buying or advertising projects, but, for the most part, the stores are operated independently. These independent businesses are of extreme importance in the community as most family members assist in the family enterprise—even small children or immigrants who lack knowledge of English can make deliveries or stock shelves. This makes it unnecessary to hire other employees and helps to control business expenses. It also allows the family to assist other immigrants, who can be employed in the family business as soon as they arrive from the country of origin.

The role of these independent businesses in the welfare of the family and the growth of the ethnic community illustrates the influence of family over the individual. If the family store is to serve the purpose of assisting immigrants from the country of origin, then the family must be able to depend upon its members to play their role in its development. It cannot afford to have its most competent young people move into other lines of work. Consequently, many young Chaldeans who might have preferred other occupations were drawn into the grocery business. Most accepted this responsibility with little sense of loss, so great is the influence of the Chaldean family over its members.

This pattern has changed somewhat as the second and third generations born in America have moved into different occupations. Many Chaldean Americans have joined such professions as medicine, dentistry, law, accounting, and teaching, to name a few. Some immigrants also come to this country with skills in other occupational areas. However, grocery stores continue to serve as a major meeting place for members of the community and concerns about the grocery business remain a major topic of conversation among Chaldean Americans. The time schedules of these stores also
exert influence over community activities. For example, weddings, family gatherings, and Church activities tend to occur late in the evening in order to accommodate the late closing hour of most grocery and party stores.

POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

An established community, Chaldean Americans actively participate in local, state, and federal government by keeping abreast of government activity and voting regularly. They are also quite interested in events taking place in their homeland.

EFFECTS OF THE GULF WAR

The most dramatic event to affect Chaldean Americans in some time occurred in 1991 and 1992, when hostilities broke out between Iraq and the United States. As the only major concentration of Iraqi immigrants in the United States, Chaldean Americans received a great deal of attention from the press, the military, and the general public. Reporters from throughout the world sought to interview community leaders concerning their views. Military representatives worried about the degree to which local Chaldeans might be security threats. Moreover, rumors spread that Chaldean Americans would be incarcerated in a camp in Louisiana as was done with the Japanese during the Second World War. Since Chaldean Americans and Arab Americans are linked together in the public mind, both were subjected to harassment by the general public, who saw them as local representatives of a hostile foreign power—in spite of the fact that many Arab Americans immigrated from nations which were U.S. allies during the Gulf War.

For Chaldean Americans, who view themselves as committed Americans and do not identify strongly with either Iraq or the Arab World, the experience was distressing. The Gulf War was, in a real sense, a battle of brother against brother, since many families had sons in both the U.S. and Iraqi armies. Nearly all Chaldean Americans have relatives in Iraq; most had to wait weeks or months to learn whether they were safe. In particular, they were shocked by the carnival-type atmosphere of the war. The American public watched news reports of the hostilities like a sports event, and spoke of it in similar terms. Most distressing to Chaldean Americans, however, was the public's continued perception of their alliance with Arab Americans.

As a result of American resentment over the Gulf War, immigration from Iraq has slowed. The continuing difficulties between the two nations are a problem for Chaldean Americans who must worry about loved ones in their ancestral homeland and face discrimination in their adopted homeland.

Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle

Ibrahim Namo Ibrahim (born October 10, 1937) is Bishop Emeritus of the Catholic Church in the United States. He served as the Apostolic Exarch of United States of America from 1982 to 1985, and then, following its elevation, as the first eparch (bishop) of the Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of Saint Thomas the Apostle of Detroit, from 1985 until his retirement was accepted by Pope Francis on Saturday, May 3, 2014. Bishop Francis Y. Kalabat, a native of Kuwait, was named to succeed him as Eparch.

His Beatitude Patriarch Louis Raphael I Sako

Louis Raphaël I Sako (born 4 July 1948) is the current Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Babylon and the Head of the Chaldean Catholic Church since his election on 1 February 2013. Sako was born in the city of Zakho on the Iraq–Turkey border. He is an Chaldean Catholic from a religious community that has had presence in the city of his birth since the 5th century AD.

On 1 February 2013, Pope Benedict XVI granted him ecclesiastica communio (ecclesiastical communion) which the leaders of the Eastern-rite Catholic churches seek as a sign of their unity with the wider Catholic church. Patriarch Louis Raphaël I Sako speaks Syriac, German, French, English, Italian, and Arabic.

Sako was ordained a priest on 1 June 1974 for the Chaldean Archeparchy of Mosul. After his election and subsequent confirmation in 2003 he was consecrated the Chaldean Catholic Archeparch of Kirkuk on 27 September 2003. He was elected to the position by a synod of bishops of the Chaldean Catholic Church on 24 October 2002. He was awarded the Defensor Fidei prize in 2008 and in 2010, he was awarded the International Pax Christi Award.

As Patriarch

The Synod of Bishops of the Chaldean Catholic Church, convoked in Rome on 28 January 2013, electing him Patriarch of Babylon in succession of Emmanuel III
Delly who had resigned because of old age. Sako chose Louis Raphael I as his regnal name.

In July 2014 Sako led a wave of condemnation for the Sunni Islamists who demanded Christians either convert, submit to their radical rule and pay a religious levy or face death by the sword. At the Vatican, Pope Francis decried what he said was the persecution of Christians in the birthplace of their faith, while U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the Islamic State's actions could constitute a crime against humanity. Hundreds of Christian families left Mosul ahead of Saturday’s ultimatum, many of them stripped of their possessions as they fled for safety. They formed the remnants of a community which once numbered in the tens of thousands and traced its presence in Mosul to the earliest years of Christianity.

On 14 November 2015, the Synod of Bishops announced that Pope Francis had named him as one of his three appointments to that body’s council.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Raphael_I_Sako
Chapter Eight:
The Coptic Heritage
The word Copt is derived from the Greek word Aigyptos, which was, in turn, derived from "Hikaptah", one of the names for Memphis, the first capital of Ancient Egypt. The modern use of the term "Coptic" describes Egyptian Christians, as well as the last stage of the ancient Egyptian language script. Also, it describes the distinctive art and architecture that developed as an early expression of the new faith.

The Coptic Church is based on the teachings of Saint Mark who brought Christianity to Egypt during the reign of the Roman emperor Nero in the first century, a dozen of years after the Lord's ascension. He was one of the four evangelists and the one who wrote the oldest canonical gospel. Christianity spread throughout Egypt within half a century of Saint Mark's arrival in Alexandria as is clear from the New Testament writings found in Bahnasa, in Middle Egypt, which date around the year 200 A.D., and a fragment of the Gospel of Saint John, written using the Coptic language, which was found in Upper Egypt and can be dated to the first half of the second century. The Coptic Church, which is now more than nineteen centuries old, was the subject of many prophecies in the Old Testament. Isaiah the prophet, in Chapter 19, Verse 19 says "In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border."

Although fully integrated into the body of the modern Egyptian nation, the Copts have survived as a strong religious entity who pride themselves on their contribution to the Christian world. The Coptic church regards itself as a strong defendant of Christian faith. The Nicene Creed, which is recited in all churches throughout the world, has been authored by one of its favorite sons, Saint Athanasius, the Pope of Alexandria for 46 years, from 327 A.D. to 373 A.D. This status is well deserved, after all, Egypt was the refuge that the Holy Family sought in its flight from Judea: "When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord throug the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son" [Mathew 2:12-23].

The contributions of the Coptic Church to Christendom are many. From the beginning, it played a central role in Christian theology---and especially to protect it from the Gnostics heresies. The Coptic Church produced thousands of texts, biblical and theological studies which are important resources for archeology. The Holy Bible was translated to the Coptic language in the second century. Hundreds of scribes used to write copies of the Bible and other liturgical and theological books. Now libraries, museums and universities throughout the world possess hundreds and thousands of Coptic manuscripts.

The Catechetical School of Alexandria is the oldest Catechetical School in the world. Soon after its inception around 190 A.D. by the Christian scholar Pantanaeus, the school of Alexandria became the most important institution of religious learning in Christendom. Many prominent bishops from many areas of the world were instructed in
that school under scholars such as Athenagoras, Clement, Didymus, and the great Origen, who was considered the father of theology and who was also active in the field of commentary and comparative Biblical studies. Origen wrote over 6,000 commentaries of the Bible in addition to his famous Hexapla. Many scholars such as Saint Jerome visited the school of Alexandria to exchange ideas and to communicate directly with its scholars. The scope of the school of Alexandria was not limited to theological subjects, because science, mathematics and the humanities were also taught there: The question and answer method of commentary began there, and 15 centuries before Braille, wood-carving techniques were in use there by blind scholars to read and write. The Theological college of the Catechetical School of Alexandria was re-established in 1893. Today, it has campuses in Alexandria, Cairo, New Jersey, and Los Angeles, where priests-to-be and other qualified men and women are taught among other subjects Christian theology, history, Coptic language and art---including chanting, music, iconography, tapestry etc.

Monasticism was born in Egypt and was instrumental in the formation of the Coptic Church's character of submission and humbleness, thanks to the teachings and writings of the Great Fathers of Egypt's Deserts. Monasticism started in the last years of the third century and flourished in the fourth century. Saint Anthony, the world's first Christian monk was a Copt from Upper Egypt. Saint Pachom, who established the rules of monasticism, was a Copt. And, Saint Paul, the world's first anchorite is also a Copt. Other famous Coptic desert fathers include Saint Makarios, Saint Moses the Black, and Saint Mina the wondrous. The more contemporary desert fathers include the late Pope Cyril VI and his disciple Bishop Mina Abba Mina. By the end of the fourth century, there were hundreds of monasteries, and thousands of cells and caves scattered throughout the Egyptian hills. Many of these monasteries are still flourishing and have new vocations till this day. All Christian monasticism stems, either directly or indirectly, from the Egyptian example: Saint Basil, organizer of the monastic movement in Asia minor visited Egypt around 357 A.D. and his rule is followed by the eastern Churches; Saint Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin, came to Egypt around 400 A.D. and left details of his experiences in his letters; Saint Benedict founded monasteries in the sixth century on the model of Saint Pachom, but in a stricter form. And countless pilgrims visited the "Desert Fathers" and emulated their spiritual, disciplined lives. There is even evidence that Copts had missionaries to Northern Europe. One example is Saint Moritz of the Theban Legion who was drafted from Egypt to serve under the Roman flag and ended up teaching Christianity to inhabitants of the Swiss Alps, where a small town and a Monastery that contains his relics as well as some of his books and belongings are named after him. Another saint from the Theban Legion is Saint Victor, known among Copts as "Boktor".

Under the authority of the Eastern Roman Empire of Constantinople (as opposed to the western empire of Rome), the Patriarchs and Popes of Alexandria played leading roles in Christian theology. They were invited everywhere to speak about the Christian faith. Saint Cyril, Pope of Alexandria, was the head of the Ecumenical Council which was held in Ephesus in the year 430 A.D. It was said that the bishops of the Church of Alexandria did nothing but spend all their time in meetings. This leading role, however, did not fare
well when politics started to intermingle with Church affairs. It all started when the Emperor Marcianus interfered with matters of faith in the Church. The response of Saint Dioscorus, the Pope of Alexandria who was later exiled, to this interference was clear: "You have nothing to do with the Church." These political motives became even more apparent in Chalcedon in 451, when the Coptic Church was unfairly accused of following the teachings of Eutyches, who believed in monophysitism. This doctrine maintains that the Lord Jesus Christ has only one nature, the divine, not two natures, the human as well as the divine.

The Coptic Church has never believed in monophysitism the way it was portrayed in the Council of Chalcedon! In that Council, monophysitism meant believing in one nature. Copts believe that the Lord is perfect in His divinity, and He is perfect in His humanity, but His divinity and His humanity were united in one nature called "the nature of the incarnate word", which was reitered by Saint Cyril of Alexandria. Copts, thus, believe in two natures "human" and "divine" that are united in one "without mingling, without confusion, and without alteration" (from the declaration of faith at the end of the Coptic divine liturgy). These two natures "did not separate for a moment or the twinkling of an eye" (also from the declaration of faith at the end of the Coptic divine liturgy).

The Coptic Church was misunderstood in the 5th century at the Council of Chalcedon. Perhaps the Council understood the Church correctly, but they wanted to exile the Church, to isolate it and to abolish the Egyptian, independent Pope, who maintained that Church and State should be separate. Despite all of this, the Coptic Church has remained very strict and steadfast in its faith. Whether it was a conspiracy from the Western Churches to exile the Coptic Church as a punishment for its refusal to be politically influenced, or whether Pope Dioscurus didn't quite go the extra mile to make the point that Copts are not monophysite, the Coptic Church has always felt a mandate to reconcile "semantic" differences between all Christian Churches. This is aptly expressed by the current 117th successor of Saint Mark, Pope Shenouda III: "To the Coptic Church, faith is more important than anything, and others must know that semantics and terminology are of little importance to us." Throughout this century, the Coptic Church has played an important role in the ecumenical movement. The Coptic Church is one of the founders of the World Council of Churches. It has remained a member of that council since 1948 A.D. The Coptic Church is a member of the all African Council of Churches (AACC) and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC). The Church plays an important role in the Christian movement by conducting dialogues aiming at resolving the theological differences with the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Presbyterian, and Evangelical Churches.

Perhaps the greatest glory of the Coptic Church is its Cross. Copts take pride in the persecution they have sustained as early as May 8, 68 A.D., when their Patron Saint Mark was slain on Easter Monday after being dragged from his feet by Roman soldiers all over Alexandria's streets and alleys. The Copts have been persecuted by almost every ruler of Egypt. Their Clergymen have been tortured and exiled even by their Christian brothers after the schism of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. and until the Arab's conquest of Egypt in 641 A.D. To emphasize their pride in their cross, Copts adopted a
calendar, called the Calendar of the Martyrs, which begins its era on August 29, 284 A.D., in commemoration of those who died for their faith during the rule of Diocletian the Roman Emperor. This calendar is still in use all over Egypt by farmers to keep track of the various agricultural seasons and in the Coptic Church Lectionary.

For the four centuries that followed the Arab’s conquest of Egypt, the Coptic Church generally flourished and Egypt remained basically Christian. This is due to a large extent to the fortunate position that the Copts enjoyed, for the Prophet of Islam, who had an Egyptian wife (the only one of his wives to bear a child), preached especial kindness towards Copts: "When you conquer Egypt, be kind to the Copts for they are your protégés and kith and kin". Copts, thus, were allowed to freely practice their religion and were to a large degree autonomous, provided they continued to pay a special tax, called "Gezya", that qualifies them as "Ahl Zemma" protégés (protected). Individuals who cannot afford to pay this tax were faced with the choice of either converting to Islam or losing their civil right to be "protected", which in some instances meant being killed. Copts, despite additional sumptuary laws that were imposed on them in 750-868 A.D. and 905-935 A.D. under the Abbasid Dynasties, prospered and their Church enjoyed one of its most peaceful era. Surviving literature from monastic centers, dating back from the 8th to the 11th century, shows no drastic break in the activities of Coptic craftsmen, such as weavers, leather-binders, painters, and wood-workers. Throughout that period, the Coptic language remained the language of the land, and it was not until the second half of the 11th century that the first bi-lingual Coptic-Arabic liturgical manuscripts started to appear. One of the first complete Arabic texts is the 13th century text by Awlaad El-Assal (children of the Honey Maker), in which the laws, cultural norms and traditions of the Copts at this pivotal time, 500 years after the Islamic conquest of Egypt were detailed. The adoption of the Arabic language as the language used in Egyptians’ every-day’s life was so slow that even in the 15th century al-Makrizi implied that the Coptic Language was still largely in use. Up to this day, the Coptic Language continues to be the liturgical language of the Church.

The Christian face of Egypt started to change by the beginning of the second millennium A.D., when Copts, in addition to the "Gezya" tax, suffered from specific disabilities, some of which were serious and interfered with their freedom of worship. For example, there were restrictions on repairing old Churches and building new ones, on testifying in court, on public behavior, on adoption, on inheritance, on public religious activities, and on dress codes. Slowly but steadily, by the end of the 12th century, the face of Egypt changed from a predominantly Christian to a predominantly Muslim country and the Coptic community occupied an inferior position and lived in some expectation of Muslim hostility, which periodically flared into violence. It is remarkable that the well-being of Copts was more or less related to the well-being of their rulers. In particular, the Copts suffered most in those periods when Arab dynasties were at their low.

The position of the Copts began to improve early in the 19th century under the stability and tolerance of Muhammad Ali's dynasty. The Coptic community ceased to be regarded by the state as an administrative unit and, by 1855 A.D., the main mark of
Copts' inferiority, the "Gezya" tax was lifted, and shortly thereafter Copts started to serve in the Egyptian army. The 1919 A.D. revolution in Egypt, the first grassroots display of Egyptian identity in centuries, stands as a witness to the homogeneity of Egypt's modern society with both its Muslim and Coptic sects. Today, this homogeneity is what keeps the Egyptian society united against the religious intolerance of extremist groups, who occasionally subject the Copts to persecution and terror. Modern day martyrs, like Father Marcos Khalil, serve as reminders of the miracle of Coptic survival.

Despite persecution, the Coptic Church as a religious institution has never been controlled or allowed itself to control the governments in Egypt. This long-held position of the Church concerning the separation between State and Religion stems from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, when he asked his followers to submit to their rulers: "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." [Mathew 22:21]. The Coptic Church has never forcefully resisted authorities or invaders and was never allied with any powers, for the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are clear: "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." (Mathew 26:52). The miraculous survival of the Coptic Church till this day and age is a living proof of the validity and wisdom of these teachings.

Today [as of the writing of this document in 1992 A.D.], there are over 9 million Copts (out of a population of some 57 million Egyptians) who pray and share communion in daily masses in thousands of Coptic Churches in Egypt. This is in addition to another 1.2 million emigrant Copts who practice their faith in hundreds of churches in the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Holland, Brazil, and many other countries in Africa and Asia. Inside Egypt Copts live in every province and in no one of these provinces are they a majority. Their cultural, historical, and spiritual treasures are spread all over Egypt, even in its most remote oasis, the Kharga Oasis, deep in the western desert. As individuals, Copts have reached prestigious academic and professional stature all over the world. One such individual is Dr. Boutros Boutros Ghali the Sixth United Nations Secretary-General (1992-1997). Another is Dr. Magdy Yacoub one of the world's most famous heart surgeons.

Copts observe seven canonical sacraments: Baptism, Christmation (Confirmation), Eucharist, Confession (Penance), Orders, Matrimony, and Unction of the sick. Baptism is performed few weeks after birth by immersing the whole body of the newborn into especially consecrated water three times. Confirmation is performed immediately after Baptism. Regular confession with a personal priest, called the father of confession, is necessary to receive the Eucharist. It is customary for a whole family to pick the same priest as a father of confession, thus, making of that priest a family counselor. Of all seven sacraments, only Matrimony cannot be performed during a fasting season. Polygamy is illegal, even if recognized by the civil law of the land. Divorce is not allowed except in the case of adultery, annulment due to bigamy, or other extreme circumstances, which must be reviewed by a special council of Bishops. Divorce can be requested by either husband or wife. Civil divorce is not recognized by the Church. The Coptic Orthodox Church does not have and does not mind any civil law of the land as long as it does not interfere with the Church's sacraments. The Church does not have
(and actually refuses to canonize) an official position vis-à-vis some controversial issues (e.g. abortion). While the church has clear teachings about such matters (e.g. abortion interferes with God’s will), it is the position of the Church that such matters are better resolved on a case-by-case basis by the father of confession, as opposed to having a blanket canon that makes a sin of such practices.

There are three main Liturgies in the Coptic Church: The Liturgy according to Saint Basil, Bishop of Caesarea; The Liturgy according to Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Bishop of Constantinople; and The Liturgy according to Saint Cyril I, the 24th Pope of the Coptic Church. The bulk of Saint Cyril’s Liturgy is from the one that Saint Mark used (in Greek) in the first century. It was memorized by the Bishops and priests of the church till it was translated into the Coptic Language by Saint Cyril. Today, these three Liturgies, with some added sections (e.g. the intercessions), are still in use; the Liturgy of Saint Basil is the one most commonly used in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

The worship of Saints is expressly forbidden by the Church; however, asking for their intercessions (e.g. Marian Praise) is central in any Coptic service. Any Coptic Church is named after a Patron Saint. Among all Saints, the Virgin Saint Mary (Theotokos) occupies a special place in the heart of all Copts. Her repeated daily appearances in a small Church in Elzaytoun district of Cairo for over a month in April of 1968 was witnessed by thousands of Egyptians, both Copts and Muslims and was even broadcast on International TV. Copts celebrate seven major Holy feasts and seven minor Holy feasts. The major feasts commemorate Annunciation, Christmas, Theophany, Palm Sunday, Easter, Ascension, and the Pentecost. Christmas is celebrated on January 7th. The Coptic Church emphasizes the Resurrection of Christ (Easter) as much as His Advent (Christmas), if not more. Easter is usually on the second Sunday after the first full moon in Spring. The Coptic Calendar of Martyrs is full of other feasts usually commemorating the martyrdom of popular Saints (e.g. Saint Mark, Saint Mina, Saint George, Saint Barbara) from Coptic History.

The Copts have seasons of fasting matched by no other Christian community. Out of the 365 days of the year, Copts fast for over 210 days. During fasting, no animal products (meat, poultry, fish, milk, eggs, butter, etc.) are allowed. Moreover, no food or drink whatsoever may be taken between sunrise and sunset. These strict fasting rules -- which have resulted in a very exquisite Coptic cuisine over the centuries -- are usually relaxed by priests on an individual basis to accommodate for illness or weakness. Lent, known as "the Great Fast", is largely observed by all Copts. It starts with a pre-Lent fast of one week, followed by a 40-day fast commemorating Christ’s fasting on the mountain, followed by the Holy week, the most sacred week (called Pascha) of the Coptic Calendar, which climaxes with the Crucifix on Good Friday and ends with the joyous Easter. Other fasting seasons of the Coptic Church include, the Advent (Fast of the Nativity), the Fast of the Apostles, the Fast of the Virgin Saint Mary, and the Fast of Nineveh.

The Coptic Orthodox Church's clergy is headed by the Pope of Alexandria and includes Bishops who oversee the priests ordained in their dioceses. Both the Pope and the
Bishops must be monks; they are all members of the Coptic Orthodox Holy Synod (Council), which meets regularly to oversee matters of faith and pastoral care of the Church. The Pope of the Coptic Church, although highly regarded by all Copts, does not enjoy any state of supremacy or infallibility. Today, there are over 60 Coptic Bishops governing dioceses inside Egypt as well as dioceses outside Egypt, such as in Jerusalem, Sudan, Western Africa, France, England, and the United States. The direct pastoral responsibility of Coptic congregations in any of these dioceses falls on Priests, who must be married and must attend the Catechetical School before being ordained.

There are two other non-clerical bodies who participate in taking care of Church affairs. The first is a popularly-elected Coptic Lay Council, which appeared on the stage in 1883 A.D. to act as a liaison between the Church and the Government. The second is a joint lay-clerical committee, which appeared on the stage in 1928 A.D. to oversee and monitor the management of the Coptic Church's endowments in accordance with the Egyptian laws.

Daily, in all Coptic Churches all over the world, Copts pray for the reunion of all Christian Churches. They pray for Egypt, its Nile, its crops, its president, its army, its government, and above all its people. They pray for the world's peace and for the well-being of the human race.

SOURCE: http://www.coptic.net/EncyclopediaCoptica/
The Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria

The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the most ancient Churches in the world, having been founded by Saint Mark the Apostle, the writer of the second gospel, in the first Century. The word 'Coptic' simply means 'Egyptian.' The Coptic Orthodox Church is the Church of Alexandria, one of the five ancient sees of Christianity. The five sees are: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople. The Coptic Orthodox Church has carefully preserved the Orthodox Christian Faith in its earliest and form, handing it down from generation to generation, unaltered and true to the Apostolic doctrines and patterns of worship. The Coptic Orthodox Church is one of the Oriental Orthodox Churches, which include the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the Indian Orthodox Church and the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Oriental Orthodox Family of Churches is close in faith, dogma and liturgical worship to the Eastern Orthodox Church and is engaged in active and fruitful dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox with the goal of full communion within reach after centuries of division.

Saint Mark the Apostle and Evangelist, one of the seventy apostles and writer of the oldest gospel, established the Church of Alexandria in the middle of the First Century. In Alexandria, St. Mark structured the church worship; ordained one bishop and seven deacons; established the famous School of Alexandria; and was martyred there by the Romans in 68 AD.

While the formal establishment of the Church of Alexandria took place with the arrival and ministry of St. Mark, it is of course important to note that Egypt has always been a religious nation and a land which received with hospitality honored patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament such as Abraham, Joseph, Jacob and his sons, Moses as well as Jeremiah the Prophet. Egypt is also mentioned with honors in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah chapter 19. The prophesy of Isaiah foreshadows the coming of Christ himself as the child with the Holy Family in verse 1: —Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, And will come into Egypt; The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst.” Also, there is a prophesy of the establishment of the Church of Egypt, i.e., the Coptic Orthodox Church in verse 19: —In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. 20 And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the LORD because of the oppressors, and He will send them a Savior and a Mighty One, and He will deliver them. 21 Then the LORD will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the LORD and perform it.” Finally, Isaiah records a divine blessing in verse 24, which is a source of pride for all Egyptians, when the Lord says, —Blessed is Egypt my people.‖ Thus the Old Testament prophesies and the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt are the earliest signs of the establishment of the Coptic Orthodox Church. The sites visited by the Holy Family in their three year stay in Egypt are some of the most ancient and holy churches, monasteries and pilgrimage sites in the world.
The School of Alexandria was the earliest and most important institution of theological learning in Christian antiquity. It grew tremendously in the first four centuries of the world. After the Roman Empire officially accepted Christianity in 313 AD, Alexandria became a renowned center of learning, especially in theology. The School was essential in the education of both recent converts and future patriarchs of Christianity throughout the world. Many of the great deans of the school include St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 - 254 AD), a gifted author; Origen (185 - 264 AD) the brilliant scholar; and St. Didymus the Blind, who formed a system of engraved writing for the blind fifteen centuries before Braille.

The Ecumenical Councils
As a result of this great tradition of theology, there arose a number of theologians who were well respected and recognized in the Christian world. Many of these scholars played a critical role in the development of Christian theology in the three recognized Ecumenical Councils of Nicea (325 AD), Constantinople (381 AD), and Ephesus (431 AD).

While still a young deacon at Nicea, St. Athanasius, the 20th Patriarch of Alexandria, defended the Divinity of Christ and was one of the writers of the Christian Creed, which is followed by most Christians today. Another Egyptian sage was St. Cyril of Alexandria, who stressed the unity of the Divinity and Humanity of Christ in the third Council of Ephesus (431 AD). Although the Coptic Church has been unjustly labeled as being 'Monophysite' (believing in only one nature of Christ), St. Cyril explained centuries ago that the Coptic Orthodox Church believes in the "one incarnate nature of God the Word" - that is, one union of two natures - one fully human nature and one fully divine nature, without mingling, confusion or alteration, thus not monophysite, but mia-physite.

The Monastic Movement
The Coptic Orthodox Church is also famous for its asceticism and monasticism, a long-standing tradition founded by St. Anthony the Great, the "Father of Monasticism" (251 - 356 AD), St. Pachomios, St. Makarios and St. Shenouda the Archimandrite. This monastic order - based on principles of poverty, obedience and chastity - became the foundation from which many western orders developed from.

The Church of Martyrs
As Christianity grew, the attempts to quash it became fierce. The Egyptian Church is recognized as having suffered one of the most violent waves of persecution in Christian history, and thus our Coptic Calendar commences at the beginning of the reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian, at whose hands hundreds of thousands of Christians were massacred.

What we believe:
The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is a comprehensive summary of the beliefs of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria. This Creed, built on the foundation of the Apostle's Creed, defines the belief in the Holy Trinity, the incarnation of the Logos and the four pillars of the Church, i.e., that it is One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic. The
Nicene Creed was drafted by the Coptic deacon, Athanasius who later became the 20th Patriarch of Alexandria and was the definition of the faith reached in the First Ecumenical Council held in Nicea in 325 AD. The creed was completed in the Second Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 381 AD.

We believe in one God, God the Father, the Pantocrator, who created heaven and earth, and all things seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of light, true God of true God, begotten not created, of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary, and became Man. And he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose from the dead, according to the scriptures, ascended into the heavens; he sits at the right hand of his Father, and He is coming again in his glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end.

Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Life-Giver, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And in one holy, catholic and apostolic church. We confess one baptism for the remission of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the coming age. Amen.

The Seven Sacraments of the Church: Baptism, Chrismation (Confirmation), Repentance and Confession, the Eucharist (Holy Communion), Marriage, Priesthood, and Unction of the Sick.

The Coptic Orthodox Church today...
The Coptic Orthodox Church is the largest Church in the Middle East, with over 12 million faithful in Egypt. Under the leadership of His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the 117th Patriarch of the See of Saint Mark, there is an increasing number of monasteries and convents in the deserts of Egypt, as well as new monasteries being established abroad in America, Europe, and Australia.

The Coptic Orthodox Church is a dynamic church, always looking at the needs of her children, and trying to satisfy them to her best ability. Over the past thirty years, the Church has spread all over the world. Since his enthronement in 1971, H.H. Pope Shenouda III has established hundreds of churches abroad.

The Church is actively involved in official and unofficial dialogues with the major Christian Churches denominations. Additionally, the church is currently a member of the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, the All African Council of Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, Christian Churches Together in the USA, the Global Christian Forum and other international, regional and local bodies.

+Adapted from The Coptic Orthodox Church by St. Paul Brotherhood, Diocese of Los Angeles.
SOURCE: http://www.ecucopt.org/Coptic%20orthodox%20Church.php
His Holiness Pope Theodoros II of Alexandria

Pope Theodoros II is the 118th Coptic Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark since he took office on 18 November 2012, a fortnight after being selected.

Early life
Pope Theodoros was born on 4 November 1952 in the city of Mansoura in Egypt. He studied at the University of Alexandria, where he received a degree in pharmacy in 1975. After a few years of managing a state-owned pharmaceutical factory, he joined the Monastery of Saint Pishoy in Wadi Natrun to study theology for two years. He was ordained priest in 1989.

Bishop
On 15 June 1997, he was consecrated as a general bishop by Pope Shenouda III in the name Theodoros (Tawadros). He was assigned to serve in the Eparchy of Behira in north Egypt.

Views and issues
Theodoros has stated that the 2011 Egyptian revolution was a turning point in the Coptic Church’s relations with its youth. Amongst his first tasks is the issue of Egypt’s changing political landscape, given the new constitution and more independent-minded congregants who seek their demands outside the church in dealing with the state.

Papal selection
The papal selection process began several weeks before the 4 November selection. Prior to the selection, Metropolitan Pachomios, locum tenens of the Church, sealed the chalice with the names with red wax and put it upon the altar as he led Mass. He then told the congregation: "We will pray that God will choose the good shepherd." Following a moment of silence, a blindfolded boy then picked Theodoros’s name from the chalice. The thousands of congregants in attendance then erupted in ovation, tears or prayer. In reaction Theodoros II said, from the monastery at Wadi Natrun: "[We] will start by organising the house from within. It is a responsibility. Most important is...that the church, as an institution, serves the community."

Papacy
Pope Tawadros II started his papacy amidst multiple changes in Egypt. He said that the Orthodox Church is committed to keeping Article 2 of Egypt’s draft constitution intact, as it was in the old constitution and ended supporting the withdrawal of the Egyptian churches from Egypt’s Constituent Assembly despite efforts by the presidency to convince them to return. There has been some changes in the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church by appointing Bishop Raphael who came first in the election stage of Pope selection as the general secretary of the synod.

The Late Holiness Pope Shenouda III
117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark

A Brief Biography
by the V. Rev. Archpriest Mikhail E. Mikhail,
D.Min.
Pastor, St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church of Cleveland

From the land of the great ancient Egyptian civilization, the land visited by Our Lord and the Holy Family and from the line of renowned predecessors such as St. Mark the Apostle, St. Athanasius the Apostolic, and St. Cyril the Great, comes the author of the renaissance of the Coptic Orthodox Church: H. H. Pope Shenouda III.

A distinguished and prominent religious leader, a profound theologian, a gifted preacher, a talented author, a spiritual father, a man of God his entire life.

His Holiness was born Nazeer Gayed on August 3, 1923, to a pious Christian family in Egypt. By the age of 16, H. H. was active in the Sunday School movement, which wrought to enrich Christian Education in the Coptic Orthodox Church.

When H. H. graduated from Cairo University, he joined the Coptic Orthodox Seminary, and upon graduation, joined the faculty of the seminary.

On July 18, 1954, H. H. chose the solitude of the Egyptian desert and the angelic life of monasticism over everything else, taking the example of St. Anthony the Great. As a monk, and later a monk priest, H. H. carried the name of the Christian monk and was know as Fr. Antonious El-Syriani.

Wishing to live in complete solitude and devotion to our Lord, he became a hermit and lived in a cave that he had carved out himself for a period of six years. On September 30, 1962, he was called by the late Pope Cyril VI to be consecrated Bishop of Christian Education and President of the Coptic Orthodox Theological Seminary. He was known as His Grace Bishop Shenouda. Through his leadership of the seminary, the number of students tripled.

On November 14, 1971, His Grace Bishop Shenouda was consecrated as His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, the 117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark.
Since that blessed day, the Coptic Orthodox Church has witnessed a remarkable revival through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the pastoral care of H. H. Pope Shenouda III. H. H. conducts a weekly meeting, which is attended by over seven thousand of the faithful at the Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo.

H. H has been the editor-in-chief of El-Kiraza Magazine the official publication of the Coptic Orthodox Church, since 1962. He became the first patriarch of Alexandria since the Fifth Century to have been Dean of the Theological Seminary and continues to lecture at the branches of the Seminary in Cairo, Alexandria, and abroad and the Higher Institute of Coptic Studies. He also established other branches of the Seminary in Egypt as well as in America, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

His Holiness is the author of 101 books on a variety of subjects, over half of which have been translated into English, French, German, Italian, and other languages.

He has ordained more than eighty Metropolitans and Bishops and over 600 priests since 1971. He gives special attention to the youth of the church. H. H. has said many times, “A church without youth is a church without a future.” And one of our youth once replied to H. H., “And youth without the church are youth without a future.”

H. H. also gives special attention to the service of women in the Coptic Orthodox Church. H. H. said, and I quote, “We felt a great need of the work of women and we wanted women to have a certain order and service in the church, not only to have girls as Sunday School teacher who give a part of their time whenever they can, but we want girls and women to give their whole life to God and serve the Church.”

Despite his many responsibilities, H. H. usually manages to spend three days a week in the monastery. His love of monasticism has led a monastic revival in the Coptic Orthodox Church. He has ordained hundreds of monks and nuns and reestablished many monasteries and convents. He is the first pope to establish Coptic monasteries outside of Egypt, which presently number nine.

One of the most remarkable things about the growth of the Coptic Orthodox Church is her expansion worldwide. When H. H. became pope in 1971, there were only four churches in North America. Today, there are over 100.

The year 1996 witnessed the installation of the first two Diocesan bishops for the United States, one for Los Angeles and the other for the Southern United States. There are plans to further group the churches into regional dioceses in the near future.

H. H. has established mission churches in the U. S. Virgin Islands in St. Thomas, Bermuda, and St. Kitts. Moreover, he founded the first Coptic Orthodox Church in South America in Sao Paolo, Brazil, and the second in Bolivia.

Under his leadership, the Coptic Orthodox Church has also witnessed a growth in Australia and New Zealand, where there are currently twenty-eight churches. In 1999,
we witnessed the enthronement of the first bishop over Melbourne, Australia and New Zealand. In Europe, there are currently over fifty church and ten bishops. Africa currently has two bishops serving in missions in nine African countries.

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III is well known for his deep commitment to Christian Unity. In an address, he gave at an ecumenical forum during the International Week of Prayer in 1974, he declared, “The whole Christian world is anxious to see the church unite. Christian people, being fed up with divisions, are pushing their church leaders to do something about church unity and I am sure that the Holy Spirit is inspiring us.”

H. H. has emphasized that Christian Unity must be found upon a unity of faith and not a unity of jurisdiction. As a result, H. H. has paid many visits to the various sister Orthodox churches and their patriarchs, such as those of Constantinople, Moscow, Romania, and Antioch. A full communion of these churches with the Oriental Orthodox Churches is very close.

In 1973, H. H. was the first Coptic Orthodox pope to visit the Vatican in over 1500 years. In this visit, both H. H. Pope Shenouda III and H. H. Pope Paul VI signed a common declaration on the issue of Christology and agreed to establish joint commissions for dialogue on unity. There have also been dialogues with various Protestant churches worldwide.

Under the leadership of H. H., the Coptic Orthodox Church is a full member of the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Church, the All-African Council of Churches, the National Council of the Churches in Christ in the U.S.A., the Canadian Council of Churches, and the Australian Council of Churches. In May 2000, he established the Office of Ecumenical Affairs in the Archdiocese of North America.

--Biography from St. Mark's Church of Cleveland, Ohio.

SOURCE: http://www.ecucopt.org/Pope.php
Chapter Nine:
The Evangelical Christian Heritage
Middle Eastern Presbyterians in the United States...

Presbyterian Middle Eastern Americans trace their faith origin to the apostolic age, and their Reformed roots to the Presbyterian missions in the Middle East in the 19th Century. Here in the USA, Middle Eastern immigrants started to join the Presbyterian Church more than a century ago.

In 1898, the Armenian Presbyterian Mission of West Hoboken was organized to minister to refugees from the 1895 Turkish massacres, and was officially recognized by the Jersey City Presbytery. The Mission later became the Armenian Presbyterian Church in New Jersey.

In 1899, a small group of Lebanese/Syrian immigrants met regularly for worship in an apartment in Fall River, Massachusetts. The group eventually became affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, first as a mission and, in 1934, as a church.

The first Assyrian Presbyterian Church in the United States was established in Chicago in 1910 as the Carter Memorial Persian Assyrian Presbyterian Church.

Today, there are more than 60 Presbyterian congregations and fellowships throughout the United States, worshiping in different languages, including Arabic, Armenian, Assyrian, and Farsi.

The office of Middle Eastern Ministries was created by the General Assembly Council in 1993 to provide spiritual and organizational services to enable the growth and enhance the ministry of Middle Eastern Presbyterian congregations and fellowships; and to help PC(USA) reach out to the more than six million Middle Easterners living in the United States.
History of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut

The National Evangelical Church of Beirut is the headquarters and administrative center for a conglomerate of churches (in the towns of Abeih, Aramoun, Khaled, Kafarshima, Hadath, Dbayyeh, Jdeideh and Dhour Shweir) operating under the name of the National Evangelical Union of Lebanon (NEUL). These churches function like a presbytery for Beirut and its suburbs.

The Beirut church is the oldest and largest of these nine congregations; indeed, it is the oldest indigenous Arabic-speaking Protestant congregation in the Middle East. It was established in Beirut in 1848 as a result of the efforts of Congregational and Presbyterian missionaries from the United States. In 1869, the first evangelical church edifice was built to house the Arabic and English-speaking congregations. For the next hundred years it served as the center for all the activities and celebrations of both communities. The Arabic-speaking congregation is typical of most other evangelical churches around the world. It has active Sunday school, youth groups, women’s program, spiritual, social and cultural services and committees which minister to the needs of the congregation and the society surrounding it.

In 1975, with the beginning of the war in Lebanon, most of the active ministries of the NEUL came to a halt. The Church of Beirut was still able to worship in the chapel of the Near East School of Theology in Ras Beirut. However, most of the churches of the Union were destroyed or deserted. The elementary and high school, which the Beirut Church was running in the nearby town of Dbayyeh, had to move to several different locations in and around Beirut during the war years (1975 – 1990).

In 1990, the churches of the Union began gradually to rebuild their infrastructures and rejuvenate their ministries and activities. This process is still going on. It is, however, slow, time consuming and expensive. Thanks to the commitment of the members of the congregation, however, as well as the helping hands of sister churches and mission organisations -- especially the EMS -- the results have been fruitful and encouraging. The love of Christ for all human beings, regardless of gender, race, colour or religion, shines through the dedicated lives of the Church members and friends.

At present, the National Evangelical Church of Beirut runs a number of social and educational projects in different parts of Lebanon: two elementary schools, one in Ras Beirut and another in Kafarshima, and a high school in Kafarshima as well. The Church also runs the Schneller orphanage and school (academic and vocational) in the village of Khirbet Qanafar, in the Beqa` Valley of Lebanon. This orphanage was founded in Jerusalem in 1860 to house the victims of the civil war in Lebanon, but was moved to Lebanon after the establishment of the State of Israel. It is run in partnership with EMS. Since the year 2002, the National Evangelical Church has fostered the re-establishment of the International Community Church, an international congregation that was disbanded during the Lebanese civil war. At the present the International Community Church worships at the Beirut Church. It is a Christian community that is made up of expats, migrant workers, refugees and English-speaking Lebanese.

SOURCE: http://www.nechurchbeirut.org/cms/?q=node/21
The Reformed Churches in Iraq

Until recently most Christians were not aware of the presence of Christian churches in Iraq. It is possible that few Western Christians are conscious of the presence of Reformed churches there. Yet, biblical Christianity in Iraq goes back to the second half of the first century AD.

The land of the Tigris and Euphrates was Abram the Hebrew's birthplace. His wife, Sarah, and his son Isaac's wife, Rebecca, were also from there. Jacob also went back there in search of a good wife. He ended up marrying Leah and Rachael, his cousins, daughters of Laban, his mother's brother.

The Assyrians and Babylonians exiled the Israelites there. It was there that the people of God experienced a spiritual awakening under leaders like Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai. The concept of gathering in simple meeting places called synagogues to study the Scriptures sprang up there and spread among the rest of the Jewish communities in Palestine and elsewhere. From there the exiles returned by the Lord’s mighty hand refreshed and blessed by the presence of a vibrant believing remnant. They rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. For several hundred years afterwards they were prepared for the coming of the promised seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham through whom all families of the earth would be blessed.

Archeological evidence points to the conversion to the Christian faith of many Jews who remained in Mesopotamia during the first century. The Jewish communities there did not enjoy the same level of influence they had in the Mediterranean lands. Synagogues were turned into Christian meeting places, which gradually were remodeled and became elaborate liturgical church buildings. It was not long before the entire area became predominantly 'Christian'. The early Christian communities there did not seem to have had much pressure from local authorities or followers of other faiths. Even before the conversion of Emperor Constantine, the Christian communities there enjoyed much freedom and were spared the kind of persecution endured by other Christians elsewhere during the first three Christian centuries.

The quality of the Christian faith in Iraq seems to have declined as fast as the number of its adherents increased. The Church in Iraq was more quickly invaded by unbiblical doctrines and practices and more speedily divided than in other lands in the region. Mesopotamia became a strong base for Nestorianism and the anti-Chalcedon rebellion. Hierarchical and other forms of power struggles among the clergy sometimes led to violent clashes and to deep and lasting divisions among Christians. This coupled with an increased distancing of the people from the reading and the study of the Bible led the faithful to rely more and more on the clergy. They, in turn, lost sight of the ministry of the Word and the saving grace of God in Christ.

One can read or hear many heroic stories of 'Christian' warriors who fought the Mongols, the Muslims and the Ottomans. History, however, does not testify to the
presence of spiritually vibrant leaders like Daniel or Zerubbabel in those lands which now are called Iraq. Spiritual decline led to loss of vision. Divisions among Christians led to political as well as religious disasters. The Muslim armies did not have much difficulty in subduing most of the country. Christians were quickly forced to seek refuge in the mountainous north. Even then they were spared complete annihilation only because of the inter Muslim conflicts between the Sunnis and the Shiites.

Despite the internal weaknesses of the Church and the external threats to its existence, there continued to be a significant Christian minority in Iraq. Until the early part of the twentieth century, Christians constituted about 30% of the Iraqi population. Immigration and other demographic factors have reduced the numbers to less than 8% at the present time. For the most part they belong to various ethnic and linguistic branches of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. There are Chaldeans, Assyrians, Romans and Armenians in both groups. In addition, there is the ancient Nestorian Orthodox Church a portion of which migrated eastward and settled in southern India. There they gained some Indian converts and have survived until this day.

Still, Iraq’s 'Christian' communities have, throughout the centuries, had small groups of lay people and clergy deeply interested in the study of the Bible. The traditional churches for the most part, unlike others in the West prior to the Protestant reformation, did not discourage the people from the study of the Bible. This made the job of Reformed missionaries far easier as they began their endeavors of Gospel proclamation in 1836. Reformed witness in Iraq and the Arabian Gulf was established as a joint endeavor between the American immigrant German Reformed Churches at the time called 'Reformed Churches in the USA' and the main Dutch immigrant churches called 'Reformed Church in America'. Both denominations were committed to the Scriptures, the Reformed faith and the Great Commission. (The RCUSA, however, drifted to liberalism and ecumenism and later became part of what is now called United Church of Christ. A small remnant remained faithful and is now called the RCUS. The RCA still exists and has many faithful Reformed and missionary-oriented people.)

Reformed mission work in Iraq proved to be very effective from the start. In less than five years, a congregation was organized in the northeastern in the city of Mosul. In 1840 a church building was erected for the use of the young congregation. Later another congregation was established about 15 miles from the first one, in a smaller town. The work continued to advance to the south and west. Congregations were organized in Kirkkuk, Baghdad and Basra, with several preaching stations throughout the country. Just like in other Arabic-speaking countries the churches have been called 'Evangelical'. Presbyterian and Reformed missions recognized that such an identification with the 'evangel'(Gospel) would not only give the right impression of the churches as Gospel-preaching and Gospel-based, but also solved the problem of having to use terms like 'Presbyterian' or 'Reformed' which do not translate well into Arabic. So, the term 'Evangelical' in the Middle East does not mean just being generally evangelical. Now, if you hear of 'Evangelical' churches in the Middle East, you would be hearing of the Presbyterian or Reformed ones. At least local people understand that.
For the most part the mission concentrated on work among the majority who were Arabic-speaking. This proved to be very wise; thus the newly founded churches did not seem to be a deliberate effort to convert those who belong to the ancient ethnic churches. It also meant that the congregations could be more easily identified as national Arab churches. Still, there were also successful efforts among the Assyrian and Armenian communities.

The emphasis of the mission was on a balanced combination of evangelism and church planting. The Continental Heidelberg Catechism was Arabized from an English translation and used as the main means of preparing new believers for church membership. The mission wisely determined to recognize any baptisms performed in the name of the Triune God. They took a clear stand against re-baptizing converts from the ancient churches. In time, all the native churches adopted the Reformed translation of the Bible into Arabic as their own. This in itself was one of the greatest and the most far-reaching achievements of Presbyterian and Reformed missions in the Muslim world.

For some unknown reasons, however, the missionaries did not give enough attention to training local pastors and other church officers. Unlike Presbyterian missionary endeavors in countries like Egypt, the Sudan, Lebanon, Iran and Syria, the Reformed missions in Iraq and the Arabian Gulf region allowed the expatriate missionaries to stay on as pastors of the local congregations for many years. This meant that, when missionaries were no longer able to pastor the indigenous churches, congregations were unable to maintain a steady and stable existence. The larger ones in the main cities were able to wait for and finally received trained Egyptian pastors. Others never recovered. The momentum of the mission ultimately lost its upward trend by the beginning of World War II. In the seventies and eighties, the congregations in Baghdad and Basra enjoyed good pastoral leadership by the steady ministries of two faithful Egyptian Presbyterian under shepherds. The congregation in Kirkkuk did not have effective pastoral care in recent years except for a brief period in the early nineties.

From the beginning, it was not difficult to gain government recognition for these Reformed congregations. In the sixties, however, some visiting non-Reformed preachers introduced dispensationalist eschatological teachings with pro-Israeli overtones. This caused a great deal of turmoil to the churches and led to the imprisonment of several people including one of the pastors. By the Lord's grace, the churches have been able to withstand those difficulties and ably proved to the authorities that they advocate biblical loyalty to the authorities divinely ordained over the country. For over twenty years, the Reformed churches of Iraq have enjoyed much freedom. This might surprise many; but the Iraqi authorities have been quite helpful to all Christian churches including the Reformed ones. Christians enjoy a lot more religious freedom in Iraq than many other countries in the region, including Turkey, Israel and Kuwait. One of the elders of the congregation in Baghdad recently put it this way: 'In Iraq you can legally and freely do anything religious as long as it is not mix with politics and so far as it does not endanger the social stability of the community.'
In recent years, Reformed believers in Iraq have experienced the same difficulties as other Iraqi citizens. The last Gulf war devastated the economic superstructure of the nation. The US led air bombardment did not spare one sector of the economy. Most industrial sites were destroyed. The rest have not had the spare parts or raw materials necessary for continued operation. The harsh United Nations embargo and sanctions have made it very difficult for the people to return to living a normal life. Many Reformed people lost their jobs or businesses and have not been able to provide for their families. Some have resorted to selling houses, other properties and even household effects to provide food or medicine for their families.

Because of the severity of the economic situation there, the government has allowed relief agencies to operate quite freely throughout most of the country. This has included some very unsound church-based as well as para-church groups. Such people have tried to win converts from among the members of the Reformed churches in order to establish their own works or alter the Reformed nature of some of these congregations.

The Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) now works very closely with the remaining six Reformed congregations in Iraq. MERF has been able to help them with temporary pastoral care from Egypt. For the first time the congregation in Basra has an Iraqi pastor. He was supported by MERF to prepare for the ministry at the Presbyterian Theological College in Cairo. Other promising Iraqi young men are being prepared for the Gospel ministry. In the meantime, MERF provides diaconal aid to needy Iraqi families to help them get established in self-supporting jobs. Also, training is being provided for elders, deacons, lay evangelists and others. In July 1997, meetings were organized in Amman, Jordan with representatives of all the Iraqi congregations. MERF's Executive Committee worked out with them an action plan for the next six years in the areas of evangelism, pastoral care, church-extension, and biblical and theological training as well as diaconal aid.

As we help these brethren and pray for them, we can thank the Lord for their perseverance and their desire to be faithful to the Saviour and to His inspired word. We can also rejoice in the opportunities we have to serve them and with them. In May 1997 MERF's new and much expanded Study Centre was opened in Larnaca, Cyprus. Please pray for MERF's plans to establish a branch of this in Amman, Jordan. This is designed to help not only Iraqi churches and believers, but also those in Syria and Palestine. Pray also for the efforts underway to establish a Reformed congregation in Jordan.

SOURCE: http://merf.woh.gospelcom.net/articles/iraqChurches.html
Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and The Holy Land

Mission Statement
God calls the ELCJHL to proclaim the Gospel within an Arab context in the Holy Lands. This proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the message of salvation is to Arabs, including Palestinians, and is expressed both through witnessing to the Gospel as well as through diakonia.

God calls us to serve the poorest of the poor and to care for people who have suffered long because of the difficult political situation in this area.

Although the ELCJHL is a minority church we do not have a minority complex. Rather we consider ourselves to be salt in the society, as God calls us to be. For this reason we seek to serve our Palestinian people through education that aims to provide Christian evangelical instruction, quality training and peace education.

The ELCJHL is called to serve the marginalized, the elderly, those who suffer or are traumatized, and all who are in need - regardless of race, gender or political affiliation. The ELCJHL empowers youth, women, men, and children, encouraging all our baptized members to be the people of God in service and witness.

The ELCJHL ministers with the other 12 churches of the Holy Land. Together we promote unity, make a joint witness and seek to speak with a prophetic voice against any kind of injustice or any violation of human rights.

The ELCJHL is a catalyst for a just peace, working as bridge builders among the nations. We seek to be brokers of justice, ministers of reconciliation, and apostles of love.

The ELCJHL, with the other churches, seeks to live and witness within a Muslim world and seeks to create a paradigm of Christian-Muslim relations.

The ELCJHL, with the other churches, seeks also to live with Jews in a just and equitable coexistence. The ELCJHL engages in interfaith dialogue, seeking to cooperate positively for a just peace throughout the Middle East.

The ELCJHL is the local expression of the Lutheran communion worldwide. It works in partnership and companionship with other Lutherans who have come to the Holy Land and with Lutheran Churches and agencies throughout the world.

History
Compared with other churches in the Middle East, the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan & the Holy Land (ELCJHL) is rather short.
The ELCJHL traces its origin to the middle of the 19th century when German and English Evangelical Christians came to Palestine to support the Christian minority in the area through diaconal and mission work. Their activities were many and were channeled through a variety of organizations and institutions.

The initial phase of the Lutheran mission efforts began in 1841 when a joint British Anglican and Prussian Evangelical bishopric was established in Jerusalem. In 1851 Theodor Fliedner, of Kaiserswerth, was invited to bring four deaconesses to the Holy Land to begin a hospital. Four years later, a school for girls, Talitha Kumi, was begun. This was the first school to offer girls a proper education.

In 1860 Johann Ludwig Schneller founded the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem. His work among homeless boys had its origin in a civil war in Syria, at that time a province of the Turkish regime. Some 30,000 Christians lost their lives in that war and many children became orphans. (Eventually that work was moved to the Bekka Valley of Lebanon and was administered by the Lutheran World Federation.)

The Anglicans and Lutherans worked together as one body until 1886 when the Prussian Lutherans went their own way, partly due to political and theological differences in Europe between Prussia and England. The German Lutherans focused their efforts on social work and education at a time when the British Anglicans were emphasizing conversion. Today the ELCJHL continues this call to witness through education and health care for Palestinians regardless of faith and provides for the spiritual needs of the Arab Lutheran community.

The original aim of these Protestant mission efforts in the Holy Land was not to create a new church in the area, but to serve the poor and provide a proper education for Christians. Only later the former pupils of the Lutheran Schools helped to establish the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Many of these members became refugees at the time the State of Israel was created.

Until 1947 the Lutheran Church was a mission church under the spiritual leadership of a Propst appointed by the Evangelical Church in Germany. On 7 May 1959, at a time when what is now the West Bank was part of Jordan, the ELCJHL was officially recognized as an autonomous religious community with a royal decree from King Hussein. Thus it was officially called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan though in practice it is known simply as the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ). The ELCJ Synod met on Jan. 14, 2005, and unanimously decided to add "and the Holy Land" to our name, so that the name more accurately reflects the full scope of the ministry of the Lutheran church that is serving in Jordan, Palestine and Israel.
During the 1970s the ELCJHL began to make its way toward independence as Lutherans worldwide focused on — church to church relationships rather than — church to mission field relationships. In 1979 the German Propst transferred spiritual leadership to the first Palestinian Bishop, the Rev. Dr. Daoud Haddad, who had been vicar of the Jerusalem congregation for more than 30 years. The Synod of the ELCJHL had elected him as the first Arab Lutheran bishop in the whole of the Middle East.

The election of a Palestinian as bishop proved to be very important as the ELCJHL took its place among the churches of the region. The tenure of the Bishops of the Church is as follows:

- 1 Jan. 1998 -- Up to Date - Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan

Congregations of the ELCJHL are located in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and Ramallah, and in Amman, Jordan. The latter two congregations were initially established to serve refugees from the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, especially Lutheran families who were driven from their homes in Lydda, Ramle and Jaffa. The ELCJHL can properly be called a church of refugees and is grateful for the efforts of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) among Palestinian refugees that began in 1950.

Today the church operates schools in Ramallah, Beit Jala, Bethlehem and Beit Sahour. There is a kindergarten in Jerusalem and two boarding homes in Beit Jala. More than 3000 pupils, boys and girls, are served. The headquarters of the ELCJHL is in the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, located on the Muristan Road in the “Resurrection neighborhood,” about 100 yards from the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

The ELCJHL has been a member of the Lutheran World Federation since 1974 and maintains a “companionship” or partner relation with many other churches worldwide. It’s a member of the Middle East Council of Churches and is active in ecumenical affairs and interreligious dialogue.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church faces many challenges in this new century. A particular concern is the emigration of many Palestinian Christians from the Holy Land. And, as Palestinians continue to struggle for autonomy and nationhood, they are confronted with the need for improved education, better access to health care, improved employment opportunities, stronger leadership, and a greater recognition within the international community. The ELCJHL remains a Christian presence in these demanding times, providing leadership in ecumenical efforts and offering both spiritual and social services to meet the daily needs of the people.

Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan believes that educating Lutheran and other Christian communities around the world about the presence of Arab Christians in the Holy Land and about the Palestinian struggle is essential if Palestine is to attain recognition and autonomy.

**SOURCE:** http://www.elcjhl.org/mission.asp
Middle East Reformed Fellowship

History of MERF

The Church in the Middle East: The Evangelical churches in the Middle East were largely established by Reformed missionaries. However, in recent decades they have been influenced by different unbiblical trends, superficiality and dead spirituality. Moreover, those of the Reformed persuasion in the region lack active fellowship and cooperation with like-minded Christians elsewhere. They need encouragement from Reformed churches and believers worldwide. MERF was formed to link together the gifts of the national believers with the vision and support of the Bible-believing Reformed communities worldwide.

Born in Beirut: In 1971 three young believers in Beirut, Lebanon, from various nationalities, got together for fellowship and mutual encouragement. The three were united in a desire to "proclaim the whole counsel of God" and to serve and guard "the church of God which He purchased with His own blood." They were driven by love for Christ and admiration for those pioneer missionaries who faithfully laboured and established believing churches in different countries of the region. Their vision centred around presenting the whole Gospel to the whole man in the spirit of the pioneers.

Meeting regularly for prayer, Bible study and the discussion of Reformed literature, they established a growing fellowship. They began to sponsor lectures, seminars and other Christian activities in Beirut. The membership steadily grew and the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF) was fully organized in 1974. Its vision began to receive much attention in Reformed circles worldwide. In 1975, however, as MERF began to take root, war broke out in Lebanon, scattering its members around the world. The organization's official activities ceased, but the dispersed members kept working toward the goal of strengthening the Reformed witness in the Middle East. Projects of translating and publishing Reformed literature as well as preaching and teaching were carried out in Egypt. Also, the Lebanon Reformed Fellowship (LRF) was organized by Lebanese believers to continue the original work of MERF in Lebanon.

Reorganized as an Indigenous Service Organization: The events of the 70's and 80's forced the reexamination of MERF's strategy. On the one hand, doors became clearly closed for the traditional missionary endeavors in the region. On the other hand, the effectiveness of nationals and their churches in outreach became more obvious. National Christians began to make an impact in their societies by means of radio, literature and other mass media. With the wise counsel of prominent national pastors as well as Reformed missionary strategists, in 1983 a reorganized MERF began to emerge on a regional scale as an indigenously-based Fellowship with clear statements of nature, faith and purpose, structured as a holistic four-fold ministry--Evangelism, Church-extension, Biblical Training and Diaconal Aid. In November 1984 MERF was registered in Cyprus along this new indigenous line. After much prayerful preparation a
new Board of Directors was organized and met in October 1985 as a Reorganizing Committee.

**Today:** Pastors, churches and Christian individuals all over the world have caught sight of this vision. MERF has the great opportunity to promote an active Reformed witness in the Middle East out of its headquarters in Cyprus, with local MERF administrative committees in Egypt, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon. MERF is committed to the service of the church of Christ according to God's Word. This is a truly ecumenical effort since it unites the gifts and resources of God's people from different ethnic backgrounds for the service of Christ in the Arab World, with a view of expanding outreach to other Muslim lands. By God's grace, much prayerful and hard work over the years has resulted in an effective and expanding ministry in the region. As the work has expanded its needs also have grown. Thus, MERF support bodies have been organized in the Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the USA, Canada and South Africa.

**SOURCE:** [http://merf.woh.gospelcom.net/articles/merfmanual1.html](http://merf.woh.gospelcom.net/articles/merfmanual1.html)
Chapter Ten:
The Maronite Heritage
Maronite Church

Maronite Catholic Church

The saying "The glory of Lebanon was given to him" (Isaiah 35:2) has been applied to the Maronite Patriarch.

Founder       Maron, AD 410; John Maron, 7th century

Recognition   Catholic Church, Eastern Catholic Churches

Primate        Bechara Boutros al-Rahi

Headquarters   Bkerké, Lebanon

Territory      Syria, Lebanon, Cyprus, USA, Israel, Australia, Brazil

Possessions    approx one third of Lebanese territory ;
The Syriac Maronite Church of Antioch is an Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with the Holy See of Rome. It traces its heritage back to the community founded by Maroun, a 4th-century Syriac monk venerated as a saint. The first Maronite Patriarch, Saint John Maron, was elected in the late 7th century.

Although reduced in numbers today, Maronites remain one of the principal ethno-religious groups in Lebanon. The Maronite Church asserts that since its inception, it has always remained faithful to the Church of Rome and the Pope. In November 2012, Pope Benedict appointed Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rahi as a Cardinal.

Before the conquest by Arabian Muslims reached Lebanon, the Lebanese people, including those who would become Muslim and the majority who would remain Christian, spoke a dialect of Aramaic. Syriac (Christian Aramaic) still remains the liturgical language of the Maronite Church. The members of the Maronite Church are a part of the Syriac people; though they have, over time, developed a distinctive Maronite character, this has not obscured their Antiochene and Syriac origin.

**History**

Maron (died sometime between 406 and 423 AD), founder of the Maronite spiritual movement. Since the 17th century, his feast day has been celebrated on February 9. Statue, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.

The followers of Jesus Christ first became known as "Christians" in Antioch (Acts 11:26), and the city became a center for Christianity - especially after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. According to Catholic tradition, the first Bishop was Saint Peter before his travels to Rome. The third Bishop was the Apostolic Father Ignatius of Antioch. Antioch became one of the five original Patriarchates (the Pentarchy) after Constantine recognized Christianity.

Maron, a fourth-century monk and the contemporary and friend of St. John Chrysostom, left Antioch for the Orontes River to lead an ascetic life, following the traditions of Anthony the Great of the Desert and Pachomius. Many of his followers also lived a monastic lifestyle.
Following the death of Maron in 410 AD, his disciples built a monastery in his memory and formed the nucleus of the Maronite Church.

The Maronites held fast to the beliefs of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD. When the Monophysites of Antioch slew 350 monks, the Maronites sought refuge in the mountains of Lebanon. Correspondence concerning the event brought papal and orthodox recognition of the Maronites, which was solidified by Pope Hormisdas (514–523 AD) on February 10, AD 518. A monastery was built around the shrine of St. Maro after the Council of Chalcedon.

The martyrdom of the Patriarch of Antioch in the first decade of the seventh century, either at the hands of Persian soldiers or local Jews, left the Maronites without a leader, a situation which continued because of the final and most devastating Byzantine–Sassanid War of 602–628. In the aftermath of the war, the Emperor Heraclius propagated a new Christological doctrine in an attempt to unify the various Christian churches of the east, who were divided over accepting the Council of Chalcedon. This doctrine, monothelitism, was meant as a compromise between supporters of Chalcedon, like the Maronites, and opponents, like the Jacobites. Instead this new doctrine caused greater controversy, and was declared a heresy at the Sixth Ecumenical Council in 680–681. Contemporary Greek and Arab sources, however, claimed that the Maronites accepted monothelitism, rejected the sixth council and continued to maintain a belief in the largely discredited monothelete doctrine for centuries, only moving away from monothelitism in the time of the crusades in order to avoid being branded heretics by the crusaders. The modern Maronite Church, however, rejects the assertion that the Maronites were ever monothelites, and the question remains a major controversy to this day.

In 687 AD, the Emperor Justinian II agreed to evacuate many thousands of Maronites from Lebanon and settle them elsewhere. The chaos and utter depression which followed led the Maronites to elect their first Patriarch, John Maroun, that year. This, however, was seen as a usurpation by the Orthodox churches. Thus, at a time when Islam was rising on the borders of the Byzantine Empire and a united front was necessary to keep out Islamic infiltration, the Maronites were focused on a struggle to retain their independence against imperial power. This situation was mirrored in other Christian communities in the Byzantine Empire and helped facilitate the Muslim conquest of most of Eastern Christendom by the end of the century.

**Muslim rule**

After they came under Arab rule following the Muslim conquest of Syria, the Maronites experienced an improvement in their relationship with the Byzantine Empire. The imperial court, seeing its earlier mistake, saw an advantage in the situation. Thus, Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV provided direct ecclesiastical, political and military support to the Maronites. The new alliance soon coordinated devastating raids on Muslim forces, providing a welcome relief to besieged Christians throughout the Middle East. Some of the Maronites relocated to Mount Lebanon at this time and formed several communities that became known as the Marada. That is from the view of 17th century Patriarch Estephan El Douaihy (also known as Stephane Al Doueihi “The Father
Another view is of Ibn al-Qilaii, a Maronite scholar from the 16th century, who proposed that Maronites fled Muslim persecutions of the Umayyads in the late 9th century AD.

The most widely accepted theory postulates that the Maronites fled Jacobite monophysite persecution, because of Monothelite heresy as advanced by Sergius of Tyr, a scholar of the 10th century AD. It is most probable, because nearly all the denominations became Monothelite after that it was introduced by Patriarch Sergius I of Constantinople. The Maronite migration to the mountains took place over a long period, but its peak must have been during the 7th century.

Around AD 1017, a new Muslim sect emerged calling themselves the Druze. At that time, the Maronites, as dhimmis, were required to wear black robes and black turbans, so as to be easily identified; they were also forbidden to ride horses.

Maronite monk and pilgrims, Mount Lebanon.

Following the conquest of Eastern Christendom outside of Anatolia and Europe by the Muslims, and the establishment of secured lines of control between Islamic Caliphs and Byzantine Emperors, little was heard from the Maronites for 400 years. Secure in their mountain strongholds, it was not until the crusader Raymond of Toulouse on his way to conquer Jerusalem in the Great Crusade that the Maronites were re-discovered in the mountains near Tripoli, Lebanon. Raymond later returned to besiege Tripoli after his conquest of Jerusalem and relations between the Maronites and European Christianity were re-established.

**Crusades**

It was late in the 11th century when the Crusaders made their way to the lands of the
Levant to overthrow Islamic rule; on their way, they passed through mount Lebanon, where they came across the Maronites. The Maronites had been largely cut off from the rest of the Christian world for around 400 years. The Church in Rome had been unaware that the Maronites were still in existence. The crusaders and Maronites established ties and from this point provided each other with mutual assistance.

During the Crusades in the 12th century AD, Maronites assisted the Crusaders and affirmed their affiliation with the Holy See in 1182 AD. Consequently, from this point onwards, the Maronites have upheld an unbroken ecclesiastical orthodoxy and unity with the Catholic Church. To commemorate their communion, Maronite Patriarch Youseff Al Jirjisi received the crown and staff marking his patriarchal authority, from Pope Paschal II in 1100 AD. In 1131, Maronite Patriarch Gregorios Al-Halati received letters from Pope Innocent II in which the Papacy recognized the authority of the Patriarchate.

For a long time Maronites had been effectively isolated from Christians of the Byzantine Empire and Western Europe. As a result, they appointed their own Patriarch, starting with John Maron, who had been a bishop of Batroun, Mount Lebanon. Through him, the Maronites of today claim full apostolic succession through the See of Antioch. Nonetheless, controversy surrounds this claim as some Maronites had been accused of having fully adopted the Monothelite heresy; this led to a number of civil wars (e.g. 1282 and 1499 AD).

**Ottoman rule**

Following the defeat of the Mamelukes by the Ottoman Empire, and to reward their new Druze ally who fought with them in the battle of Marj Dabek (1516), the Ottomans rewarded Prince Fakher el Din al Maani I, with the Principality of Lebanon, where he established a Druze- Maronite alliance lasting for hundreds of years; this prosperous principality would be the base of the modern Lebanese Republic.

The Maronites were partners in governing the new principality; often the post of Moudabbir (roughly Prime Minister) and the post of Army Commander were given to a Maronite, usually a Khazen or a Hobeich of Keserwan. During this period (1516-1840), the Maronites started returning to southern Mount Lebanon, where they had lived before they were almost exterminated by the Mamelukes in 1307. Thus, the historic Keserwan and all the Druze mountains were repopulated. It was this love and affection between the Maronites and Druze that helped establish the Lebanese identity.

On July 15, 1584, a Maronite college was established in Rome, with Pope Gregory hosting the grand opening.

Fakhr-al-din II, who was said to have been brought up by a Maronite el Khazen family, fought for Lebanese independence for over 50 years. In the mid-16th century, 25,000 Ottoman troops launched an attack on Lebanon. During the ensuing battles, Fakhr and three of his sons were captured; they were subsequently executed in Istanbul on the 13th day of April 1635.
In 1638, France declared that it would protect all Catholics within the Ottoman Empire, including the Maronites.

In the 17th century AD Western religious groups started settling in Lebanon. The migration began in 1626 with the Capuchins, followed by the Jesuits. The groups moving at this time did this in order to serve the Lebanese, opening schools for the Maronite people until there was a school next to each church. This made it possible for the Maronites to acquire a formal education. The Maronites were on the forefront of the cultural Renaissance in the Middle East.

Maronite nun from Mount Lebanon, painting from 1779.

However, connection to Rome was arduously maintained and through diplomacy and maneuvering, European powers helped keep the Maronite community from destruction. Eventually, a Maronite College was established at Rome on July 5, 1584. From this college, the Maronite community obtained some valuable assistance in maintaining their Christian identity. In 1610, the Maronite monks of the Monastery of Saint Anthony of Qozhaya imported one of the first printing presses in what is known as the Arabic-speaking world; however that press was printing in the Syriac language and not Arabic. The monasteries of Lebanon would later become key players in the Arabic Renaissance of the late 19th century as a result of developing Arabic, as well as Syriac, printable script.

In 1856 the Maronites' uprising took place against governor (Dawood Pasha). Youssef Karam was the son of Sheikh Boutros Karam, at that time the Sheikh was lord of Ehden and surrounding district.

In 1997, Pope John Paul II visited Lebanon to give hope to Lebanese Catholics. He said, "Lebanon is more than a country, it is a message."
The Peshitta is the standard Syriac Bible, used by the Maronite Church, amongst others. The illustration is of the Peshitta text of Exodus 13:14-16 produced in Amida in the year 464.

Organization

The head of the Maronite Church is the Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, who is elected by the Maronite bishops and resides in Bkerké, close to Jounieh, north of Beirut (the Maronite Patriarch resides in the northern town of Dimane during the summer months). The current Patriarch (since March 2011) is Bechara Boutros Rahi, while Cardinal Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir is Patriarch Emeritus. When a new patriarch is elected and enthroned, he requests ecclesiastical recognition by the Pope, thus maintaining their communion with the Holy See. As an Eastern patriarch, the patriarch is usually created a Cardinal by the Pope in the rank of a Cardinal Bishop; he does not receive a suburbanian see, since he is a head of a sui iuris Church.

Maronites share the same doctrine as other Catholics, but they retain their own liturgy, theology, spirituality, discipline and hierarchy. Strictly speaking, the Maronite church belongs to the Antiochene tradition and is a West Syro-Antiochene Rite. Syriac is the liturgical language.

Nevertheless, they are considered, to be among the most Latinized of the Eastern Catholic Churches although there have been moves to return to Eastern practices.

Cardinal Sfeir's personal commitment accelerated liturgical reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, bearing fruit in 1992 with the publication of a new Maronite Missal. This represents an attempt to return to the original form of the Antiochene Liturgy, removing the liturgical Latinization of past centuries. The Service of the Word has been described as far more enriched than in previous missals, and it features six Anaphoras (Eucharistic Prayers).

Celibacy is not strictly required for Maronite deacons and priests outside of North America with parishes; monks, however, must remain celibate, as well as bishops who
are normally selected from the monasteries. Due to a long-term understanding with their Latin counterparts in North America, Maronite priests in that area are expected to remain celibate. The bishops who serve as eparchs and archeparchs of the eparchies and archeparchies (the equivalent of diocese and archdiocese in the Latin Catholic Church) are answerable to the Patriarch.

**Eparchies**

The church has twenty-six eparchies and patriarchal vicariats as follows:

In Lebanon: Zahleh, Tyre, Tripoli, Sidon, Sarba (vicariat), Jounieh (vicariat), Zgharta (vicariat), Joubbeh (vicariat), Jbeil, Beirut, Batroun, Baalbeck and Deir el Ahmar and Antelias

In Syria: Latakia, Damascus and Aleppo

In Israel: Haifa, Holy Land and the Patriarchal Vicar

Elsewhere: Cyprus, Cairo, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Sydney, Montreal, Mexico, Los Angeles, St. Louis and Brooklyn

**Population**

The exact worldwide Maronite population is not exactly known, being estimated at more than 3 million, according to the Catholic Near East Welfare Association.

Based on a 2007 report, there are approximately 930,000 Maronites in Lebanon, where they constitute up to 22% of the population. Syrian Maronites total 51,000 and they follow the archdioceses of Aleppo and Damascus and the Diocese of Latakia. There is also a Maronite community in Cyprus of about 10,000, which speaks Cypriot Maronite Arabic. A noticeable Maronite community exists in northern Israel (Galilee), numbering 7,504, being famous for its preservation attempts of the Aramaic language.

**Diaspora**

The two residing eparchies in the United States have issued their own "Maronite Census", designed to estimate how many Maronites reside in the United States. Many Maronites have been assimilated into Western Catholicism as there were no Maronite parishes or priests available. The "Maronite Census" was designed to locate these Maronites. There are also eparchies at São Paulo in Brazil, as well as in Argentina, Australia, South Africa, Canada and Mexico.

The history of the Lebanese Community in South Africa goes back to the late 19th century, when the first immigrants arrived in Johannesburg, the biggest city in the Transvaal coming from Sebhel, Mesyara, Becharre, Hadath El-Joube, Maghdoushe and other places. It is recorded that in the year 1896 the first Maronite and Lebanese immigrants arrived in Durban, Cape Town and Mozambique, and congregated around their local Catholic Churches.

Ref: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maronite_Church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maronite_Church)
MARONITE RITE

The Maronite is one of the Syrian rites and has been closely assimilated in the Church to the Roman Rite (see MARONITES). Unlike the Syro-Chaldean or the Syro-Catholic rites, for they all use the Syriac language in the Mass and liturgy, it has not kept the old forms intact, but has modeled itself more and more upon the Roman Rite. Among all the Eastern rites which are now in communion with the Holy See, it alone has no Schismatic rite of corresponding form and language, but is wholly united and Catholic, thereby differing also from the other Syrian rites. The liturgical language is the ancient Syriac or Aramaic, and the Maronites, as well as all other rites who use Syriac, take especial pride in the fact that they celebrate the Mass in the very language which Christ spoke while He was on earth, as evidenced by some fragments of His very words still preserved in the Greek text of the Gospels (e.g., in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 5:41). The Syriac is a Semitic language closely related to the Hebrew, and is sometimes called Aramaic from the Hebrew word Aram (Northern Syria). As the use of Ancient Hebrew died out after the Babylonian captivity, the Syriac or Aramaic took its place, very much as Italian has supplanted Latin throughout the Italian peninsula. This was substantially the situation at the time of Christ's teaching and the foundation of the early Church.

Syriac is now a dead language, and in the Maronite service and liturgy bears the same relation to the vernacular Arabic as the Latin in the Roman Rite does to the modern languages of the people. It is written with a peculiar alphabet, reads from right to left like the Hebrew or Arabic languages, but its letters are unlike the current alphabets of either of these languages. To simplify the Maronite Missals, Breviary, and other service books, the vernacular Arabic is often employed for the rubrics and for many of the best-known prayers; it is written, not in Arabic characters, but in Syriac, and this mingled language and alphabet is called Karshuni. The Epistle, Gospel, Creed and Pater Noster are nearly always given in Karshuni, instead of the original Arabic.

The form of the Liturgy or Mass is that of St. James, so called because of the tradition that it originated with St. James the Less, Apostle and Bishop of Jerusalem. It is the type form of the Syriac Rite, but the Maronite Use has accommodated it more and more to the Roman. This form of the Liturgy of St. James constitutes the Ordinary of the Mass, which is always said in the same manner, merely changing the epistles and gospels according to the Christian year. But the Syrians, whether of the Maronite, Syrian, Catholic, or Syro-Chaldaic rite, have the peculiarity (not found in other liturgies) of inserting different anaphoras or canons of the Mass, composed at various times by different Syrian saints; these change according to the feast celebrated, somewhat analogously to the Preface in the Roman Rite. The principal anaphoras or canons of the Mass used by the Maronites are: (1) the Anaphora according to the Order of the Holy Catholic and Roman Church, the Mother of all the Churches; (2) the Anaphora of St. Peter, the Head of the Apostles; (3) the Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles; (4) the Anaphora of St. James the Apostle, brother of the Lord, (5) the Anaphora of St. John the Apostle and Evangelist; (6) the Anaphora of St. Mark the Evangelist; (7) the Anaphora of St. Xystus, the Pope of Rome; (8) the Anaphora of St. John surnamed Maro, from whom they derive their name; (9) the Anaphora of St. John Chrysostom; (10) the Anaphora of St. Basil; (11) the Anaphora of St. Cyril; (12) the Anaphora of St.
Dionysius; (13) the Anaphora of John of Harran, and (14) the Anaphora of Marutha of Tagrith. Besides these they have also a form of liturgy of the Presanctified for Good Friday, after the Roman custom. Frequent use of incense is a noticeable feature of the Maronite Mass, and not even in low Mass is the incense omitted. In their form of church building the Maronites have nothing special like the Greeks with their iconostasis and square altar, or the Armenians with their curtains, but build their churches very much as Latins do. While the sacred vestments are hardly distinguishable from those of the Roman Church, in some respects they approach the Greek form. The alb, the girdle, and the maniple or cuffs on each hand, a peculiar form of amict, the stole (sometimes in Greek and sometimes in Roman form), and the ordinary Roman chasuble make up the vestments worn by the priest at Mass. Bishops use a cross, mitre, and staff of the Roman form. The sacred vessels used on the altar are the chalice, paten or disk, and a small star or asterisk to cover the consecrated Host. They, like us, use a small cross or crucifix, with a long silken banneret attached, for giving the blessings. The Maronites use unleavened bread and have a round host, as in the Roman Rite.

The Maronite Mass commences with the ablution and vesting at the foot of the altar. Then, standing at the middle of the sanctuary, the priest recites Psalm xlii, "Introibo ad altare," moving his head in the form of a cross. He then ascends the altar, takes the censer and incenses both the uncovered chalice and paten, then takes up the Host and has it incensed, puts it on the paten and has the corporals and veils incensed. He next pours wine in the chalice, adding a little water, and then incenses it and covers both host and chalice with the proper veils. Then, going again to the foot of the altar, he says aloud the first prayer in Arabic, which is followed by an antiphon. The strange Eastern music, with its harsh sounds and quick changes, is a marked feature of the Maronite Rite. The altar, the elements, the clergy, servers, and people are incensed, and the Kyrie Eleison (Kurrilison) and the "Holy God, Holy strong one, etc." are sung by choir and people. Then comes the Pater Noster in Arabic, with the response: "For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, world without end. Amen." The celebrant and deacon intone the Synapte for peace, which is followed by a short form of the Gloria in excelsis: "Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace and good hope to the sons of men, etc." The Phrumiur is then said; this is an introductory prayer, and always comes before the Sedro, which is a prayer of praise said aloud by the priest standing before the altar while the censer is swung. It is constructed by the insertion of verses into a more or less constant framework, commemorative of the feast or season, and seems to be a survival of the old psalm verses with the Gloria. For instance, a sedro of Our Lady will commemorate her in many ways, something like our litany, but more poetically and at length; one of Our Lord will celebrate Him in His nativity, baptism, etc. Then come the commemorations of the Prophets, the Apostles, the martyrs, of all the saints, and lastly the commemoration of the departed: "Be ye not sad, all ye who sleep in the dust, and in the decay of your bodies. The living Body which you have eaten and the saving Blood which you have drunk, can again vivify all of you, and clothe your bodies with glory. O Christ, Who hast come and given peace by Thy Blood to the heights and the depths, give rest to the souls of Thy servants in the promised life everlasting!" The priest then prays for the living, and makes special intercession by name of those living or dead for whom the Mass is offered. He blesses and offers the sacred elements, in a form
somewhat analogous to the Offertory in the Roman Rite. Another *phrumiun* and the
great *Sedro* of St. Ephraem or St. James is said, in which the whole sacrifice of the
Mass is foreshadowed. The psalm preparatory to the Epistle in Arabic is recited, and the
epistle of the day then read. The Alleluia and gradual psalm is recited, the Book of
Gospels incensed, and the Gospel, also in Arabic, intoned or read. The vesicles of
thanksgiving for the Gospel are intoned, at several parts of which the priest and deacon
and precentor chant in unison. The Nicene Creed, said in unison by priest and deacon,
follows, and immediately after the celebrant washes his hands saying Psalm xxvi. This
ends the Ordinary of the Mass.

The Anaphora, or Canon of the Mass, is then begun, and varies according to season,
place, and celebrant. In the Anaphora of the Holy Catholic and Roman Church, which is
a typical one, the Mass proceeds with the prayers for peace very much as they stand at
the end of the Roman Mass; then follow prayers of confession, adoration, and glory,
which conclude by giving the kiss of peace to the deacon and the other clergy. The
Preface follows: "Let us lift up our thoughts, our conscience and our hearts! Response.
They are lifted up to Thee, O Lord! Priest. Let us give thanks to the Lord in fear, and
adore Him with trembling. R. It is meet and just. P. To Thee, O God of Abraham and
Isaac and Jacob, O glorious and holy King of Israel, for ever! R. Glory be to the Father
and the Son and the Holy Ghost, now and forever, world without end. P. Before the
glorious and divine mysteries of our Redeemer, with the pleasant things which are
imposed, let us implore the mercy of the Lord! R. It is meet and just" (and the Preface
continues secretly). Then the Sanctus is sung, and the Consecration immediately
follows. The words of Consecration are intoned aloud, the choir answering "Amen."

After the succeeding prayer of commemoration of the Resurrection and hope of the
Second Coming and a prayer for mercy, the Epiklesis is said: "How tremendous is this
hour and how awful this moment, my beloved, in which the Holy and Life-giving Spirit
comes down from on high and descends upon this Eucharist which is placed in this
sanctuary for our reconciliation. With silence and fear stand and pray! Salvation to us
and the peace of God the Father of all of us. Let us cry out and say thrice: Have mercy
on us, O Lord, and send down the Holy and Life-giving Spirit upon us! Hear me, O Lord!
And let Thy living and it descend upon me and upon this sacrifice! And so complete this
mystery, that it be the Body of Christ our God for our redemption!" The prayers for the
Pope of Rome, the Patriarch of Antioch, and all the metropolitans and bishops and
orthodox professors and believers of the Catholic Faith immediately follow. This in turn
is followed by a long prayer by the deacon for tranquility, peace, and the
commemoration of all the saints and doctors of the early Church and of Syria, including
St. John Maro, with the petition for the dead at the end. Then comes the solemn offering
of the Body and the Blood for the sins of priest and people, concluding with the words:
"Thy Body and Thy Holy Blood are the way which leads to the Kingdom!" The adoration
and the fraction follow; then the celebrant elevates the chalice together with the Host,
and says: "O desirable sacrifice which is offered for us! O victim of reconciliation, which
the Father obtained in Thy own person! O Lamb, Who wast the same person as the
High Priest who sacrificed!" Then he genuflects and makes the sign of the Cross over
the chalice: "Behold the Blood which was shed upon Golgotha for my redemption;
because of it receive my supplication." The "Sanctus fortis" is again sung, and the
celebrant lifts the Sacred Body on high and says: "Holy things for holy persons, in purity and holiness!" The fraction of the Host follows after several prayers, and the priest mingles a particle with the Blood, receives the Body and the Blood himself, and gives communion to the clergy and then to the people. When it is finished he makes the sign of the Cross with the paten and blesses the people.

Then follow a synapte (litany) of thanksgiving, and a second signing of the people with both paten and chalice, after which the priest consumes all the remaining species saying afterwards the prayers at the purification and ablution. The prayer of blessing and protection is said, and the people and choir sing: "Alleluia! Alleluia! I have fed upon Thy Body and by Thy living Blood I am reconciled, and I have sought refuge in Thy Cross! Through these may I please Thee, O Good Lord, and grant Thou mercy to the sinners who call upon Thee!" Then they sing the final hymn of praise, which in this anaphora contains the words: "By the prayers of Simon Peter, Rome was made the royal city, and she shall not be shaken!" Then the people all say or sing the Lord's Prayer; when it is finished, the final benediction is given, and the priest, coming again to the foot of the altar, takes off his sacred vestments and proceeds to make his thanksgiving.

The principal editions of the Maronite missals and service books for the deacons and those assisting at the altar are The Book of Sacrifice according to the Rite of the Maronite Church of Antioch (Kozhayya, 1816, 1838, and 1885; Beirut, 1888), and The Book of the Ministry according to the Rite of the Maronite Church of Antioch (Kozhayya, 1855).

**Maronites in America**

The Maronites are chiefly from the various districts of Mount Lebanon and from the city of Beirut, and were at first hardly distinguishable from the other Syrians and Arabic-speaking persons who came to America. At first they were merely peddlers and small traders, chiefly in religious and devotional articles, but they soon got into other lines of business and at present possess many well-established business enterprises. Not only are they established in the United States, but they have also spread to Mexico and Canada, and have several fairly large colonies in Brazil, Argentine, and Uruguay. Their numbers in the United States are variously estimated from 100,000 to 120,000, including the native born. Many of them have become prosperous merchants and are now American citizens. Several Maronite families of title (Emir) have emigrated and made their homes in the United States; among them are the Emirs Al-Kazen, Al-Khoury, Abi-Saab, and others. There is also the well-known Arabic novelist of the present day, Madame Karam Hanna (Afifa Karam) of Shreveport, Louisiana, formerly of Arashid, Mount Lebanon, who not only writes entertaining fiction, but touches on educational topics and even women's rights. Nahum Mokarzel, a graduate of the Jesuit College of Beirut, is a clever writer both in Arabic and English. The Maronites are established in New York, the New England States, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and Alabama. The first Maronite priest to visit the United States was Rev. Joseph Mokarzel, who arrived in 1879 but did not remain. Very Rev. Louis Kazen of Port Said, Egypt, came later, but, as
there were very few of his countrymen, he likewise returned. On 6 August, 1890, the
Rev. Butros Korkemas came to establish a permanent mission, and after considerable
difficulty rented a tiny chapel in a store on Washington Street, New York City. He was
accompanied by his nephew, Rev. Joseph Yasbek, then in deacon's orders, who was
later ordained to the priesthood by Archbishop Corrigan, and founded the Maronite
mission in Boston; he is now Chor-Bishop of the Maronites and practically the head of
that rite in America.

A church was later established in Philadelphia, then one in Troy and one in Brooklyn,
after which the Maronites branched out to other cities. At present (1911) there are
fifteen Maronite churches in the United States: in New York, Brooklyn, Troy, Buffalo,
Boston, Lawrence, Springfield, Philadelphia, Scranton, St. Paul, St. Louis, Birmingham,
Chicago, Wheeling, and Cleveland. Meanwhile new congregations are being formed in
smaller cities, and are regularly visited by missionary priests. The Maronite clergy is
composed of two chor-bishops (deans vested with certain episcopal powers) and
twenty-three other priests, of whom five are Antonine monks. In Mexico there are three
Maronite chapels and four priests. In Canada there is a Maronite chapel at New
Glasgow and one resident priest. There are only two Arabic-English schools, in New
York and St. Louis, since many of the Maronite children go to the ordinary Catholic or to
the public schools. There are no general societies or clubs with religious objects,
although there is a Syrian branch of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. About fifteen years
ago Nahum A. Mokarzel founded and now publishes in New York City the daily
newspaper, "Al Hoda" (The Guidance), which is now the best known Arabic newspaper
in the world and the only illustrated one. His brother also publishes an Arabic monthly
magazine, "Al Alam ul Jadid" (The New World), which contains modern Arabic literature
and translations of American and English writers. There are also two Maronite papers
published in Mexico. The Maronites also have in New York a publishing house on a
small scale, in which novels, pamphlets, and scientific and religious works are printed in
Arabic, and the usual Arabic literature sold.

SOURCE: http://www.ourladyofthecedars.net/moniteright.htm
Maronite Church

Christian community, centered to Lebanon, and affiliated to the Roman Catholic Church as part of the Eastern Rite. There are also smaller groups in Palestine and Syria, as well as in Cyprus and the USA.

Their total number is about 1.5 million, of which about 800,000 live in Lebanon. This means that 60% of all Maronites live in Lebanon, and that they represent 25% of the country's population. According to the Lebanese constitution, the president of the country shall be a Maronite Christian.

In Syria about 40,000 Maronites live, headed by the archdioceses of Aleppo and Damascus, and the Diocese of Latakia.

Over centuries, the Maronites lived isolated in the mountains, where religion came to play an important part in all aspects of their lives. In modern times, they have become much more urban and represent an important part of the population in Lebanon's largest cities.

The spiritual head of the Maronites is the Patriarch of Antioch, who actually resides no longer in Antakya (now Turkey) but in Jounieh north of Beirut.

The liturgy was developed inside the Maronite Church prior to the affiliation to Rome in the 12th century, but Roman Catholic elements have been introduced. Even in modern times, Syriac language is used for the services even though the Maronites use Arabic as the vernacular tongue.

The Maronites claim to be within Orthodox theology, but this is not always true. From the 7th century, they became supporters of the doctrines of the patriarch of Constantinople Sergius, who claimed that Jesus had no human qualities, only divine (called Monothelite).

Celibacy is not a prerequisite for the Maronite clergy, but is regulated according to local traditions.

SHORT HISTORY

Early 5th century: The hermit Maron (now St. Maron) living in northeast Syria fetches the attention of local Christians, and a group starts to develop around his domain. This group survives his death and gets more supporters, which soon are referred to as "Maronites".

Late 7th century With the arrival of Islam in Syria, the Maronites leave for the Lebanon mountains, under the leadership of Joannes Maro (or John Maron), their patriarch of Antioch. Over the following centuries, many other Christians flee to the same mountains, where they joined the Maronite Church.

12th century: The Maronites cooperate with the Crusaders in their battle against the Muslims.

1182: The Maronite Church gets part affiliation with the Catholic Church, but is allowed to preserve its liturgy and keep the organization with a Patriarch in Lebanon.

1585: The Maronite College is established in Rome by the Pope and is administered by Jesuits. This becomes an important training centre for the church over the next 350 years.

1648: France declares itself protector of the Catholics living in the Ottoman Empire. From this time on, close ties have existed between France and the Maronites. This
relationship would centuries later become one of the central foundations for the creation of the state of Lebanon.

1858: Maronite peasants rebel against the Maronite aristocracy, destroying their feudal privileges.

1860 May 31: After 2 years of tensions between Maronites and Druze, the Druze attack Maronite towns alike Hasbaya, Bkassine and Jezzine, killing around 1,500 people.

1860 June: Lebanon falls into a state of civil war, causing many more killed. The Ottoman rulers granted the Maronites autonomy, in order to make them feel safe. Still, the happenings this summer caused many Christians to emigrate to the Americas.

1920: The Maronites gets self rule under the French mandate.

1943: Lebanon gets its independence, and the constitution secures the Maronites the position of president.

1975-90: Lebanese Civil War where the Maronites are one of the main groups. During most of this time, they are backed by Syria.

SOURCE: http://i-cias.com/e.o/maronite.htm
Antioch

Antioch has always been a city of openness, dialogue, and bold initiative. It was converted to Jesus Christ by the preaching of certain of his disciples, and the believers were strengthened in their faith, thanks to the labors of the apostles Paul and Barnabas. The apostle Peter himself, the head of the Christian Church, was its bishop until he set out for Rome. Subsequently, the Church of Antioch prospered and extended its territory, finally becoming one of the great original patriarchates, namely Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.

In the year 518, the Patriarch of Antioch, Severius, was deposed from his see for having denied the two distinct natures in Christ and for rejecting the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon. A Catholic Patriarch succeeded him, by the name of Paul. However, not all the Christians approved his appointment, and in consequence the Church split into two groups, the Chalcedonians and the anti-Chalcedonians. Ever since that time, there has always been a Catholic Patriarch holding to the faith as defined at Chalcedon and a non-Catholic Patriarch rejecting it.

A century later, another division affected the Church of Antioch, leaving three groups of Christians, the Syriacs, the Maronites, and the Melkites, and this division has continued down to the present day. As from the seventh century, we find that the original Church had given rise to five district communities, the Melkites, the Maronites, the Syriacs, the Assyrians, and the Armenians, each of which had its own Patriarch. In the twelfth century yet another Patriarch was added in the person of the Latin Patriarch.

The Church of Antioch had originally been one church encompassing the whole of Asia and the East, but finally became several churches. Where there had been one Patriarch, now there are several. One day, God's mercy will bring it together again as
one flock under one shepherd.

**The Maronites and Lebanon**
The Maronites are those Christians who gathered round a certain priest by the name of Maron and adopted his pattern of life.

Maron left the city and made his abode on a mountain, intending thereby to leave behind the theological strife and to worship God in solitude. But in his retreat, Maron found that his true vocation was to live with others, so he resumed his parish duties and set about teaching the true doctrine. His disciples increased in number, and they began to call themselves Maronites after their teacher.

Maron died in the year 410, but his disciples carried on his mission. In 451 at the Council of Chalcedon, they held to the clear teaching that Christ was both God and man, having two natures, one divine and one human. Afterwards the Maronites were loyal defenders of the decrees of the Council. In the upshot, the opponents of Chalcedon showed themselves bitter enemies of the Maronites, who started moving to Lebanon in successive waves after 350 of them had been martyred.

Near the end of the fifth century of the Christian era, the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon had been converted by the disciples of St. Maron and had become Maronites themselves. These now welcomed their brethren arriving from Antioch and the two groups, now mingled, pursued their mission together. When the Arabs finally dominated the area, and any regular contact with the patriarchate of Constantinople became impossible, the Maronites had to appoint in 687 their own Patriarch, who was Saint John-Maron.

The Emperor of Byzantium acted as if his royal authority extended over the Church. He appointed Patriarchs and in many ways interfered in ecclesiastical matters. The Christians for their part got into the habit of turning to him to solve their problems. When the Maronites chose a Patriarch for themselves, the authorities at Byzantium withheld their consent. While invading the region, the imperial army attacked the Maronites, and a battle was fought at Amioun, which resulted in a victory for the latter. The Patriarch established himself at Kfarhay, where he made the Episcopal palace his seat.

A number of Patriarchs resided at Kfarhay, among who are John-Maron, Cyr, and Gabriel. They watched over their flock and ensured the purity of their faith. The Anaphora of St John- Maron, in daily use, is a brilliant testimony to the faith of the Maronites in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The lure of the riches of the world, which they had left, could not shake their firm belief, nor could the assaults of their enemies disperse them. They loved their Creator and cherished his Holy Word.

**The Patriarchs of Kfarhay**
At Kfarhay the Patriarchs lived through hard times. Numbers of their spiritual children flocked about them, trudging to Kfarhay on weary feet, carrying in their arms their infant children and staggering under the burden of such simple belongings as they had been
able to bring when driven from their houses, their lands, and their property in Syria and the Bekaa. They now came to wrest a living from a rocky, densely forested land, lacking every amenity. However, the district of Batroun opened its arms to them like a mother welcoming her children.

Now the Maronites put behind them the years of plenty and prepared for the years of hunger. They transformed rock into fertile soil in which they grew wheat and other grains, planted olive trees, grapevines and mulberry trees, and added to their traditional prayers a beautiful one: “By the intercession of your Mother, O Lord, turn your wrath from the land and its inhabitants. Put an end to trouble and sedition, banish from it war, plunder, hunger and plague. Have pity on us in our misfortunes. Console those of us who are sick. Help us in our weakness. Deliver us from oppression and exile. Grant eternal rest to our dead. Allow us to live in peace in this world that we may glorify you. In their prayers, the Maronites spoke of their hardships, hunger, disorders, and injustice, for these were things they were familiar with.

Finally, after 251 years spent by the Patriarchs in the region of Batroun, they had to find a new refuge, facing new difficulties on new soil.

The thoughts of the Patriarch kept turning to the city of Antioch, where he yearned to remain with his flock during its days of torment.

Patriarch John II imagined that he could fulfill this ambition. Once he had reached Antioch he made every endeavor to bring all the Maronites together, but without any success. Recurring difficulties and disorders obliged him to relinquish his plan and to “take refuge in the heart of Mount Lebanon in 938” as Patriarch DOUAIHY wrote of him. Finally, he settled in the vicinity of Aakoura. (The Annals, 50)

The Patriarchs and Akoura
The sojourn of the Maronite Patriarchs in the district of Jbeil lasted for 502 years, that is to say, from 938 to 1440 A.D. Thirty-four Patriarchs resided there, whose names are to be found in a list compiled by Patriarch DOUAIHY and published in 1902 by Rashid SHARTOUNI.


What was the activity of these prelates, and what did they achieve?

Of this, history has nothing to record. They lived in inaccessible and trackless mountain
fastness. They lacked all means for the acquisition and storing of knowledge and considered themselves happy if they were able to live in peace among their faithful people, treasuring the Christian teaching that had been handed down to them. They did not even have any fixed Patriarchal seat. They went from Yanuh down to Mayfuq, then to Lehfed, to Habil, back to Yanuh, to Kifan, to Kfarhay, to Kafre, to Yanuh again, and to Hardine, and to Mayfuq again. If they accepted to live an austere life and to be like Abraham ever on the move, it was because it was their will to follow in the footsteps of St Maron, their master, and to say Yes to Jesus Christ.

Their dwellings were extremely humble, and deprived of all show of riches and pomp, but magnificent in their simplicity and detachment from the world. However, “the devoted inhabitants of Yanuh, being pious and good Apostles, insisted on building a residence for the Patriarch, in green stone, very attractive and solidly constructed.” (DOUAHIY, The Annals 50)

The Patriarchal seat at Mayfuq, which still exists, is a true work of art. If the greater part of the construction is devoted to the church, as was the case of the other residences vestiges of which are scattered about, this was because the Patriarchs were above all men of prayer and so wanted their places of residence to be in the first place retreats for prayer.

**The Years of Difficulties**

After the departure of the Crusaders, the Maronites came under attack from the Mamlouks. They suffered every humiliation, while their Churches were set on fire, their villages plundered, and their vineyards destroyed.

“On Monday, the second day of Muharram, Akush Pasha, governor of Damascus, marched at the head of a military force into the mountains of Kesrouan. The soldiers invested these mountains and, having dismounted scaled the slopes from all sides. The governor invaded the hills, and his soldiers trampled underfoot a land whose inhabitants had believed it impregnable. The enemy occupied the heights, destroyed the villages, and wreaked havoc in the vineyards. They massacred the people and made prisoners of them. The mountains were left deserted.” (The Annals, 288)

The Patriarchs themselves had their share of the general misfortune, suffering as much as any. One was tortured, another harassed, another compelled to flee, another put on trial, and yet another burnt alive.

“In 1283 Patriarch Daniel of Hadshit in person led his men in their defense against the Mamlouk soldiery, after the latter had assaulted the Jubbeh of Bsharri. He succeeded in checking their advance before Ehden for forty days, and the Mamlouks captured Ehden only after they had seized the Patriarch by a ruse.” “In 1367, patriarch Gabriel was conveyed from Hjoula, his home district where he had taken refuge during the persecutions, down to Tripoli, where he was burnt alive at the stake. His tomb still stands in Bab el Ramel, at the gates of Tripoli.” “In 1402, there was great hardship.
Many of the dead remained without burial, many of which died of hunger. It was a tragedy without parallel.” (DOUAIHY, The Annals, 338).

However, the Maronites bore their trials patiently. They looked on the district of Jbeil, which had sheltered their Patriarchs, as a fertile land which by its bounty and situation invited them to meditation and prayer. They had drawn from its rough roads patience in adversity, from its high mountains the ability to rise above the outrages inflicted on them, and from the vastness of the sea reflecting the azure vault of heaven the habit of turning their vision to distant horizons. For them Jbeil was the Garden of Gethsemane, impressing on them its pure spirit and endowing them with courage, wisdom and peace of mind. They read the Holy Gospel, and in this way they were brought together again.

For they did not give up hope. They put in the balance what they had gained and what they had lost as a result of their alliance with the Crusaders and realized that God was their only resort. In Him they placed all their trust and gathered round their Patriarch as their leader, both spiritual and civil. After passing their situation in review, they called on the civil chiefs of the villages, the muqaddams, to act according to the instructions emanating from the Patriarch, and for their part these notables accepted minor orders as sub-deacons to put themselves at his disposition.

These initiatives bore good fruit. The country knew some tranquility and order. When they had invaded Kesrouan, the main purpose of the Mamlouks, who were Sunni Muslims, had been to eliminate the Shiites. But this gave the Maronites the opportunity to act as mediators. To a considerable degree, they reconciled the opposing points of view of the two rival communities, acting as Apostles of peace and harmony in all the villages where Sunnites and Shiites dwelt together, interposing between them.

The Churches that have survived from this period are small, but they testify to the renewal in our mountains of the mission in Our Lord Jesus Christ, which began when he trod the soil of Lebanon. The priests administered the sacraments and preached the word of God. Miracles followed: wounds were healed, tears were wiped away, vendettas were settled, and unity was restored.

The unity of the Maronites owes much to their parochial life. It was this, which led them to enter into relationships with the Shiites and the Druzes, serving the Sunnites Shehabi dynasty, and working with all for the common good. All were united when it was a matter of facing a common enemy. When finally they found themselves in a situation, which knew no other solution, the Maronites moved into the valley of Kannoubine.

**The Maronites and Rome**

Pope Innocent III saw with his own eyes what men of prayer the Maronite Patriarchs were on the day when Patriarch Jeremiah of Amshit came to see him during the proceedings of the Latran Council of 1215, in which the latter participated. “The Pope ordered that the Patriarch be depicted in a painting to be made for St Peter’s. When over the centuries the painting had lost much of its radiance, Pope Innocent XIII ordered that it be retouched. This painting represents the Patriarch raising the host that had
frozen in his hands while he was celebrating Mass, with the Pope attending.”
(DOUAIHY, Chronologie des Patriarches Maronites, 24).

These Patriarchs did not leave behind them great works, such as fine Churches or castles or universities. Nevertheless, they succeeded like the Apostles in watching over their flocks as mothers and fathers do over their children, and to pass on to them the teachings of Our Lord. They formed a people full of the faith, blessing when insulted and enduring when persecuted. When at last they had completed their labors in one place, they carried the torch and went elsewhere.

For three centuries, the Maronites were cut off from the rest of the world, blockaded with in their mountains; and when the Crusaders swarmed into the East, their discovery of the Maronites came as a surprise. The Holy See itself was astonished to learn of their continued existence when their disappearance had been taken for granted. Subsequently there were strong ties formed between the Maronites and the Crusaders, particularly after the arrival in the East of St Louis, King of France.

During the thirteenth century, Lebanon knew some decades of relative peace. The Maronites were even able to undertake the construction of a number of Churches, an activity which Patriarch DOUAIHY recorded as follows: “At that time, Christianity spread throughout the East and was openly proclaimed. Bronze bells were rung to summon the faithful to prayer and to the sacred services. Those who received the outpourings of God’s grace founded convents and built Churches, for the people yearned to serve the Almighty and to perform good deeds. Father Basil of Bsharri had three daughters: Mariam, Thecla, and Salomeh. Mariam constructed the shrine of St Saba in Bsharri in Mount Lebanon; Salomeh, that of St Daniel in Hadath; and Thecla, that of St George in Bkerkasha as well as two churches in Koura...” (The Annals, 104)

**The Pallium**

Although he had received an invitation from Pope Eugene IV to attend the Council of Florence in person, “the Maronite Patriarch sent Fra Juan as his delegate, being motivated by concern about the risks of the voyage. Fra Juan had an audience with the Pope, at that time presiding over the works of the Council, after which he returned to Lebanon bearing the Pallium.”

“When the worthy friar reached Tripoli, there was a large crowd who came to greet him; unfortunately however, there were also soldiers sent by the governor to arrest him, the official in question being persuaded that the Christians had met in Florence to prepare the launching of another crusade against the Muslims of Syria. On learning of the envoy’s misfortune, the Patriarch sent emissaries to reassure the governor about Fra Juan’s intentions. After having pocketed a substantial bribe, the governor set his prisoner free after the latter had promised to return after completing his mission. Fra Juan made his way up to Our Lady of Mayfuk, which was then the seat of the Patriarch, and delivered him the Pallium together with a letter from Pope Eugene IV. But he then set off for Rome again, this time passing through Beirut and ignoring his earlier promise to the governor of Tripoli, who naturally enough flew into a rage and sent his soldiers to
arrest both the Patriarch and other leading personalities. Finding nobody at the patriarchal residence, he plundered and set fire to the houses around and even killed a number of the local inhabitants. Those of his men who continued the search for the Patriarch destroyed the monastery, killing some of the monks and taking the others in chains to Tripoli.” “The Patriarch was obliged to leave the monastery of Mayfuk and from then on lived under the protection of Jacob, Mukaddam of Bsharri.” (DOUAIHY, The Annals, 210).

**Wadi Qannoubine**

As one advances into the deep-cut valley of Kannoubine, one is surrounded by mountains towering over the gorge, leaving only a patch of the sky visible overhead. If one looks down from the shoulder of one of the great mountains into the three-thousand-foot depths of the gorge below, one is overwhelmed by a sense of power, and one wants to seize some twisted tree-trunk or jutting crag so as not go falling into the vast space between plunging cliffs. One European traveler recounted how the Patriarch, like a second Moses risen from the pages of the Old Testament, guided his people from his austere retreat among the rocks. Our Lady of Kannoubine was the seat of 24 Patriarchs between 1440 and 1823. They were:

John of Jaj (1440-1445), Jacob of Hadeth (1445-1468), Joseph of Hadeth (1468-1492), Symeon of Hadeth (1492-1524), Moussa AKARI of Barida (1524-1567), Michael RIZZI of Bkoufa (1567-1581), Sarkis RIZZI of Bkoufa (1581-1596), Joseph RIZZI of Bkoufa (1596-1608), John MAKHLOUF of Ehden (1608-1633), George OMAIRA of Ehden (1633-1644), Joseph HALIB of Akoura (1644-1648), John Bawab of Safra (1648-1656), George Rizkallah of Bseb’el (1656-1670), Stephen DOUAIHY of Ehden (1670-1704), Gabriel of Blaouza (1704-1705), Jacob AWAD of Hasrour (1705-1733), Joseph DERGHAM Khazen of Ghosta (1733-1742), Symeon AWAD of Hasrour (1743-1756), Toubia EL KHAZEN of Bekaa Kanaan (1756-1766), Joseph STEPHAN of Ghosta (1766-1793), Michael FADEL of Beirut (1793-1795), Philip GEMAYEL of Bikfaya (1795-1796), Joseph TYAN of Beirut (1796-1808), John HELOU of Ghosta (1808-1823).

All of those named above were God-fearing men, servants of their people. The valley stands witness to their holiness and the sincerity of their quest for God through austerity and frugality. People said of them, “Their crosses are of wood, but their hearts are of gold.”

If must be said here that the hardships endured by the Maronites were not entirely to their disadvantage. Their sufferings united the people under their leaders, in turn under the authority of the Patriarch. The Mukaddam of Bsharri was the chief of his whole region. In this way, some semblance of peace and order was established. But even the times of peace were not without trouble, as may be seen from this report made by a traveler who visited Kannoubine in 1475: “The Maronite nation has lived under occupation enduring continuous oppression and tyranny. All over Lebanon one finds ruin, tears, and terror. Under the pretext of gathering a certain tax called the ‘Gezia,’ the authorities strip the peasants of all their belongings and beat them with sticks, and torture them in order to extract from them all that they possess. Many would
have perished had not their aged patriarch, Peter son of Hassan, come to their rescue. Terrified by the perils that threatened his people, the Patriarch gave away all the revenues of the Church to satisfy the rapacity of the tyrants. "The door of the patriarchal monastery was sealed, and the Patriarch sometimes had to hide in caves as did Popes Urban and Sylvester." (Marcellin de Civezza, Histoire universelle des missions franciscaines, Paris 1858, vol. 3, p. 209)

In Wadi Kannoubine, the Maronites heard the Gospel and lived by it. Theirs was a life of sacrifice inspired by the true faith and by hope, and so their lives were directed. They were an example of unity and love. In Wadi Kannoubine the Maronites had no need to be urged to pray. Wadi Kannoubine is in itself an invitation to the forgetfulness of self, to meditation, and to prayer, an invitation that the Maronites did not refuse. "They spent their time as the first Christians did, learning from the Apostles." (Acts II:42) Some of them felt the need to live a life more fully devoted to prayer; many men and women sought God away from the haunts of men, and soon the caves in the valley became the retreats of hermits devoted to the inner life of union with the Creator.

The Maronites at that time were always under the threat of famine through failure of the crops. They were also under the threat of attack on their persons whenever they went out to their fields. But they lived without hate towards any, anxious only to fulfill their mission in this world. They were the Apostles of Jesus Christ. They labored in patience and in hope. They looked on their enemies as people for whom Jesus had died, people to whom they must convey the message of the Gospel. They made such progress in virtue that in 1515 Pope Leo could write them a letter of encouragement in which he said: “You have acted without allowing the persecutions and the hardship inflicted on you by the infidels, enemies of Our Savior, and from the heretics and schismatic, to turn you away from the faith of Christ.”

The Maronite College of Rome

On July 5th, 1584, Pope Gregory inaugurated the Maronite College in Rome, satisfying the aspirations of the community and opening to its students the way to success. In his bull the Pope declared:

“We hope that the students of this college during the days ahead, after being formed in piety and the true religion, which are of the tree of Sion and of the teaching of the Roman Church, head of all the Churches, will return home to the cedars of Lebanon to serve their community, renewing in their country faith in God.”

“This is why, with full knowledge of the facts and by virtue of our apostolic authority, we establish the Maronite College, where the students of this community may learn good behavior, devotion, the true doctrine, and all the virtues which every Christian must have.”

With the arrival of the first students in Rome, the dreams of the Pope became a reality, and the whole Maronite community began to emerge from the shadows. More than that, the Maronite community now had means of access to Europe and to the world beyond,
and was able to play its role as an intermediary between East and West.

Many eminent clerics were trained in the Maronite College, the most famous being Patriarch DOUAIHY, “who visited every diocese to choose holy and educated priests. He examined the liturgical books, corrected the errors introduced into them by the copyists, read and adapted the works of historians, both eastern and western, and wrote books some of which are still unpublished.” (Patriarch Jacob AWAD) Others worthy of note include Joseph Assemani, appointed archivist in the Vatican Library, Gabriel SIONITE, professor first in Rome and then in Paris in the Royal College as well as interpreter to King Louis XIII, Echellensis, whose career exactly paralleled that of Gabriel SIONITE, and Mirhej Ben Namroun, also professor and interpreter.

The Patriarchs were now in a position to encourage the education of their people. As the famous Lebanese Synod said:

“In the name of Jesus Christ we urge you all, the ordinaries of the dioceses, of the towns, villages and hamlets, and of the convents, to work together to encourage this undertaking, which will bear much fruit. The chiefs of the people must find teachers wherever they can, and take the names of all the children able to learn, and order the parents to bring their children to school even against their will. If they are orphans or if they are poor, let the church or the monastery feed them, and if it cannot, let it contribute one half of the cost and the parents the other.” (The Lebanese Synod, 529)

Now western religious communities began to settle in Lebanon. The Capuchins were the first in 1626, followed in 1635 by the Carmelites and in 1656 by the Jesuits. The process went steadily ahead.

These religious orders came in order to serve the Lebanese. They opened schools in which the youth of the country were formed, schools whose academic level was on a par with those of Europe itself.

Schools were opened one after the other, until there was one adjoining every Maronite Church. Some, such as those of Ain Warka, Mar Abda, and Haouka, flourished and gained a reputation for themselves. Once the Lebanese, at that time mostly Maronites, had acquired a good education, they were at the forefront of Arab intellectual progress, and played a leading role in the cultural Renaissance of the Middle East.

First Maronite Order

“In 1694, Gabriel HAIFA, Abdallah BEN ABDEL-AHAD Qara’li, and Youssef BEN ALBETEN, approached Patriarch DOUAIHY to request his permission to establish a religious community that follows a religious rule and constitutions under the authority of superiors who would be under a superior general. The members would take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, under the patronage of St Anthony, the father of hermits. The Patriarch looked favorably on their demand, thanked them, and blessed their enterprise.” (Debs, 253)
The beginning of the eighteenth century found the Maronites divided by two currents. One group wanted to preserve the Maronite traditions, while the others were in favor of the Latinization. The holding of a synod became necessary to heal the divisions and to restore to the community its previous luster. This synod opened at Louaizeh in 1736 and was the most comprehensive to be held in modern times.

It was useful to the community, as it provided guidelines for the ending of chaos and the healing of divisions. But it also limited the authority of the Patriarch and favored the liberal Latinizing tendency. It did not provide definitive solutions and left the community in a condition that was by no means entirely healthy. In the region of Jbeil, the Maronites suffered from famine, hardship, and privation, bearing with their lot in patience and silence. When pursued by enemies, they took to flight, and history speaks of no protest on their part, as if they had acknowledged their guilt. Their wretched condition was accepted as a punishment for sin. When the Mamlouks vented their wrath on the Maronites, no murmur rose from their victims. Their muqaddams received the sub-diaconate as a way of turning a page on the past and accepting the authority of the Patriarch.

In Wadi Kannoubine, too, the Maronites endured famine and privation, and were pursued by enemies. But here they made themselves heard. In Jbeil they had kept silence, but in Wadi Kannoubine they did not accept to be downtrodden. Was this because something around them had changed? Was it because they were in a place of surer refuge, unlike Jbeil? Wadi Kannoubine was indeed their last stronghold, and it was lost all would be lost. Now the Maronite people reacted with vigor and initiative. Men and women devoted to prayer, and particularly to the life of the hermitage, increased in number. Schools were opened and the pupils flowed in. Religious orders were founded, and after division a synod was held.

Such a brief summing-up is not without truth. The fact is that Nature has a force of its own. Jbeil is a region of serenity and a school of wisdom, where the Maronites learnt peace of mind. The adjoining sea extended in tranquil vastness. Wadi Kannoubine, however, is all crag and mountain rock, soaring heights and plunging depths. It is a land still bearing the imprint of its Creator, and is a source of revelation and inspiration to action. There the Maronite has been schooled in forcefulness and obstinacy, to become a man of bold initiative.

In Wadi Kannoubine one feels a force conducive to prayer and meditation, to thought and to action. There, a man can realize that he is both dust and spirit. He feels the force of the soil and its attraction, and remembers the words to Holy Scripture: “Dust and ashes art thou, O man, and to dust and ashes thou shalt return.” He feels also the force of the spirit, and again recalls the words of Holy Scripture: “In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved over the waters.” (Genesis I, 1, 2) At Wadi Kannoubine the poet is a poet, the husbandman is a husbandman, and the Christian is a Christian. At Wadi Kannoubine, a man is known for what he is, either cold
or hot, as is said in the Apocalypse of St John: “I know what you have done; I know that you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other. But because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I am going to spit you out of my mouth.” (Apocalypse III: 15 -16). The Maronites of Wadi Kannoubine had not been at all cold. Their difficulties and their sufferings had marked them. They mourned but they took stock of themselves, and entered on a new life. As Jbeil was the Maronites’ Garden of Olives, so Wadi Kannoubine was their road to Golgotha, and there remained for them only the triumph of the Resurrection. In 1823 the patriarchal seat was transferred to Dimane for the summer and Bkerke for the winter. The Maronites stood now in expectation of finding glory after their long history of suffering and tribulation. Wadi Kannoubine was where the Patriarch took refuge during the period of great hardship, which lasted 383 years, from 1440 to 1823. As peace slowly returned, the Patriarchs envisaged the transfer of their seat to Dimane. The first Patriarch to consider such a move was Youssef HOBAISH, who occupied a house overlooking the valley and belonging to a partner in ownership of a farm west of the village. But the first to act on the idea was Patriarch Hanna EL HAJJ, who built the Patriarchal residence in Dimane now known as the Old Residence, in the center of the village, while near it he erected the church of St John-Maron, now the parish Church. The present residence was the work of Patriarch Elias HOAYEK, who laid the foundation stone on September 28, 1899. The architect was the Lazarist Brother Leonard, who had previously planned the residence at Bkerke.

The Patriarch had no winter residence, and therefore considered the construction of one at Bkerke.

In 1703, cloister of Bkerke was built by Sheikh Khatar EL KHAZEN. It had a little Church with a presbytery alongside. In 1730, it was taken in charge by the Antonine order. In 1750, Bishop Germanos SAKR and Sister Hindyieh Oujaymeh took it as a house for the Congregation of the Sacred Heart. In 1779, an apostolic decree was issued dissolving the Congregation of the Sacred Heart and putting the house at the disposition of the Maronite community for any useful purpose. In 1786, the Maronite Synod of Bishops declared that Bkerki should be a dependency of the residence at Kannoubine. In 1890, Patriarch Hanna EL HAJJ restored it, adding part of the ground floor and the whole of the upper story. Brother Leonard, the Lazarist, was the architect. In 1970, Patriarch Paul MEOUSHI had various repairs made.

In 1982, Patriarch Anthony KHORAISH had the main gate made. In 1995, patriarch Nasrallah SFEIR enlarged the residence with a new building for the archives and for the patriarchal exhibition. He also made a cemetery for the Patriarchs and embellished the church with fine stained-glass windows. Nine Patriarchs have used Dimane as a summer residence and Bkerki as a winter one: Youssef HOBAISH of Sahel Alma (1823-1845), Youssef EL KHAZEN of Ajaltoun (1845-1854), Boulos MASSAD of Ashkout (1854-1890), Hanna EL HAJJ of Dlebta (1890-1898), Elias HOAYEK of Hilta (1898-1931), Antoun Aride of Bsharri (1932-1955), Boulos MEOUSHI of Jezzine (1955-1975), Anthony KHORAISH of Ain Ibl (1975-1986), Nasrallah SFEIR of Reyfoun (1986)

All these Patriarchs bore a heavy burden of responsibility, working for the unity of their
flock. Their main concern has been the independence of Lebanon.

In fact, despite the Mamlouk occupation and the especially redoubtable Ottoman occupation, the Maronites have always managed to preserve a certain degree of autonomy. Their Patriarch refused the decree by virtue of which the Sublime Porte used to recognize the Patriarch, and so they have always been leading their country towards total independence and seeking to preserve all that they achieved.

1860

Events followed in rapid succession. After the troubles of 1860 between the Maronites and the Druzes, there came massive emigration, World War I, and then conflicts with brother against brother. The tragedy of 1860 resulted in the death of some ten thousand Maronites, and in a deep division between the Maronites and the Druzes. Many Maronites were forced to leave their homeland and seek their fortune abroad. The coexistence of the communities was called into question.

Then during World War I a blockade was imposed on the Lebanese Mountains and hundreds of thousands starved. The Church opened its doors to the poor. Patriarch Anthony ARIDA set up a cement-making factory and also the Kadisha Electricity Company. These provided jobs for hundreds of young men. Such initiatives had a positive effect, helping forward the process of reconciliation to strengthen national unity. After the war, there was a return to the traditional pattern of life. Now that the Maronites had a more normal existence, there were two tendencies dividing them. Conflict was renewed, and the enemy outside entered the house. Coming to the most recent part of the contemporary history of our community, we find selfishness as the dominating force driving the hearts of the faithful. Division reached the point where members were finally at each other’s throats and carrying out massacres.

This egoism has inevitable repercussions on the lives of the faithful. There was a moral collapse, and many people went abroad, as their predecessors had done after the events of 1860.

The Independent Lebanon

Independence was not easy to achieve. After the Ottoman withdrawal, the diverging political orientations of the seventeen Lebanese communities made agreement among them difficult. However, every one of the Maronite Patriarchs knew his mission as an Apostle of peace. His presence could be felt everywhere, supporting every effort for the public good and opposing injustice. All the Lebanese would trust him, for they knew he could be relied on as working for national unity and independence. In 1919, patriarch Elias HOAYEK as delegated by the Lebanese people to go to the Peace Conference at Versailles, and to demand independence on their behalf. The Patriarch went to Versailles explained the problems of Lebanon, negotiated effectively, and accomplished his mission. He thus put the future of Lebanon on a firm footing and obtained satisfaction for the national aspirations.
The Patriarchs who succeeded Elias HOAYEK all followed his example. “No to monopolies!” said Patriarch ARIDA. “No to injustice!” said Patriarch AFEOUSHI. “No to fratricidal strife!” said Patriarch KHORAISH. “No to hegemony!” said Patriarch SFEIR. But it was always “Yes!” For sovereignty and freedom of decision. The Patriarchs looked beyond narrow confines and worked not only on behalf of their community but on behalf of all the Lebanese. Acting in this spirit, they helped strengthen national unity and mutual understanding among the communities. This proved to be a source of wealth for the country, as Lebanon swung into an era of development.

When the worst period of trial came to an end, the Patriarch moved to Dimane in summer and to Bkerke in winter. The Maronites thought that glory now awaited them and happiness unalloyed. However, they were to learn that they had a long road to tread before they could achieve their ambitions.

The Maronite Diaspora

Did this mark the end of all the aspirations of the Maronites? Let us turn back to the very beginnings of the Church. “That very day the Church in Jerusalem began to suffer cruel persecution. All the believers, except the Apostles, were scattered throughout the provinces of Judea and Samaria… The believers who were scattered went everywhere, preaching the message.” (Acts VIII. 1/4).

A similar movement in the history of the Maronites in Lebanon paralleled this development in the early history of the Church in Jerusalem. The Maronites set out for foreign parts and in doing so spread the message of St Maron throughout the world. The Maronites of the Diaspora, estimated to number some four million, played a humanistic role wherever they went, and wherever they went they succeeded, the most famous among them being Khalil GIBRAN. However, they did not forget the suffering land of Lebanon, which they had once left; they helped it financially and politically with a view to their future return. Emigration meant no setback for the community, and the Maronites were by no means doomed to extinction.

The New Maronite Saints

Saint Charbel Makhlouf, whom Pope Paul VI canonized on October 9th, 1977, and Blessed Rafca Rayess, whom Pope John-Paul II beatified on November 17th, 1985, may help us as examples of that multitude of Maronites who followed Jesus Christ in silence, doing his will, and forgetting themselves for the sake of their Savior and of His Gospel. Charbel and Rafca represent those Maronites who said “No!” to evil and who incarnated that Maronite spirituality whose youth is ever renewed. Self-seeking has hampered this mission, assumed by the Maronites down the centuries. It may be thought to have been enfeebled to the point where it appears non-existent. However, there can be no doubt that it will revive, that love will prevail, and that the Maronites will once again play their leading role.

**His Eminence Beatitude Cardinal Bechara Boutros al-Rahi**

**His Beatitude Bechara Boutros al-Rahi**

*Patriarch of Antioch and The Whole Levant*

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**Orders**

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Patriarch Mar Bechara Boutros al-Rahi (born 25 February 1940) is the 77th Syriac Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, a position he has held since 15 March 2011, succeeding Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir.

**Early life**
Bechara Boutros al-Rahi was born in Himlaya, Matn District, Lebanon on 25 February 1940. He attended Collège Notre Dame de Jamhour, a Jesuit school in Lebanon. He entered the Mariamite Maronite Order on 31 July 1962 and was ordained as a priest on 3 September 1967. From 1967 to 1975 he has been responsible for the Arabic transmissions of Vatican Radio. In 1975 he was awarded a Ph.D. in canon and civil law. He also studied for three years at the Lateran University in Rome.

**Religious positions**
He was consecrated as auxiliary bishop of Antioch on 12 July 1986, by Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir and on 9 June 1990, he was appointed bishop of Byblos. In 2003 he was elected Secretary of the Maronite Synod, and in 2009 he was appointed President of the Lebanese Episcopal Commission for the Media.

**Maronite patriarch**
At 71, he was elected Patriarch of the Maronites on 15 March 2011, after getting more than two-thirds of the votes of the 39 bishops and replacing Nasrallah Sfeir. The Mass for the inauguration of his patriarchate took place on 25 March 2011, in Bkerké, the see of the Maronite Catholic Patriarchate. As is customary for all Maronite patriarchs Rahi took the additional name Boutros, that of Saint Peter, who briefly held the See of Antioch before moving to Rome to become bishop there. On 7 March 2012 he was appointed a member of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. Bechara Boutros al-Rahi was created a Cardinal by Pope Benedict XVI in a consistory on 24 November 2012.

**Religio-political views**
In April 2011 Patriarch Rai said that, for the sake of communion and love, he would work "to establish a sincere and complete dialogue" with Muslims "and build together a future in common life and cooperation." Patriarch Rai said his predecessor "struggled
with insistence to free both the national decision-making and the land of Lebanon from all forms of tutelage and occupation, worked for reconciliation in Mount Lebanon and realized needed church reforms. All of these constitute an extension of the church's springtime started by the Second Vatican Council.

Syria and Hezbollah

In September 2011, some of the Christian community of Lebanon, partly supportive of the March 14 alliance, were upset over his controversial comments in Paris, France supporting Hezbollah’s right to hold arms in defense against Israel and that the 2011 Syrian protests could awaken the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood if President Bashar al-Assad was removed from office. The opposition March 14 alliance criticized him for the comments and sought clarification from him, especially seeing that his predecessor patriarch Sfeir had very different views and was almost fanatically supportive of the Lebanese Forces, the main March 14 Christian party.

However the Christians of the March 8 alliance welcomed his comments. Prime Minister Najib Mikati also supported his stance saying "The Maronite patriarch spoke about a part [of the problem]. No one is against the resistance’s arms as long as [Israeli] occupation continues. There is Lebanese unanimity on the resistance’s arms in the face of [Israeli] occupation." He said that after his meeting with al-Rahi that he was satisfied with the explanation and that he was "very relieved and reassured by the Patriarch’s wisdom." President Michel Suleiman said that al-Rahi's comments were not "politics or political employment" and that he had an all-encompassing vision to show the French. He also added that "the Patriarch is not in need of anyone to defend him and his positions emanate from his central role as a person in charge of Lebanon's and the Middle East's Christians and that of Lebanon's independence and sovereignty;" and that "the patriarch does not need to be defended, and his stances represent his way of taking responsibility for Lebanon’s Christians."

Parliament speaker Nabih Berri said that Rai’s "comments in Paris protect Lebanon from danger and I agree with what he stated and affirm his vision that is rooted in both a religious and national background" and that "If the situation further deteriorated in Syria and we reached a more radical rule than the current rule, like the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood, Christians there would pay the price, either in the form of killings or displacement. Here is the picture of Iraq in front of us." Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun expressed support for al-Rahi and added that no one wants the al-Assad regime to fall. "Rai’s statements express the concerns of the minorities because he is entrusted with the Synod for the Middle East. Gradual changes doesn’t harm stability and wouldn’t get Syria into the [same] troubles as Palestine, Iraq, Libya and Yemen. [As some of the Syrian demonstrators are armed and are destroying the country] the Syrian government cannot but bring order to the country." Former 14 March Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt, who sits with the incumbent March 8 alliance in government, also criticized Rai's assessment of Hezbollah’s arms with the fate of the Middle East conflict on the grounds that "Lebanon cannot remain hostage to regional conflicts." He also criticized Rai’s assessment of regime change in Syria as posing a threat to Christians in the country.
In an interview with Reuters on 4 March 2012, al-Rahi said: "All regimes in the Arab world have Islam as a state religion, except for Syria. It stands out for not saying it is an Islamic state...The closest thing to democracy [in the Arab world] is Syria."

**Awards**

In 2007 he received the award of the National Order of the Cedar. In 2011 he was decorated with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor by the President of France Nicholas Sarkozy

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bechara_Boutros_al-Rahi

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**Pope elevates Rai and 5 other cardinals**

By Nicole Winfield

Lebanon's Beshara Boutros al-Rai (L) is greeted by US cardinal Bernard Francis Law upon arrival for a ceremony where the pontiff will appoint him as one of the six new cardinals on November 24, 2012 at St Peter's basilica at the Vatican. AFP PHOTO / VINCENZO PINTO

VATICAN CITY: Lebanon’s Beshara Rai is among six new cardinals who joined the elite club of churchmen who will elect the next pope Saturday, bringing a more geographically diverse mix into the College of Cardinals.

Pope Benedict XVI presided over the ceremony in St. Peter’s Basilica to formally elevate the six men, who hail from Colombia, India, Nigeria, the Philippines and the United States as well as Lebanon. As Benedict read each name aloud in Latin, applause and cheers erupted from the pews.

Aside from Archbishop James Harvey, the new cardinals are: Abuja, Nigeria Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan; Bogota, Colombia Archbishop Ruben Salazar Gomez; Manila, Philippines Archbishop Luis Antonio Tagle; and the major Archbishop of the Trivandrum of the Siro- Malankaresi in India, His Beatitude Baselios Cleemis Thottunkal.

Rai is the fourth patriarch from Lebanon to be appointed cardinal, alongside Patriarchs Nasrallah Butros Sfeir, Anthony Peter Khoraish and Boulos Meouchi, who was the first Lebanese to be appointed cardinal in 1965.


Note: Dr. Ramsay F. Dass, President of the American Middle East Christians Congress, was invited and attended the festivities and the auspicious ceremonies in the Vatican.
Chapter Eleven:
The Melkite Heritage
A Short History of the Melkite Church

The Church began on the day of Pentecost when the Apostles followed Jesus' command to preach the Gospel on the streets of Jerusalem. From there the Apostles preached in all the great centers of the Roman Empire. The first converts were Jews, but soon the Church began to appeal to gentiles of all nationalities: Romans, Greeks, Syrians, Egyptians and Africans. The message of the Gospel was heard even at the far reaches of the Roman Empire.

Antioch was a major city in the Eastern Roman Empire. As an important stop along the east-west trade route it had a large and ethnically diverse population. It was here that St. Peter and St. Paul preached to a Christian community of both Jews and gentiles and where the followers of Jesus were first known as "Christians." As the Christian Church spread throughout the Empire and beyond, five major administrative centers developed into the first Patriarchates: Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Rome and finally, in the 4th Century, Constantinople. The Bishop at each of these five centers was known as the Patriarch, and the Patriarch of Rome was considered "first among equals" by the others.

Each Patriarchate developed its own liturgy and theology, often related very closely to the customs and modes of thought of the people in its respective part of the Empire. In the 4th and 5th Centuries serious disagreements about the nature of Jesus arose. One priest, Arius, taught that Jesus had only a human nature: he was merely a great man. Another priest, Nestorius, taught that there were actually distinct persons in Jesus Christ. Yet another theologian taught that Christ had only a divine nature, that His human form was merely a disguise (Monophysite heresy). The Church of Antioch held to the true faith that Jesus has two natures: He is at once fully human and fully divine. This truth was taught by the Emperor at Constantinople, but many Christians who resented the rule of the Greeks would not accept the Emperor's teaching. Those who followed the true faith were called "malkaya" or "followers of the emperor."

Unfortunately, the Church of Antioch split into two factions: the Orthodox (Melkite) faction and the Jacobite faction which adhered to the idea that Jesus' nature was solely Divine.

By the end of the 5th Century the Melkite Church grew to encompass Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem. The Church developed a strong and flourishing spiritual life. Many of its saints are revered in both Eastern and Western Churches to this day: Ignatius of Antioch, John Chrysostom, Barbara, John of Damascus, Cosmas and Damian, Ephram the Syrian, Maron, Romanos the Melodist and Thallelaeus the Physician.

The city of Antioch suffered many invasions through the centuries, and the fortunes of the Patriarchate rose and fell with successive waves of invaders. In 637 Antioch fell to the Muslim Arabs and was not recovered by the Byzantine Roman Empire until 969. It was during this period of Muslim occupation that the Church felt persecution but
managed to maintain a strong spiritual life. St. John of Damascus, while serving as a secretary to the Muslim ruler, wrote the beautiful canon for our Easter Matins service and the deeply moving canon for our funeral service as well.

The fierce Seljuk Turks conquered Antioch in 1084 and imposed harsh restrictions on the practice of Christianity. Melkite Christians expected relief from their sufferings when ten years later Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade and thousands of European Knights set out to recapture the Holy Land from the Turks. During the rule of the Mamluks, who overran Antioch in 1268, the Patriarch was banished from Antioch; the Patriarchate moved to Damascus and has been there ever since.

The churches of Rome and Constantinople excommunicated each other in 1054, but the Melkite Patriarch of Antioch tried to promote good relations between both churches. Nevertheless, the political situation forced the Melkite Patriarch under the protection of Constantinople to break communion with Rome. After the Crusades, when many European traders established permanent trading contacts in the Middle East, the Melkite Church once again came in contact with Europeans, primarily French merchants. The foreign merchants often enjoyed greater freedom of religion than the Melkites living under the rule of the Ottoman Turks. Factions of the Melkite Church sought to bring the Patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople together once again, but the differences were perceived as too great. So, for religious and economic reasons the Patriarch of Antioch split again: the election of Patriarch Cyril Tanas in 1724 brought the Melkite Patriarchate into communion with Rome. Opponents formed the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, which remains our sister church to this day.

Over the 18th and 19th Centuries western European powers conquered territory throughout the world. In the late 19th Century many Melkites immigrated to the United States and Latin America, determined to retain something of their Melkite identity. These immigrants organized the first parishes and requested priests from the Middle East to serve their spiritual needs. In response, the Patriarchs sent many priests from the ranks of the celibate clergy to act as "circuit riders" in the United States. These priests held services all across the country, organized parishes where local Melkites were willing to make the commitment and functioned under the jurisdiction of Latin Rite Bishops. It was in this way that the Melkite churches in the United States were begun.

Before the Second Vatican Council a group of prominent Melkite clergy stationed at the seminary in Cairo advocated a restoration of Eastern Theology and Liturgy in the Melkite Church. Archbishop Joseph Tawil was an original member of the Cairo group, which expressed considerable influence on the Second Vatican Council and prompted a renewal of the Melkite liturgy according to its ancient traditions. This liturgical and theological renewal of the Melkite Church has made perhaps the greatest headway in the United States, especially since the creation of a Melkite episcopate in the United States in 1966. Today the Melkite Church in America stands as a living witness to the universality of the Church, to the truth that "in Christ there is no East or West.

SOURCE: http://www.stanndanbury.org/history.htm
The History of Melkites

Historical Introduction

Here are some extracts taken at length from a synthesis made by Mgr Joseph Nasrallah, the Exarch in Paris, of his "HISTOIRE de L'EGLISE MELCHITE des ORIGINES à NOS JOURS" (History of the Melkite Church from its Origins to the Present Day), published in Le Lien.

Unlike the other oriental churches, Catholic or Orthodox, the Melkite Church is not a national church. In the canonical acceptation of the word it is a particular Church, spread throughout the Arab Middle East and throughout a diaspora of ever increasing extent. It is the legitimate heir of the three apostolic sees of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Its origins are inextricably bound up with the preaching of the Gospel in the Greco-Roman world of the Eastern Mediterranean and with the extension of Christianity beyond the limits of the Empire. The setting up of the patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, the first two at the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) and the third at Chalcedon (451 A.D.), gave it its form and made of it a territorial and juridical entity.

The Melkite Church owes its character as a particular church to two loyalties, one to the Empire of Byzantium and the other to the first seven ecumenical councils. However, it was only towards the end of the fifth century that it took the name of Melkite. This appellation, which was invented by its Monophysite detractors to stigmatize its fidelity to Marcian the Emperor (=malka in Syriac) and to the council which he had called at Chalcedon, is the distinguishing label marking its orthodoxy in relation to the cattolica.

In our day, sociologically speaking the Melkite Church offers an astonishing ethnic homogeneity; its patriarch, its episcopate, its clergy both regular and secular, its faithful, are mostly Arabic speaking.

With the Arabo-Islamic conquest of the seventh century, the world of the Melkite patriarchates passed under non-Christian domination; Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem were part of the Islamic world up to and including the Ottoman domination, which started in 1516. With rare exceptions during the Mameluke rule, the Christians did not undergo persecution so much as a regime of vexation and subjection; they were now dhimmis or protected people. They assumed with resignation and courage their new role as witnesses to Christ in the territory of Islam. As they were no longer able to play a political role, the Melkites, like the Jacobites and Nestorians, turned towards the liberal professions, especially medicine, and were the artisans of the translation into Arabic of the philosophical, medical and scientific heritage of ancient Greece.

The Byzantine reconquest of Antioch lasted no more than a century, from 960 to 1085 A.D. It had as consequence the Byzantinization of the liturgy of the three patriarchates, and the adaptation of the liturgical usage and customs of the imperial city was more or less accomplished at Antioch by the end of the thirteenth Century.
But there was something which not even the halo surrounding the ecumenical throne of Constantinople had been able to do, and that was the dragging of the Melkite Church into schism; now, however, the Crusaders prepared the way for it. What happened was that Latin patriarchs and bishops replaced the Melkite hierarchy everywhere except at Alexandria. The local Church was forced to submit to a foreign Church. A kind of estrangement grew up between the two, without the former however actually breaking off its relations with Rome.

The reign of the Mamelukes from 1250 to 1516 not only put an end to the existence of Frankish possessions in the East, but was itself a crucial period for the Christian communities; persecutions, destruction and massacres were their almost daily lot. It was during the reign of these slaves invested with authority that the number of Christians went sharply down, with whole regions either Islamized or emptied of their population. However, the faithful few held on to their mission, which took on more and more a character of witness and of fidelity to Christ. Confessors and martyrs were not lacking.

The Ottoman conquest (1516 to 1918) was no more clement, at least until the seventeenth century. For a long time now, Christians had no longer been considered as "protected" persons but were viewed as no better than infidels. The Pashas were under no restraint in their dealings with this category under their administration, a category which had no legal means of protest.

Now all the East was under one authority alone, that of the Sultan, who knew how to get the most out of the situation. Constantinople became not only the political capital of an immense empire, but also the religious capital of the East, in the same way as Rome was of the West. The Ecumenical Patriarch was now given complete authority over the members of the Melkite hierarchy. Their confirmation and sometimes even their election depended on the Phanar. The hierarchies of Alexandria and Jerusalem were in consequence completely Hellenized, and from 1534 down to the present day their episcopal charges have been given to Greeks. So it was that the two patriarchates cut themselves off from the cattolica to embrace schism. Hellenism had no hold on Antioch, whose patriarchs were chosen from among the native clergy, and for the most part maintained some links with 14 Rome. Basically, the Patriarchate never faltered in its belief, even when one or other of its chief hierarchs happened to be more favorable to Constantinople than to Rome. A Church is formed of more than its head; it is composed also of bishops, clergy and people. The faithful bear within themselves a sense of the truth, a sure instinct which allows them to recognize it. Simply because Pope Honorius leaned towards monothelitism, has anyone ever seriously deduced that the Church of the West actually embraced this heresy?

The failure of the Union attempted at Florence served as a lesson for Rome. The establishment of formal communion with an oriental Church would have to be brought about by work at the base and not at the summit. During an early stage, various missionaries, including Jesuits, Capuchins, Carmelites and Franciscans, put themselves at the disposition of the local hierarchy and worked in co-operation with it. Pastors who
were not in formal communion with Rome encouraged their flocks to turn to the missionaries. The people felt the need for a deeper understanding of the traditional faith which they followed despite one thousand years of repression. They hoped to gain this from a clergy more instructed than their own. On both sides, the feeling was that there was one and the same faith which they shared. However, there was a fraction of the population which felt drawn by the high reputation of western culture and took over the Latin contribution in its entirety.

So it was that after some decades there appeared a new way of conceiving the traditional faith. The behavior of these new «Catholics» was viewed as treason by the group of those attached to their past and as a 15 deformation of their ancestral law. Consequently, communion in one faith with the cattolica, which had never ceased to flourish in the Patriarchate of Antioch, was called into question and two different conceptions of it made their appearance. The Antiochean identity became lost. one fraction of the faithful leaned towards Byzantium and became more Constantinopolitan than Antiochean, while the other fraction tended towards Rome, with a relationship that was Roman rather than faithful to the belief of the local Church The result was that at the death of Patriarch Athanasius in 1724, a double lineage of patriarchs came into existence, one Orthodox and the other Catholic. Both lines have lasted down to the present day.

1724 was indeed a fateful year; from now on there were two parallel hierarchies, two sister communities, driven apart under the complacent eye of the Turks, who granted the patriarchal and episcopal sees to those who offered them the most. Both sides had their martyrs and confessors. Henceforth, the two Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, followed two divergent ways and two different destinies.

The first one, the one which we are to talk about, namely the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, pushed on with its own internal organization. New monastic orders were founded and a clergy educated in Rome taught in the newly founded schools. A seminary was opened in Aïn Traz in 1811. Despite the difficulties of the period of growth, which lasted until the end of the eighteenth century, due above all to antagonisms between the new monastic congregations, the Melkite Church could stand on its own feet; local Church councils endowed it with a solid organization and so it extended and developed. Then in the nineteenth century, Providence provided it with two great patriarchs, Maximos Mazloum (1833 to 1855), and Gregory Joseph Sayour (1864 to 1897).

Three years after his election, Mazloum put the finishing touches to the canonical legislation of his Church, confirmed at the Councils of Aïn Traz in 1835 and of Jerusalem in 1849. He extended his care to the Patriarchate of Alexandria, for in their efforts to flee persecution at the hands of the Orthodox, many Catholics from Syria and Lebanon had emigrated to Egypt. Mazloum consecrated a bishop for them, sent them priests and provided the new parishes with churches and charitable foundations, and did as much for the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. But Mazloum is above all famous for
having obtained from the Sultan recognition of the complete independence of his Church from both the civil and ecclesiastical points of view, in the year 1848.

The long patriarchal reign of Gregory Joseph was both glorious and fertile. For thirty-three years, balancing his actions against their possible consequences on the capital work of the union of the Churches, he strove for the application of his great plan for the restoration of his Church. He wished for this to be done according to the pure oriental tradition and this explains his opposition to Vatican I for its declaration of the dogmas of the Primacy and Infallibility of the Pope in the meaning given them by the majority of the Fathers present, as he considered declaration of these dogmas to be inopportune. He struggled against Protestantism, which was penetrating the area in force, by founding the patriarchal colleges of Beirut in 1865 and of Damascus in 1875. In 1866 he re-opened the seminary of Aïn Traz, but most important of all it was he who was behind the founding of the seminary of St. Anne of Jerusalem in 1882. He took a most important part in the Eucharistic Congress of Jerusalem in 1893. His suggestions had in addition an important influence on the elaboration of the encyclical Orientalium Dignit as a veritable charter for the oriental Churches by which Pope Leo XIII ordered the strictest respect for the rights of the patriarchs and for the oriental discipline, correcting on several points the spirit of the majority of the Latin missionaries.

We all remember the outstanding personality of Maximos IV (1947-1967) and his action at Vatican II. It has been truly said of him that he was one of the Fathers who made the Council, to which he imparted many of the orientations that it took. Perhaps, when one considers the small number of the faithful of his Church, his audacity may appear to have bordered on temerity. But he was strongly aware that he was speaking on behalf of the "absent brother", the great Orthodox Church, which counts no less than two hundred million faithful. He drew his force and his effectiveness from the conception which he had of his Church as a bridge between Rome and Orthodoxy. Since his election to the Patriarchate on November 22, 1967, his successor, His Beatitude Maximos V Hakim, the present head of the Melkite Church, has firmly followed the way traced by his predecessors, while paying particular attention to the problem of the Diaspora of his Church; for in fact most of its members live outside the limits imposed on our Patriarchate.

J. Nasrallah, Exarque patriarcal, Paris

Antioche

When, in the fullness of time and "awaited by all the peoples" Christ was born of the Virgin Mary in Palestine(1), most of the world was under the civilizing influence of the "lex romana" and Antioch, situated where the Orontes returns between its banks, was the second most important city in the Empire(2). There are very interesting descriptions of Antioch, the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Seleucia, later to become the Roman province of Syria. This city, with a population of over 200,000, often received the imperial court and was the true capital of what was then called the East
Two important men of letters from Antioch, Liban and Saint John Chrisostomos, have testified in their writings to the greatness and beauty of the city. Of that former splendor, of the elegant villas described by Chrisostomos, the streets paved with marble and illuminated at night for which Antioch was renowned, nothing but memories and ruins remain.

Today, Antakia, as it is now known, is an unpretentious rural centre on Turkish soil. Then, however, when for the first time on earth the tidings that the Word had been made flesh and the coming of the Saviour were received, this city, notorious for its riches and even more so for its degenerate morals, could not be overlooked by the Twelve.

From Antioch, a center of international trade, great highways led to Damascus and Jerusalem, to Asia Minor and Egypt, to Persia and India. Antioch's connection with the beginning of the preaching of the gospel is of great significance: it was from here that the good tidings were brought to Syria and Persia, from here that Paul undertook his first apostolic journeys, here that Peter established his Bishopric before he went to Rome; and it was in Antioch that "Christians" were first so named. The fact that this most scandalous city of the East should become the Seat of the Prince of the Apostles is really philosophically Christian, in the words of Juvenal, that "vice should flow into the Tiber from the Orontes". Thus, a fresh stream began to flow from the Orontes to the Tiber, whose murmurings brought words of Hope and Love until the Word was preached on the very banks of the Tiber, from Rome itself, chosen as the new Seat of the throne of Peter.

The same was to happen with the cross which, on the Hill of Golgotha in Jerusalem, was used to "execute" Christ, now became the symbol of salvation; and the ignominious instrument of condemnation became the sign of holiness and honor.

(1) cf. rise Holy Bible.

(2) GLANVILLE DOWNEY, A History of Antioch in Syria, Princeton, 1961, with an extensive bibliography.

The Melkites

With freedom secured (in 313), the Church possessed a well defined territorial organization based on the civil administration (1).

On the occasion of the first Ecumenical Council in Nicaea in the year 325, the existing situation received juridical confirmation. According to the provisions of the various canons, specific powers were granted to the "metropolitans", i.e. to the bishops of the "metropolises", or capitals of the "provinces". The rights of the bishops having jurisdiction over the "metropolises" were also laid down. Canon 6(2) granted Alexandria special privileges in Egyptian territory, similar to those enjoyed by Rome in Italy. Antioch
was granted primacy over the East and Canon 7 conferred a similar privilege on Jerusalem.

In this way, the government of the Church was based on the jurisdictional powers held by the Sees of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem over the territories assigned to them, the overall primacy being attributed to the Holy See of Rome.

The title of the Bishops of these four Seats was that of Patriarch.

With the transfer of the capital of the empire to Constantinople, the city of Constantine gained considerable importance also within the ecclesiastical administration and eventually became a Patriarchal see. In the year 381, the second Ecumenical Council decreed that Constantinople should be honored with a primacy that was second only; to that of Rome, which would remain the See of the Successor of Peter.

The five patriarchal Sees formed the so called "Pentarchy", their Patriarchs being known as the five luminaries of the universe, the five heads and supports of the Church, the five senses of the ecclesiastic body of which Rome represented the eyes.

Under Justinian, imperial authority and the rights of the Patriarchs were consolidated. The Novella 123(3) set the order of precedence of the Patriarchal Seats as follows: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Furthermore, the consecration of metropolitan bishops and the convening of local councils would remain with the Patriarchs, as well as judicial rights and the right of control over the entire Patriarchate and that of dispatching personal ambassadors to other Patriarchates. In addition, the Patriarchs were granted the right to maintain a permanent Synod, a union of Bishops, to carry out and direct the main business of the Patriarchate.

The Pentarchy, which was virtually tantamount to a government by five territorial Popes, one of whom, the Pope of Rome, had universal primacy, collapsed in 1054 with the schism of Constantinople.

Centuries earlier, at the time of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 451, the Patriarchate of Antioch had undergone a severe crisis which led to a split in the Patriarchate itself. This crisis had been created by the Dyophysitic definition (4). The Monophysites, who acknowledge only one person in Christ, were condemned by the Council. They persisted in holding to their doctrine principally for political, anti-byzantine motives, since the emperor had become the Guarantor of the "orthodox" doctrine. To challenge the Council of Chalcedony signified a form of protest against imperial authority, against Constantinople. The term "Melchgite" (5) was thus coined to refer to the true believers, those who remained faithful to the Council doctrine and who followed imperial orthodoxy. The "orthodox" Patriarchate of Antioch has been called "Melkite" ever since.

The same occurred in Alexandria (6) and the Patriarch and the faithful who accepted the official doctrine were called "Melkites".
With the schism between Constantinople and Rome in 1054 the entire East virtually broke away from the West and the Eastern Patriarchates, up to that time in close contact with Rome, mostly rallied round the ideas of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. In order, however, to distinguish themselves from the heretics, whom they had always condemned and repudiated, the Church of the East, though now separated from Rome, insisted on calling themselves "orthodox", that is to say faithful to the true doctrine just as, in order to stress the universal character of its Primacy, the Holy See of Rome called itself "Catholic". Thus, in time, "orthodox" came to be applied to Christians belonging to a Church of the East that had broken away from Catholicism.

(1) In the year 292, Diocletian had divided the empire into 12 "Dioceses". In 395, Theodosius had decreed the division into the Eastern and Western empires, each which were divided into "Provinces". According to the "Notitia dignitatum" the Roman Empire around the end of the 4th century thus consisted of: The Empire of the East with the eastern Prefecture, comprising the "Dioceses" of Egypt (capital Alexandria) East (Antioch), Asia (Ephesus), Thrace (Heraclea) Pontus and the Prefecture of Illiria with the two "Dioceses" and Macedonia, the Empire of the West with the Italian Prefecture, comprising the Italian, African and Illyrican Prefectures and the Prefecture of Gaul with the "Dioceses" of Spain, Gaul and Britain.


(3) "Novella" is the name given the legal provision of the great legislator Justinian, author of the "Corpus iuris dVili5".

(4) That is, that the human and the divine in Christ constitute two natures.

(5) From "Melek" which in Syrian signifies King, Emperor.

(6) It was in Alexandria, in 460, that the expression "Melkite" was first used, to designate the "orthodox" faithful of the legitimate Patriarch of Alexandria, Times them Solofaciolo, who had the support of Emperor Leo 1

**Constantine's Peace**

After the first three hundred years of preaching Christianity, which were the most dangerous and difficult for the ecclesiastical community, peace finally came. Previously, after an initial period of tolerance, the imperial authority had enacted the infamous laws of repression and condemnation of the preaching or acceptance of the gospel. Any
violation of the law was punished by death. There were hosts of martyrs, that is, those "criminals" who confessed their faith and preferred to die rather than be condemned to losing their peace in Christ.

By now, most of the Empire's subjects were Christians and the time was ripe for a reconciliation between Church and State.

It was thus that Constantine the Great, in the year 313, promulgated his famous edict of Milan on tolerance for Christians after his famous vision of the flaming cross standing out against the sky with the words "IN HOC SIGNO VINCES", and following the victory of Maxentius at Ponte Milvio.

Through the wisdom of this young Serbian emperor, born in 280 in the town known today as Nish, peace between Church and State was accomplished. This peace was dependent, however, on the proviso that the Church recognize and support the authority of the State(1).

Constantine fell more and more under the Christian influence until, in the year 330, he transferred the imperial court to Byzantium and changed its name to Constantinople, thereby founding the Christian capital of the empire in deliberate opposition to Rome where pagan traditions were still rife. In 391, under Theodosius, Christianity was adopted as the religion of the State.

The imperial power was therefore considered the Garantor of doctrinal orthodoxy and the Protector of the organized community of the believers in Christ.

(1) An extensive study of the Roman Empire of the East has been made by GEORG STROGORSKY, Storia dell'Impero bizantino, Torino 1968.

The Patriarchate

Already in the 16th and 17th centuries, efforts toward a return to unity had been made by various Melkite Patriarchs of Antioch, now residing in Damascus where the See had been transferred in the 15th century after the destruction of Antioch by a violent earthquake.

Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries did everything they could to foster good will and, finally, in 1709, Patriarch Cyril V formally recognized the authority of the Pope. One of his successors, Cyril VI Thanas (1724-1759) completed the work of unification, but a Greek monk, Sylvester, had himself nominated Patriarch by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, thereby forcing Cyril VI to flee from Damascus and take refuge in Lebanon.
Henceforth, events could only move in one direction. Although an orthodox Malachite Patriarchate remained in Antioch, a new "Greek-Melkite-Catholic" Patriarchate also grew up there which was linked to the Holy See of Peter.

The Pope granted the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East in communion with Rome the "ad personam" title of "Patriarch of Alexandria and Jerusalem".

**And this brings us to the present day.** On November 26, 1967, H.B. cardinal Maximos IV Sayegh, who distinguished himself by the enthusiasm and the content of his doctrinal intervention at the various sessions of the Vatican Council, was succeeded by the present Patriarch H.B. Maximos V, a man of broad outlook, whose sharp intellect is combined with great energy and strength of mind.

Although to a lesser extent in the West, the dignity of the office of the Patriarch is always considered of the highest prestige everywhere in the East. The Pope himself is, however, the "Patriarch of the West". Of this there remains little evidence, such as the inscription "Patriarchium" in the marble of the Palace of Lateran, the Seat of the Bishop of Rome, indicating that this Seat, with its designation "Basilica patriarchalis", was always attributed to the Roman Basilicas of St. Peter's of St. John's of the Lateran, of St. Paul's outside the walls and St. Salerno Major.

In almost all of the predominantly Islamic countries, or, more precisely, those which were previously part of the Ottoman Empire and still earlier part of the Roman Empire of the East --- Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt(1) --- the Patriarch is recognized as the supreme civil and legal authority of the ecclesiastical community. In other words, the Statute accepted by the Ottoman rulers recognizing the Patriarch as the head of the "Nation of Catholic Pilgrims" (Roum Kâtholik milleti) remains in force. Without going into matters lying beyond the scope of this brief historical outline, the Patriarchate may be said to be an "international juridical entity". From the standpoint of internal ecclesiastical law, the Patriarch enjoys a broad canonical independence within the limits imposed by the relationship with the Holy See of Rome.

It is interesting to note that in religious ceremonies in Byzantine rites (2) the Patriarch is referred to as "Patriarch of the cities of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, of Cilicia, Syria, Iberia, Arabia Mesopotamia, Pentapolis, Ethiopia, of all of Egypt and the entire East, Father of Fathers, Pastor of Pastors, Bishop of Bishops, the Thirteenth of the Holy Apostles".

Patriarchal authority was discussed during the second Vatican Council, and steps were taken to settle the matter with the decree "Orientalium Ecclesiarum", that is to say, the question of the Catholic Church of the East. This Church is so little known to the people of the West today that many think that all the Eastern peoples are Moslems. The truth is that in this land, whence came the "good tidings" to us, there are many Christian Catholics, whose faith is extremely fervent despite the comparative poverty in which they live. The following quotation of Canon 9 of "Orientalium Ecclesiarum" is an indication of how the second Vatican Council considered it necessary to stress the
extremely important role the Patriarchs have played in the Catholic Church and will continue to do so on an increasing scale in future.

"By virtue of a most ancient tradition of the Church, a special honor is due to the Patriarchs of the Churches of the East who, as Fathers and leaders, preside over their respective Patriarchates".

"This Holy Council thereby decrees the restoration of their rights and privileges, in conformity with the ancient traditions of each Church and the resolutions of the Ecumenical Councils. "These rights and privileges are those which were in effect during the period of unity between the East and the West, although they may require some modification in order to meet present day requirements."

(1 Turkey is an exception because of the well known anti-religious restrictions imposed by President Kemal Ataturk as a result of "laicization" of the Republic of Turkey.

(2) Side by side with the term "Melchites", "Byzantine" was and is still used to designate the Christian communities of the East who have rejected heresy and hold the true faith. Members of the Greek-Catholic Church are also called a uniates.

The Patriarchs of Melkite Catholic Churches

A list of twenty Melkite Catholic Patriarchs since 1724:

1724-1759 Cyrille VI Tanas
1759-1760 AthanaselV Jawhar
1760-1761 Maximos II Hakim
1761-1788 Théodore V Dahan
1788-1794 Athanase IV Jawhar (2e fois)
1794-1796 Cyrille VII Siage
1796-1812 Agapios II Matar
1812-1812 Ignace IV Sarrouf
1813-1813 Athanase V Matar
1813-1815 Macaire IV Tawil
1816-1833 Ignace V Cattan
1833-1855 Maximos III Mazloum
1856-1864 Clément Bahous
1864-1897 Grégoire II Youssef-Sayour
1898-1902 Pierre IV Géraigiry
1902-1916 Cyrille VI I Geha
1919-1925 Dimitrios I Cadi
1925-1947 Cyrille IX Moghabghab
1947-1967 Maximos IV Saîgh
1967- Maximos V Hakim

SOURCE: http://www.opuslibani.org.lb/egliseeng/003/histoire.html
Melkite Greek Catholic Church

The coat of arms of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church

The **Melkite Greek Catholic Church** is an Eastern Rite *sui juris* particular Church of the Catholic Church in communion with the Pope. The church's origins lie in the Near East, but, today, Melkite Catholics are spread throughout the world. At present there is a worldwide membership of approximately 1.3 million.[1][2] The Melkite Church has a high degree of ethnic homogeneity but its patriarch, its episcopate, its clergy and many of its faithful, are Arabic, French and English speaking.[3] The church, which split from the Antiochian Orthodox Church in 1724, observes a Byzantine liturgical tradition.

**Meaning of church name**

*Melkite* comes from the Syriac word *malko* for "imperial", which was originally a pejorative term for Middle-Eastern Christians who accepted the authority of the Council of Chalcedon (451) and the Byzantine Emperor.[4] It was given to them by anti-Chalcedonians (the Oriental Orthodox).[5] This term is now not generally used to refer to other Chalcedonian Christian groups (see *Melkite* for the history of this term)

The *Greek* element signifies the Byzantine Rite heritage of the church: its liturgy is little different in structure from that of the Eastern Orthodox Church.[6]

The term *Catholic* signifies the church’s acknowledgment of the authority of the Pope. However, the word can also imply participation in the world-wide church (see *Catholic*). According to some theologians, the Melkite Church of Antioch is the "oldest continuous Christian community in the world".[7]

In Arabic, the official language of the church [8], is called *ar-Rūm al-Kathūlīk* which literally means Greek Catholic.

**History**

The origins of the Melkite Catholic Church go back to the establishment of Christianity in the Near East.[9] As Christianity began to spread, the disciples preached the Gospel
throughout the region and were for the first time called —Christians‖ in the city of Antioch (Acts 11:26), the historical See of the Melkite Catholic Patriarchate. By the second century, Christianity was widespread in Antioch and throughout Syria. Growth of the church did not stop during periods of persecution, and by the end of the fourth century Christianity became the official state religion.

The Melkite Greek Catholic Church traces its origins to the Christian communities of the Levant and Egypt. The church’s leadership was vested in the three Apostolic Patriarchates of the ancient patriarchates: Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. The church’s history and relation to other churches may be summarised in four defining moments.

**Fallout from the Fourth Ecumenical Council**

The first defining moment was the socio-political fallout in the wake of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the Council of Chalcedon, which took place in AD 451. Fifth-century Middle-Eastern Christian society became sharply divided between those who did and those who did not accept the outcome of the council. Those who accepted the decrees of the council, the Chalcedonians, were mainly Greek-speaking city-dwellers, and were called *Melkites (imperials)* by the anti-Chalcedonians. These latter were predominantly Syriac-Arabic or Coptic-speaking provincials.

**Fusion with Arabic language and culture**

The second defining event is more of a period of change than a sudden movement. The Battle of Yarmuk (636) took the Melkite homeland out of Byzantine control and placed it in the hands of the Muslim Arabs. Whereas the Greek language and culture remained important, especially for the Melkites of Jerusalem, Melkite tradition became fused with the Arabic language and culture. Indeed there was Arabic Christian poetry before the arrival of Islam, but this enracination into the Arabic culture led to a degree of distancing between the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the Melkite patriarchs and their people.

Despite the Arab conquest, the Melkites continued to exercise an important role in the Universal Church. The Melkites played a leading role in condemning the iconoclast controversy when it re-appeared in the early 9th century, and were among the first of the Eastern churches to respond to the introduction of the *filioque* clause in the West.

**Union with See of Rome**

The third defining moment were the Councils of Reunion in which the Orthodox hierarchs accepted union with the See of Rome after a long period of schism. In 1054, Patriarch Michael Kerularios and Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida had excommunicated each other, thus formalizing a schism which had been developing for many years. The Melkite Patriarch Peter III of Antioch rejected the quarrel of the Latin Cardinal and the Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1965, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I "consigned these excommunications to oblivion."
However the Crusaders introduced Latin prelates into the apostolic sees of the East, and the Fourth Crusade saw the sack of the great city of Constantinople and its domination by the "Crusaders" for fifty-seven years. These developments brought the East-West quarrel home to everyone but there was no declaration of schism. Since there had never been any formal division from East-West Schism these 'converts' of the Latin missionaries simply became a pro-Western, pro-Catholic party within Eastern Orthodoxy. Throughout the 17th century Jesuits, Capuchins and Carmelites established missions with the consent of the local Orthodox bishops in the Ottoman Empire. The Dominicans had been in Iraq since the 1300s.

At the Second Council of Lyons (1274) and the Council of Florence (1439) the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Emperor accepted union with the West hoping for aid to save Constantinople from Islam. Neither of these unions lasted, though the last two emperors of Constantinople were professing Catholics; nor was any significant aid forthcoming from the warring kingdoms of a soon to be torn-apart Europe.

From 1342, Roman Catholic friars opened missions in the Middle East, particularly in Damascus and their teaching had important influence over the Melkite clergy and people. Yet, in the Melkite tradition it was the Jesuits, founded only in 1534, who were really decisive in the formation of the Catholic party in the Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. The Jesuits were not friars but something like the highly educated priests of the Patriarchal Chancery, which made them more acceptable.

**Election of Cyril VI**

The fourth defining moment was the election of Cyril VI, in 1724, by the Melkite bishops of Syria as the new Patriarch of Antioch. As Cyril was considered to be pro-Western by the Patriarch of Constantinople, Jeremias III feared that his authority would be compromised. Therefore, Jeremias declared Cyril's election to be invalid, excommunicated him, and appointed Sylvester of Antioch, a Greek monk to the patriarchal See of Antioch.\[^{14}\]

Sylvester exacerbated divisions with his heavy-handed rule of the church as many Melkites acknowledged Cyril's claim to the patriarchal throne. It was obvious to all that Cyril had been legitimately elected and consecrated, and that Jeremias had attempted to remove him only to bolter his own authority over the Antiochian Patriarchate. (This Greek domination over the Byzantine Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch lasted until 1899.) Jeremias and Sylvester began a five-year campaign of persecution against Cyril and the Melkite faithful who supported him, enforced by Ottoman Turkish troops.

Five years after the election of Cyril Tanas, in 1729, Pope Benedict XIII recognized Cyril as the legitimate Patriarch of Antioch and welcomed him and his followers into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.\[^{15}\] From this time onwards, the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church has existed separately from and in parallel to the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch in the Middle East; the latter is not referred to as *Melkite*.  

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The Melkite Greek Catholic Church has played an important role in the leadership of Arabic Christianity. It has always been led by Arabic-speaking Christians, whereas its Orthodox counterpart had Greek patriarchs until 1899. Indeed, at the very beginning of her separate existence, around 1725, one of her most illustrious lay leaders, the savant and theologian, Abdallah Zakher of Aleppo (1684–1748) set up the first printing press in the Middle East. In 1835, Maximos III Mazloum, Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch, was recognized by the Ottoman Empire as the leader of a millet, a distinctive religious community within the Empire. Pope Gregory XVI gave Maximos III Mazloum the triple-patriarchy of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, a title that is still held by the leader of the Melkite Church.

In 1847, Pope Pius IX (1846–1878), reinstituted the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem in the person of the young, 34 year old, zealous Giuseppe Valerga (1813-1847-1872), whom the indigenous hierarchs nicknamed “The Butcher” because of his fierce opposition to the native churches of the Holy Land. When he arrived in Jerusalem in 1847, there were 4,200 Latin Catholics and when he died in 1872, the number had doubled.

Historians theorize that Valerga’s attempts to advocate the proselytisation of local churches was a response to the domination of the Patriarchate by the Greek Hellene Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre. Others believe that Valerga was appointed to address the threat of Protestantism posed by the Lutheran-Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem which also posed a problem for the Anglican John Henry Newman.

Tensions between the Latin and Melkite Catholic Churches continued into the 19th century. Patriarch Gregory II Yusuf (1864–1897) was an opponent of papal infallibility at the First Vatican Council. Yusuf believed that the proclamation of papal infallibility would place great strain on relations between the Melkites and other Eastern Christian Churches. He also spoke forcefully for preserving the autonomous status of the Eastern Catholic Churches and maintaining patriarchal rights; this earned him the displeasure of Pius IX. The successor of Pius IX was Pope Leo XIII and in 1894 he issued the encyclical Orientalium Dignitas, reaffirming patriarchal rights and prohibiting the latinisation of the Eastern Catholic Churches, reassuring Gregory and leading to his ultimate agreement with papal infallibility.

**The Church in modern times**

Gregory III Laham, current patriarch

**Battles over Latin and Melkite traditions in the Church**

Patriarch Maximos IV Sayegh took part in the Second Vatican Council where he championed the Eastern tradition of Christianity, and won a great deal of respect from Eastern Orthodox observers at the council as well as the approbation of the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I.

Following the Second Vatican Council the Melkites moved to
restoring traditional worship. This involved both the restoration of Melkite practices such as administering the Eucharist to infants following post-baptismal chrismation as well as removal of Latin-rite elements such as communion rails and confessionalss. In the pre-conciliar days, the leaders of this trend were members of "The Cairo Circle", a group of young priests centered around the Patriarchal College in Cairo. This group included Fathers George Selim Hakim, Joseph Tawil, Elias Zoghby and former Jesuit Oreste Kerame; they later became bishops and participated in the Second Vatican Council, and saw their efforts vindicated.

These reforms led to protests by some Melkite churches that the de-latinisation had gone too far. During the Patriarchate of Maximos IV (Sayegh), some Melkites in the United States objected to the use of the vernacular in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, a movement that was spearheaded by the future archbishop of Nazareth, Father Joseph Raya of Birmingham, Alabama. The issue garnered national news coverage after Bishop Fulton Sheen celebrated a Pontifical Divine Liturgy in English at the Melkite National convention in Birmingham in 1958, parts of which were televised on the national news.

In 1960, the issue was resolved by Pope John XXIII at the request of Patriarch Maximos IV in favour of the use of vernacular languages in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

Pope John also consecrated a Melkite priest, Father Gabriel Acacius Coussa, as a bishop, using the Byzantine Rite and the papal tiara as a crown. Bishop Coussa was almost immediately elevated to the cardinalate, but died two years later. His cause for canonization was introduced by his religious order, the Basilians of Aleppo.

Further protests against the de-latinisation of the church occurred during the patriarchate of Maximos V Hakim (1967–2000) when some church officials who supported Latin traditions protested against allowing the ordination of married men as priests.

**Attempts to unite the Melkite diaspora**

Due to heavy emigration from the Middle East, which began with the Damascus massacres of 1860, in which most of the Christian communities were attacked, the Melkite Greek Catholic Church today is found throughout the world and no longer made up exclusively of faithful of Middle Eastern origin. This development is called "The Diaspora".

The Patriarchate of Maximos V saw many advances in the worldwide presence of the Melkite Church, called "the Diaspora": Eparchies (the Eastern equivalent of a diocese) were established in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia, Argentina and Mexico in response to the continued emptying of the Middle East of her native Christian peoples. Some historians state that after the revolution in Egypt in 1952, many Melkites left the Middle East due to the renewed Islamic, nativist and socialist policies of the Nasser regime. In 1950, the richest Melkite community in the world was in Egypt, in 1945 the most populous single diocese was Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and all
Galilee; by 1955 that was no longer the case due to Israeli anti-Arab measures, equally targeting Christian Arabs as well as Muslim.

In 1967, a native Egyptian of Syrian-Aleppin descent, George Selim Hakim, was elected the successor of Maximos IV, and took the name Maximos V. He was to reign until he retired at the age of 92 in the Jubilee Year of 2000. He reposed on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, June 29, 2001.

**Nobel Peace Prize nominations**

Two successors of Patriarch Maximus V in the See of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and all Galilee have been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize: the second archbishop, Joseph Raya (1968–1974) and the fifth and present incumbent, Archbishop Elias Michael Chaccour, who is the first Palestinian to hold the See and is also the founder of the Mar Elias Educational Institutions in Ibillin, Galilee. He was ordained to the episcopacy in his own church in Ibillin and enthroned in the cathedral of Haifa in 2006.

**Church traditions**

The Melkite Catholic Church is in full communion with the Holy See but fully follows the traditions and customs of Byzantine Christianity. The traditional language of worship is Arabic and Greek, but today, services are held in a variety of languages depending on the country where the Church is located.

**Modern church dioceses**

The current Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and Alexandria and Jerusalem is Gregory III Laham. The patriarchate is based in the Syrian capital Damascus. In the Middle East, the church has dioceses in:

- Egypt and Sudan
  - Patriarchal see of Alexandria, looked after by a protosyncellus.
- Israel
  - Patriarchal see of Jerusalem (a patriarchal vicariate).
  - Archeparchy of St. John of Acre, Haifa, Nazareth and all Galilee
- Jordan
  - Archeparchy of Petra, Philadelphia (Amman) and all Transjordan
- Lebanon
  - Archeparchy of Baalbek
  - Archeparchy of Baniyas and Marjeyoun
  - Archeparchy of Beirut and Byblos
  - Archeparchy of Saida and Deir el-Kamar
  - Archeparchy of Tripoli
  - Archeparchy of Tyre
  - Archeparchy of Zahleh, Furzol and all the Bekaa
- Syria
  - Patriarchal See of Antioch, now seated in Damascus.
Archeparchy of Aleppo
Archeparchy of Bosra and Hauran
Archeparchy of Homs, Hama and Yebrud
Archeparchy of Lattakiyeh and the Valley of the Christians

Throughout the rest of the world, the church has dioceses in:

- Argentina
  - Apostolic Exarchate of Argentina
- Australia and New Zealand
  - Eparchy of St. Michael's of Sydney
- Brazil
- Canada
  - Eparchy of Saint-Sauveur de Montréal.
- Mexico
  - Eparchy of Nuestra Señora del Paraíso en México.
- United States of America
  - Melkite Greek Catholic Eparchy of Newton
- Venezuela
  - Apostolic Exarchate of Venezuela, Caracas.

References


SOURCE: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melkite_Greek_Catholic_Church
GREGORY III (Laham) b.1933), Patriarch of the Church of Antioch, is the spiritual leader of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church. He was elected patriarch on November 29, 2000, succeeding Maximos V Hakim, who resigned at age 92 due to failing health, dying
seven months later. He took the name Gregory after the Patriarch Gregory II Youssef, the last member of his order to be elected patriarch (1864-1897).

Life

Early years and education

Patriarch Gregory was born Lutfy Laham in Darayya, Syria in 1933. He entered the Seminary of the Holy Savior of the Basilian Salvatorian Fathers in the Shoof, Lebanon in 1944. He took his simple religious vows in the Basilian Salvatorian Order in 1949 and his solemn religious vows in 1954. He received his religious and philosophical education at the Holy Savior Seminary, Joun, Lebanon. He continued his theological studies in Rome where he was ordained priest in 1959 in the Church of the Abbey of Grottaferrata in Italy.

Priesthood

The future patriarch received a doctoral degree in Oriental Theology from the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome following his ordination. He then served as superior of the Holy Savior Major Seminary from 1961-64. In 1962 he founded the magazine Al- Wahdah - Unity in Faith, the first ecumenical magazine to be published in the Arabic language. He also founded several orphanages and trade schools in Lebanon.

He was appointed Administrator of the Patriarchal Vicariate of Jerusalem in 1974, in the wake of the Israeli arrest of the Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem, Archbishop Hilarion Capucci of Aleppin Salvatorians. He founded the Student Fund in Jerusalem to help needy students and in 1978 the Family Assistance Fund to help needy families in the troubled areas of his Diocese. In 1967 he founded at the Patriarchate the Oriental Library to promulgate the knowledge of Eastern traditions. He initiated many social projects such as repairing churches, opening clinics and building popular housing, including a guest house for pilgrims at the Patriarchal Center in Jerusalem.

Following an old tradition of the more than 900-years old Order of Knighthood, founded in Jerusalem to take care of lepers in the Hospital of St. Lazarus, he is the Spiritual Protector of the international ecumenical Military and Hospitaller Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem as were his predecessors Maximos IV and Maximos V.

Episcopate

In 1981, he was ordained Archbishop by Patriarch Maximos V Hakim and continued his work as Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem as successor to Archbishop Hilarion Cappucci.
Appointed by Patriarch Maximos V as president of the Patriarchal Liturgical Commission, he edited the *Anthologion*, the prayer book or breviary of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church and *The Book of the Liturgies*, an updated compendium of the Divine Liturgy. As secretary of the Ecumenical Commission of the Melkite Patriarchate, he led the dialogue between the Melkite Greek Catholic and the Greek (Antiochian) Orthodox Churches.

**Books**

Patriarch Gregory III is author of several books, including:

- *Introduction to the Liturgical Services and their symbols in the Eastern Church*
- *The Voice of the Shepherd - Eastern Liturgical Spirituality*
- *Life of Archbishop Germanos Adam*
- Translations of *History of the Melkite Church* (English and German)
- *The Melkite Greek Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council*

Chapter Twelve:
The Syriac Catholic Heritage
The Syriac Catholic Church

The faithful attend Mass at Virgin Mary Church in Zeydal, Syria. (photo: Armineh Johannes)

During the Crusades there were many examples of warm relations between Catholic and Syrian Orthodox bishops. Some Syrian bishops seemed favorable to union with Rome, but no concrete results were achieved. There was also a decree of union between Syrian Orthodox and the Catholic Church at the Council of Florence (Multa et Admirabilia of November 30, 1444), but this also came to nothing.

Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries began to work among the Syrian Orthodox faithful at Aleppo in 1626. So many Syrians were received into communion with Rome that in 1662, when the Patriarchate had fallen vacant, the Catholic party was able to elect one of its own, Andrew Akhidjan, as Patriarch. This provoked a split in the community, and after Akhidjan’s death in 1677 two opposed patriarchs were elected, an uncle and nephew, representing the two parties. But when the Catholic Patriarch died in 1702, this brief line of Syrian Catholic Patriarchs died out with him.

The Ottoman government supported the Oriental Orthodox against the Catholics, and throughout the 18th century the Catholic Syrians underwent much suffering and persecution. There were long periods when no Syrian Catholic bishops were functioning, and the community was forced underground.

In 1782 the Syrian Orthodox Holy Synod elected Metropolitan Michael Jarweh of Aleppo as Patriarch. Shortly after he was enthroned, he declared himself Catholic, took refuge in Lebanon and built the still-extant monastery of Our Lady at Sharfeh. After Jarweh there has been an unbroken succession of Syrian Catholic Patriarchs.
The faithful gather in Mar Mousa Monastery in Nebek, Syria. (photo: Armineh Johannes)

In 1829 the Turkish government granted legal recognition to the Syrian Catholic Church, and the residence of the Patriarch was established at Aleppo in 1831. Catholic missionary activity resumed. Because the Christian community at Aleppo had been severely persecuted, the Patriarchate was moved to Mardin (now in southern Turkey) in 1850.

Steady Syrian Catholic expansion at the expense of the Syrian Orthodox was ended by the persecutions and massacres that took place during World War I. In the early 1920s the Patriarchal residence was moved to Beirut, to which many Syrian Catholics had fled.

The Syrian Catholic Patriarch always takes the name Ignatius in addition to another name. Although Syrian Catholic priests were bound to celibacy at the Synod of Sharfeh in 1888, there are now a number of married priests. A patriarchal seminary and printing house are located at Sharfeh Monastery in Lebanon.

The largest concentrations of Syrian Catholics are found in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. The common language is Arabic, although Syriac is still spoken in a few villages in eastern Syria and northern Iraq.

A community of nuns, known as the Ephremite Sisters or Daughters of the Mother of Mercy, was founded by the Syrian Catholic Patriarch in 1901. The community was dispersed during World War I, and reestablished in 1958. In 2003 the order had 11 sisters in Lebanon and six in Syria, along with ten novices. Since 1970 it has directed St. Joseph’s Orphanage in Batha, Lebanon, which over the years has given shelter to some 900 girls.

A diocese for Syrian Catholics in the United States and Canada, Our Lady of Deliverance of Newark, was founded in 1995. The first bishop is Joseph Younan (502 Palisade Avenue, Union City, New Jersey 07087). The diocese includes five parishes.
and four missions in the United States, and two parishes and one mission in Canada. In Australia contact Msgr. Michael Berbari, 60 Kingsland Road, Beralla 2141.

In a letter to him dated January 25, 2008, Pope Benedict XVI accepted the resignation of Syrian Patriarch Ignatius Peter VIII, who had been in office since 2001. The Pope acknowledged that the Patriarch had resigned because of his “concern for the spiritual progress of the faithful and for harmony among bishops.” The Pope entrusted the leadership of the Syrian Catholic Church to a committee composed of three bishops pending the election of a new Patriarch.

Location: Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, diaspora

Head: (Vacant)

Title: Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrians

Residence: Beirut, Lebanon

Membership: 132,000

Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch

The Syrian Church of Antioch was born soon after the Council of Chalcedon (451). The Church kept its liturgy in Syrian language, while the parallel Church of Greek expression accepted the Byzantine liturgy. The Bishop James Baradeo (VI century) consecrated various bishops and priests, giving the Church a chance to propagate in the Middle East. The Syrian Catholic Church of Antioch was born in 1782 when Michael Jarweh, archbishop of Aleppo - who had become a Catholic in 1774 – was elected Patriarch, and confirmed with this title by the Pope. This caused a rift within the Church and the creation of a parallel hierarchy.

Today the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate is present in Lebanon, Turkey and Jerusalem with three Exarchates (vicariates). There are about 200,000 faithful. The Syrian Catholic and Orthodox Churches are working together and accept cooperation in pastoral work. Three sacraments (Baptism, Eucharist and Anointing of the sick) can be celebrated by clergy of both Churches and are recognized. The Exarchate of Jerusalem was erected in 1890. There are two parishes, one in Jerusalem and one in Bethlehem. There is also a parish in Amman.

History of the Syriac Catholic Church "at a glance"

Antioch: The Syriac Catholic Church belongs to the See of Antioch (which prior to his departure to Rome, Saint Peter established) and extends it roots back to the primitive Christianity in the Orient. And in the Acts of the Apostles we are told that it is in Antioch where the followers of Jesus for the first time were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26).

History: In the time of the first Ecumenical Councils, the Patriarch of Antioch held the ecclesiastical authority over the Diocese of the Orient, which was to be extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. Its scholarly mission in both languages: the Greek and Syriac was to provide the world and the Universal Church with eminent saints, scholars, hermits and pastors. Among these great people are Saint Ephrem (373), Doctor of the Church, Saint Jacob of Sarug (521) Dionysius Bar Salibi (1171) and Gregorius X Bar Hebraeus (1286). In modern history the distinguished leaders of the Syriac Catholic Church have been among others: Patriarch Ignatius Michael Djarweh, Archbishop Clemens Daoud, Patriarch Ephrem Rahmani, Vicomte de Tarrazi, Monsignor Ishac Armaleh, Patriarch-Cardinal Gabriel Tappouni and Chorbishop Gabriel Khoury-Sarkis.

The present Syriac Catholic Patriarch of Antioch is Mar Ignatius Antoun II Hayek who was elected Patriarch in 1968 and resides in Beirut-Lebanon. He presides upon the Patriarchal Eparchy of Beirut and leads spiritually the Syriac Catholic Community that also includes two Archdioceses in Iraq, four in Syria, one in Egypt and Sudan, one Patriarchal Vicariate in both the Holy Land and Turkey and the newly erected Diocese of Our Lady of Deliverance in the United States and Canada.

Liturgy: The Syriac Rite is rooted in the old tradition of both churches of Jerusalem and Antioch and has ties with the ancient Jewish Berakah and is usually called the Western Syriac Rite. The main Syriac Liturgy is called the "Anaphora of Saint James" (brother of the Lord). The People: Throughout history the Syriac people have been known as the "Arameans" who were from the Biblical countries of Aram near the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and were the first disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Language: Their ancient Semitic language is known as Aramaic (or "Syriac" after the time of Christ since the majority of people who spoke this language belonged to the province of "Syria"). It is the same language that was spoken by Jesus, Mary and the Apostles and is still the language used during the liturgy. Many of the ancient hymns of the Church are still maintained in this native tongue although several have been translated into Arabic, English, French and other languages to benefit the faithful.

Rome: The Syriac Catholic Church was formally and officially united with Rome in 1781

North America: Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Diocese in the United States and Canada is comprised of nine parishes; seven in the United States and 2 in Canada.

SOURCE: http://syriac-catholic.org/ata1.htm
The Syriac Catholic Church

For much of church history, especially during the time of the Crusades, Catholic and Syriac Orthodox bishops enjoyed warm relations. In 1444, the Council of Florence even issued a special degree of unity between Catholics and Syriac Orthodox. In the early 17th century, Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries began working in Syriac Orthodox communities. Their activities inspired many Orthodox faithful to seek full communion with Rome, which in turn, prompted a Catholic-Orthodox split among Syriac Christians.

In 1782, the Syriac Orthodox Holy Synod elected Metropolitan Michael Jarweh of Aleppo as patriarch. Shortly after he took office, he declared himself Catholic and fled to Lebanon where he built Our Lady of Sharfeh monastery. From Jarweh onward, an unbroken succession of Syriac Catholic patriarchs has headed the emergent Syriac Catholic Church. Since the 1920’s, the patriarch of Syriac Catholic Church resides in Beirut.

Location: Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, diaspora  
Head: (Vacant)  
Title: Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrians  
Residence: Beirut, Lebanon  
Membership: 132,000

To read more:

R. Roberson: The Syrian Catholic Church

Church in North America

Eparchy: Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Diocese for United States and Canada

Bishop: Most Reverend Joseph Younan  
502 Palisade Avenue  
Union City, NJ 07087-5213  
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The **Syriac Catholic Church** or Syrian Catholic Church is a Christian church in the Levant having practices and rites in common with the Syriac Orthodox Church. They are one of the Eastern Catholic Churches following the Antiochene rite, the Syriac tradition of Antioch, along with the Maronites and Syro-Malankara Christians. This is distinct from the Greek Byzantine rite of Antioch of the Melkites, both Orthodox and Catholic. These Syriac Catholics number about the same as the Syriac Orthodox from whom they originated; their head, the Syriac Catholic Patriarch of Antioch, lives in Beirut. They have a separate church organization from the Melkites, Maronites, and Chaldeans, which are other communities of the Levant in communion with Rome.

The Patriarch of Antioch of this church has the title of *Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syrians* and resides in Beirut, Lebanon.

**1. History**

The Syriac Catholic Church belongs to the See of Antioch (which prior to his departure to Rome, Saint Peter established) and extends it roots back to the primitive Christianity in the Orient. And in the Acts of the Apostles we are told that it is in Antioch where the followers of Jesus for the first time were called "Christians" (Acts 11:26).

In the time of the first Ecumenical Councils, the Patriarch of Antioch held the ecclesiastical authority over the Diocese of the Orient, which was to be extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. Its scholarly mission in both languages: the Greek and Syriac was to provide the world and the Universal Church with eminent saints, scholars, hermits and pastors. Among these great people are Saint Ephrem (373), Doctor of the Church, Saint Jacob of Sarug (521) Dionysius Bar Salibi (1171) and Gregorius X Bar Hebraeus (1286).

In modern history the leaders of the Syriac Catholic Church have been among others: Patriarch Ignatius Michael Djarweh, Archbishop Clemens Daoud, Patriarch Ephrem Rahmani, Vicomte de Tarrazi, Monsignor Ishac Armaleh, Ignatius Gabriel I Tappouni and Chorbishop Gabriel Khoury-Sarkis.

The present Syriac Catholic Patriarch of Antioch is Mar Ignatius Peter VIII since February 2001 and resides in Beirut, Lebanon. With this title he presides upon the Patriarchal Eparchy of Beirut and leads spiritually all the Syriac Catholic Community around the world.

The emeritus patriarch, Ignace Cardinal Daoud, was as the prefect for the Congregation for Eastern Churches until June 2007. The patriarch Mar Ignatius Anthony II Hayek who was elected patriarch in 1968 took his reverence few years ago, and lives always in Lebanon.
The community includes two archdioceses in Iraq, four in Syria, one in Egypt and Sudan, a Patriarchal Vicariate in the Holy Land, a Patriarchal Vicariate in Turkey and our Diocese of Our Lady of Deliverance in the United States and Canada.

The Syriac Rite is rooted in the old tradition of both the churches of Jerusalem and Antioch and has ties with the ancient Jewish Berakah and is usually called the Western Syriac Rite. The main Syriac Liturgy is called the "Anaphora of Saint James" (brother of the Lord).

Their ancient Semitic language is known as Aramaic (or "Syriac" after the time of Christ since the majority of people who spoke this language belonged to the province of "Syria"). It is the same language that was spoken by Jesus, Mary and the Apostles and is still the language used during the liturgy. Many of the ancient hymns of the Church are still maintained in this native tongue although several have been translated into Arabic, English, French and other languages to benefit the faithful.

Syriac is still spoken in some few communities in eastern Syria and northern Iraq, but for most, Arabic is the vernacular language.

The Syriac Catholic Church was formally and officially united with Rome in 1781.

Our Lady of Deliverance Syriac Catholic Diocese in the United States and Canada is has nine parishes; seven in the United States and 2 in Canada.

2. The formation of the Church

During the Crusades there were many examples of warm relations between Catholic and Syriac ("Syrian") Orthodox bishops. Some of these bishops seemed favorable to union with Rome, but no concrete results were achieved. There was also a decree of union between the Syriac Orthodox and Rome at the Council of Florence November 30, 1444 but the effects of this decree were rapidly annulled by opponents of the union among the Syriac hierarchy.

Jesuit and Capuchin missionaries began to work among the Syriac Orthodox faithful at Aleppo in 1626. So many of them were received into communion with Rome that in 1662, when the Patriarchate had fallen vacant, the Catholic party was able to elect one of its own, Andrew Akhidjan, as Patriarch of the Syriac Church. This provoked a split in the community, and after Akhidjan’s death in 1677 two opposed patriarchs were elected, one being an uncle and the other being his nephew (from the same family), representing the two parties (one pro-Catholic, the other anti-Catholic). But when the Catholic Patriarch died in 1702, this very brief line of Catholic Patriarchs upon the Syriac Church's See of Antioch died out with him.

The Ottoman government supported the Syriac Orthodox's agitation against the Syriac Catholics, and throughout the 18th century the Syriac Catholics underwent suffering and
much persecution. There were long periods when no Syriac Catholic bishops were functioning, and the community was forced to go entirely underground.

In 1782 the Syriac Orthodox Holy Synod elected Metropolitan Michael Jarweh of Aleppo as Patriarch. Shortly after he was enthroned, he declared himself Catholic and in unity with the Pope of Rome, after this declaration he took refuge in Lebanon and built the still-extant monastery of Our Lady at Sharfeh. After Jarweh there has been an unbroken succession of Syriac Catholic Patriarchs.

In 1829 the Turkish government granted legal recognition to the Syriac Catholic Church, and the residence of the Patriarch was established at Aleppo in 1831. Catholic missionary activity resumed. Because the Christian community at Aleppo had been severely persecuted, the Patriarchate was moved to Mardin (now in southeast Turkey) in 1850.

The steady Syriac Catholic expansion at the expense of the Syriac Orthodox was ended by the persecutions and massacres that took place during World War I (Assyrian genocide). More than half of the 75,000 Syriac Catholics were massacred by Turkish nationalists (especially so-called Young Turks). In the early 1920s the Catholic Patriarchal residence was therefore moved to Beirut, to which many Syriac Catholics had fled from Turkish and intra-Syria terror.

The Syriac Catholic Patriarch always takes the name "Ignatius" in addition to another name. Although Syriac Catholic priests were bound to celibacy by the Syriac Catholic local Synod of Sharfeh in 1888, there are now a number of married priests. A patriarchal seminary and printing house are located at Sharfeh Monastery in Lebanon.

Source: www.wapedia.mobi/en/Syrian_Catholic_Church
His Beatitude Mar Ignatius Joseph III Yonan

Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syrians

Church         Syrian Catholic Church
See             Antioch
Enthroned       January 20, 2009
Predecessor     Ignatius Peter VIII Abdalahad

Orders

Ordination     Sept 12, 1971 (Priest)

January 7, 1996 (Bishop)
by Antony II Hayyek

Consecration
Mar Ignatius Ephrem Joseph III Yonan (born November 15, 1944) is the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Syrians of the Syriac Catholic Church since January 20, 2009.

Life

Ephrem Joseph Yonan was born at Hassaké, Syria on November 15, 1944 and was ordained a priest on September 12, 1971. He served as director of the Seminary of Charfet for two years, as Director of Catechesis of the diocese of Hassaké for seven years and as pastor of the Church of the Annunciation in Beirut up to 1986.

In 1986 he was sent to the United States to establish missions for the Syrian Catholic faithful. He founded a mission in Newark, New Jersey (Our Lady of Deliverance) and others in North Hollywood (Sacred Heart) in 1991 and in San Diego (Our Mother of Perpetual Help) in 1994.


Along with His Eminence Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Patriarch Ignatius Joseph III Yonan served as a co-president of the October 2010 Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East in the Vatican.

Catholic Church titles

Preceded by Ignatius Peter VIII Abdalahad
Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrian Catholic Church 20 January 2009 -
Succeeded by Incumbent

Chapter Thirteen:
The Syriac Orthodox Heritage
The Syriac Orthodox Church is one of the most ancient Christian Churches tracing its roots to the Church of Antioch. The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts of the Apostles 11:26). Apostle Peter is believed to have established a church in Antioch in AD 37, the remnants of which are still in Antakya (the modern name of Antioch), Turkey. After the martyrdom of Apostle Peter, he was succeeded by St. Euodius and St. Ignatius Noorono as shepherds of the flock in Antioch and in the writings of St. Ignatius we find the evolution of the ecclesiastical order of bishops—ordained successors of the Apostles in whom continued the spiritual authorities vested by our Lord in the Apostles. The bishopric of Antioch was recognized in the ecumenical Synod of Nicea (AD 325) as one of the Patriarchates of Christendom (along with that of Alexandria and Rome). It produced a line of succession beginning with Apostle Peter which continues to this day in the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Antioch was at the time of Christ the capital of the Roman province of Syria and an important center of commerce. As a city imbued in the hellenistic culture, Greek was the common language. But the majority of the people in the region, especially outside the cities spoke Syriac, the Edessene dialect of Aramaic, the language spoken by our Lord. The disciples Addai, Mari, Aggai and Apostle Thomas, are believed to have spread the Gospel in the regions north east of Antioch, of Edessa (Urhow) and Nisibis and further to upper northern Mesopotamian plains between Rivers Tigris and Euphrates. The Syriac Doctrine of Addai recounts how Christ send Addai, one of the Seventy Disciples, to King Abgar of Edessa. It is believed that Apostle Thomas went further east arriving in what is today India in AD 52. Many important and influential centers of Syriac speaking Christians emerged in the cities such as Edessa (Urhow), Adiabene (Hadyab), and Nisibis (Nšibin). While Antioch was the seat of the bishopric, Edessa is often considered the cradle of Syriac Christianity.

The Church of Antioch played a significant role in the early history of Christianity. It played a prominent role in the first three Synods held at Nicea (325), Constantinople (381), and Ephesus (431), shaping the formulation and early interpretation of Christian doctrines. In AD 451, the Council of Chalcedon and its Christological position resulted in a schism that divided the faithful under the Apostolic See of Antioch into two—one today known as the `idto suryooyo t syscall shubho (Syrian or Syriac Orthodox Church) and the other the Eastern Orthodox (or Rum Orthodox) Church of Antioch. The latter had the support of the Byzantinian Emperor Justinian who convened the Council of Chalcedon. The years that followed resulted in a struggle over the Apostolic See, with bishops of both persuasions assuming the position of Patriarch of Antioch. In
518, Patriarch St. Severus was exiled from Antioch. The seat of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch moved to different monasteries including Qartmin, Qenneshrin (Chalkis, near Aleppo), Malatya, and Amid (Diyarbakir), and finally settled in 1293 in Dayro d-Mor Hananyo (also known as Kurkmo Dayro in Syriac and Deir Zafaran in Arabic) in Mardin. It remained at this monastery until 1933 when the political circumstances forced its migration to Homs, Syria, and later to Damascus in 1959.

Another center of the Syriac Orthodox emerged in former Persian territory, that of the so-called Easterners (Syr. Madnehooy). The Syriac Orthodox community there was partly a result of the Persian abduction of the Syrian population during the wars with Byzantium and forced settlement on Persian territory and partly of Christians in Persia who reacted against political imposition of the doctrines of the Church of the East. In the period of the Sassanids, the Easterners for practical reasons, established an ecclesiastical organization of their own, recognizing the metropolitan of Tagrit on the River Tigris as their head in 629. Later in the eleventh century, the title came to be known as the Maphryono (literally "one who bears fruit" or "consecrator"). He was elected by the eastern bishops, just as the Patriarch was elected by those of the west, but was ordained by the Patriarch. Later, this office gained such importance that Maphryonos ordained the Patriarchs, but at the same time, the Maphryonos ceased to be elected and from 793 (with the Maphryono Sarbelios) they were nominated by the Patriarchs. Among the Maphryonos, was the illustrious author Mor Gregorius Bar `Ebroyo (1226-186). Dayro d-Mor Mattay in Mosul served as the seat of the Maphryono in many periods of history. Later, the Maphryono took residence at the Patriarchate in Mardin. The last of the Maphryonos passed away in 1848 and the position became defunct.

The history of the Syriac Orthodox Church is characterized by adversity. Byzantinian oppression in the sixth and seventh centuries was followed by the atrocities of the Crusaders in the 11th and 12th centuries, then decimation at the hands of the Mongolians lead by Tamerlane (1336-1405) in about 1400, and severe restrictions under the Ottoman Sultanate. The growth of nationalism in the waning years of the Ottoman Sultanate lead to the massacre of about 25,000 in what is today South East Turkey in 1895-96. An even greater calamity occurred in 1915, etched in the memory of the Syriac Orthodox community as the Sayfo (Year of the Sword), wiping out 90314 people (including 154 priests) in 13350 families in 346 villages representing about a third of the Syriac Orthodox population in the area (according to the records compiled by Patriarch Aphrem I). Further misery came with the Kurdish rebellion in 1925-26, when the Kurds used the monasteries of Mor Malke and Dayro da-Slibo and the churches in Basibrin and near Hbob as bases. The immense suffering and destruction from 1895 onwards resulted in the alteration of the demographics of the community and mass emigration to other areas in the Middle East, notably Syria, to the North and South Americas, to different parts of Europe, and to Australia.
Amidst all the adversity, the Church produced several illustrious saints whose lives and works had such immense influence not only on the Syriac tradition but much of Christendom. The rich liturgical heritage of the Syriac Orthodox Church is but one of their legacies. Scholars of the Church such as Mor Ya`qub of Edessa, George, the Bishop of the Arabians, and Moses Bar Kepha played an important role in transmitting Greek knowledge to the Arab world. Numerous Syriac Orthodox authors have also recorded historiographical accounts. Among them are such works as the Ecclesiastical History of John of Ephesus, the Chronicle of Jacob of Edessa, the Chronicle of Zuqnin (erroneously attributed to Patriarch Dionysius of Tel-Mahre), the Chronicle of Patriarch Mikhayel Rabo, the Chronography and Ecclesiastical History of Maphryono Gregorius Bar `Ebroyo.

Many of the historical accounts recorded in English have been written by authors affiliated with the Catholic Church and Church of England. While many of these works provide a great deal of information accessible to the English readers, denominational bias is evident in these works.

Following are links to recent historical accounts in English authored by Syriac Orthodox Patriarchs of Antioch.

*The Syrian Orthodox Church at a Glance* by Patriarch H.H. Ignatius Zakka I

*The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch* by Patriarch Ignatius Ya`qub III

(External Link)

References:


Mor Clemis E. Kaplan, The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch: A Brief Introduction. (Unpublished manuscript, 1996).


SOURCE: http://sor.cua.edu/History/index.html
The Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch

Bab Touma, P.O. Box
22260 Damascus, Syria

The Patriarchate in Damascus Source: The Hidden Pearl

The spiritual care of the Church of Antioch was vested in the Bishop of Antioch from the earliest years of Christianity. The first among the Bishops of Antioch was St. Peter who is believed to have established a church at Antioch in AD 37. Given the antiquity of the bishopric of Antioch and the importance of the Church in the city of Antioch which was a commercially significant city in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, the Synod of Nicaea (AD 325) recognized the bishopric as a Patriarchate along with the bishoprics of Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, bestowing authority for the Church in Antioch and All of the East on the Patriarch. (The Synod of Constantinople in AD 381 recognized the See of Constantinople also as a Patriarchate).

Even though the Synod of Nicaea was convened by the Roman Emperor Constantine, the authority of the ecumenical synod was also accepted by the Church in the Persian Empire which was politically isolated from the Churches in the Roman Empire. Until AD 498, this Church accepted the spiritual authority of the Patriarch of Antioch. The Christological controversies that followed the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 resulted in a long struggle for the Patriarchate between those who accepted and those who rejected the Council. In AD 518, Patriarch Mor Severius was exiled from the city of Antioch and took refuge in Alexandria. On account of many historical upheavals and consequent hardships which the church had to undergo, the Patriarchate was transferred to different monasteries in Mesopotamia for centuries. In the 13th century it was transferred in the Monastery of Mor Hananyo (Deir al-Za’faran), near Mardin, Turkey, where it remained until 1933. Due to adverse political situation, it was transferred to Homs, Syria and in 1959 was transferred again to Damascus, Syria.

The Patriarchate office is situated in Bab Touma, in the city of Damascus, capital of Syria. The Patriarch resides at the Mor Ephrem monastery in Ma´arat Sayyidnaya, near Damascus. Since September 14, 1980, His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatios Zakka I was reigns as the Patriarch of Antioch and the Supreme Head of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

SOURCE: http://sor.cua.edu/Patriarchate/index.html
**Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church**

Moran Mor Ignatius Aphrem II; born as Sa’id Karim on May 3, 1965) is the patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church. He became the 123rd Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch when he was enthroned as patriarch in Damascus on May 29, 2014. Before his election to the patriarchate, he was Archbishop for the Eastern United States of America, and known as Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim in that post. In that role, he established 11 new parishes, introduced a number of new programs for the youth, and worked for inter-church unity.

**Metropolitan Archbishop of the Eastern United States**

In 1995, following the death of Archbishop Mor Athanasius Yeshue Samuel, who had established the Archdiocese of the United States and Canada, it was decided to divide the territory into three archdioceses: the Eastern United States, Los Angeles and Environs, and Canada. Aphrem Karim was appointed archbishop of the Eastern United States territory.

On January 28, 1996, Aphrem Karim was consecrated as Metropolitan Archbishop and Patriarchal Vicar of the Archdiocese for the Eastern United States by Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas at St. Mary’s Syriac Orthodox Church in his home town of Qamishli. Taking the episcopal name Cyril, he arrived in the United States on March 2, 1996, and was officially installed at St. Mark’s Syriac Orthodox Cathedral in Teaneck, New Jersey, as Mor Cyril Aphrem Karim.

During his time as Metropolitan Archbishop, Cyril Aphrem Karim oversaw the creation of 11 new parishes, bringing the total parishes in the archdiocese to 20. He created an advisory council to aid in oversight and administration of the archdiocese. He created the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocesan Youth Organization to coordinate youth activities across the archdiocese’s parishes, and oversaw a number of youth conferences as he sought to grow the church. He organized a special youth liturgy in the New York/New Jersey area and created a choral society.

Cyril Aphrem Karim oversaw the creation of the Archdiocesan Sunday School Committee to unite lesson plans across the archdiocese. He created a pre-marriage counseling program which afforded couples-to-be the chance to meet with him personally. He also established an annual liturgy service to recognize and appreciate the elderly members of the community. He worked for inter-church unity, serving on the World Council of Churches. Cyril Aphrem Karim played a significant role in founding Christian Churches Together.
On March 21, 2014, Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas died after a long illness. Following his death, the Holy Synod of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch was convened to elect a successor. The synod was held at St Jacob Baradeus Monastery in Atchaneh, Lebanon, presided over by Mor Baselios Thomas I Catholicos of India and Mor Severius Jamil Hawa Archbishop of Baghdad and Basra and Patriarchal Locum Tenens. The synod elected Cyril Aphrem Karim to be the 122nd successor of St. Peter in the Apostolic See of Antioch. He was enthroned on May 29, 2014, at St Ephrem's Monastery, Maarat Saidnaya, near Damascus, Syria. Baselios Thomas I oversaw the ceremony.

Karim took the patriarchal name Ignatius, replacing his episcopal name Cyril, and, being the second patriarch to bear the monastic name Aphrem (the first being Ignatius Aphrem I Barsoum), his name became Ignatius Aphrem II. Unlike his immediate predecessors, but following older convention, Aphrem II chose not to use his family name, Karim, in his official title.

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignatius_Aphrem_II
Chapter Fourteen:
Christianity in Sudan
Christianity in Sudan

Holy Virgin Mary Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Khartoum

Christianity has a long history in what is now Sudan. Ancient Nubia was reached by Coptic Christianity by the 2nd century. The Coptic Church was later influenced by Byzantine Christianity. From the 7th century, the Christian Nubian kingdoms were threatened by the Islamic expansion, but the southernmost of these kingdoms, Alodia, survived until 1504.

Southern Sudan (including what is now South Sudan) remained long dominated by traditional (tribal) religions of the Nilotic peoples, with significant conversion to Anglicanism (Episcopal Church of Sudan) during the 20th century.

History

Coptic Christianity

Christianity reached what is now northern Sudan, then called Nubia, by about the end of the first century after Christ.

It greatly developed under the influence of the Eastern Roman Empire.\(^1\) Indeed, Byzantine architecture influenced most of the Christian churches in lower Nubia.\(^2\) The Roman Emperor Justinian I made Nubia a stronghold of Christianity during the Middle Ages. By 580 AD, Christianity had become the official religion of the northern Sudan, centered around the Faras cathedral. It largely disappeared following later Islamic conquests, but only after a lengthy struggle that went on for eight centuries. In the nineteenth century, most of the remaining Coptic Christians were forcibly converted to Islam under the Mahdist state (1881-1898).

Modern Missionary Activity

During the 19th century, British missionaries re-introduced the Christian faith into South Sudan. Sudan, the largest land-mass country in Africa, has a population of nearly 40 million people with the heaviest concentration in the north: an estimated 16% are Christians while Muslims make up 62% and those who practice traditional religions 22%. Taking Southern Sudan apart from the north the numbers shift to almost 50% Christian in this southern area.

The majority of Christians in Sudan adhere either to the Roman Catholic church or to the Anglican churches (represented by the Episcopal Church of the Sudan), but there are several other small denominations represented there including:

- Apostolic Church
- New Apostolic
- Coptic Church
- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Ethiopian Orthodox Church
- Eritrean Church
- Greek Orthodox Church
- Presbyterian Church of the Sudan
Roman Catholic missionaries began work in Sudan in 1842; both the Anglicans and the American Presbyterians began in Sudan in 1899. The Anglicans through the Church Missionary Society had their base in Omdurman, while the Presbyterians began in Khartoum but developed ministry both in the north and in the south. The Sudan Interior Mission began working in the country in 1937. The Africa Inland Mission launched the Africa Inland Church in 1949. In 1964 all foreign missionaries were made to leave southern Sudan because of the civil war. A few groups maintained missionaries in the north. The Sudan Pentecostal Church, which has grown significantly in the south, was started later by the Swedish.

As of 2011 about 2,009,374 Sudanese practiced Roman Catholicism, mainly in the south of the country (5% of the population are devout Roman Catholics). The patron saint of the Sudan is the former slave Saint Josephine Bakhita, canonized in 2000. There are nine catholic dioceses including two archdioceses in modern Sudan, with five Cathedrals.

About 100,000 people or 0.25% of the population belong to various Protestant denominations in northern Sudan. Catholicism is practised by some thousand followers north of Sudan’s capital.

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_sudan
Profile: Cardinal Zubeir Wako

H. E. GABRIEL CARDINAL ZUBEIR WAKO: 25 years as Archbishop of Khartoum (October 10, 1981 – 2006)

On October 10, 2006, we are commemorating 125 years of St. Daniel Comboni’s death. In fact, as a missionary, he came to bring the Gospel to the Sudan and, after many years of hard work in this beloved country, he died in Khartoum on October 10, 1881. St. Daniel Comboni’s Plan is enclosed in his motto: To “Save Africa with the Africa”; all his missionary life was dedicated to make this motto a reality. After 125 years, Comboni’s motto is moving in the direction of its realization. During the last 25 years, a Sudanese Pastor has guided the Catholic Church in the Archdiocese of Khartoum, for the first time in history. A Sudanese Archbishop and now a Cardinal has been the Channel of Salvation for his own Sudanese brothers and Sisters!

Indeed, on October 10, 2006, H. E. Gabriel Card. Zubeir Wako is celebrating his 25th anniversary as Archbishop of Khartoum. This is a tremendous grace for H. E. Card. Zubeir, for the Church in the Sudan and especially for the Catholic Community in the Archdiocese of Khartoum. However, the last 25 years are important not only for His Eminence the Cardinal but also for all the Sudanese who profess the Catholic faith. These years have been a very significant historical time: the war brought displacement allowing thus the growth and maturity of the Catholic Church in Northern Sudan. Joys, sufferings, achievements, frustrations, the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, etc. have accompanied the life of millions of Sudanese during these last 25 years. In all these events God’s hand and goodness has been always present. Jesus’ words have been a daily reality for guidance and strength in our midst: “I am with you always!” To thank God for his Love towards his people, a special program has been prepared consisting mainly of a week of spiritual preparation, main religious celebrations in Comboni Ground, and a social and cultural entertainment. The members of the Archdiocese of Khartoum invite all the missionaries who have worked in this country, all Sudanese abroad, our benefactors, and friends to join in our thanksgiving to God for allowing us to reach this point in the history of the Church in the Sudan.

Ref: http://home.catholicweb.com/archdioceseofkhartoum/index.cfm/NewsItem?ID=185315&From=Home

Hope and forgiveness in Sudan

Throughout more than two decades of conflict, Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir Wako has been a constant voice of reason, calling for peace, mercy, and forgiveness in a land scared by war. It is difficult to imagine the scale of the trials and tribulations borne by the leader of the Catholic Church in Sudan. Nearly three million lost their lives as Sudan ricocheted from one war to another. Yet Cardinal Wako’s consistent message has been one of reconciliation.

Growing up amid violence

The future Cardinal Archbishop of Khartoum, was born in Mboro, a small town in the Bahr el
Archbishop Zubeir Wako had to watch with shock and dismay as poverty in southern Sudan. The district he grew up in was to become one of the bloodiest theatres of war. One million people died there. Few signs of the conflict to come were apparent on 27th February 1941, when Gabriel Zubeir Wako was born. His parents, Placido Wako, senior catechist in Wau diocese, and his wife, Bulunda, were devout Catholics and the Faith was crucial to his upbringing. Attracted to the Church from a young age, Zubeir would wait for Father Angelo Arpe to pass their family home. They would walk to a nearby pond, where they would sit on two large rocks, praying the Breviary together. But their regular prayer times came to an abrupt halt when Father Angelo was assassinated. The murder came just hours after the priest gave the young Zubeir his first Holy Communion. From the age of 10, when he entered the Minor Seminary, he was drawn to the priesthood and was finally ordained on 23rd July 1963. Completing his studies at just 22, Zubeir required a special dispensation from Rome to be ordained because of his youth. He would need all the vigour of youth for the years ahead.

**Early years of priesthood**
The 1962 Missionary Society Act was wreaking havoc across the Church in Sudan. In Wau diocese, clergy numbers fell to just six in a few short years. Initially appointed assistant priest in the town of Kuajok, Father Zubeir soon had to run the parish alone, when the parish priest was expelled from the country. Soon he became district inspector of Christian Religious Education. When the junior seminary, Saint Anthony’s, faced closure because of a shortage of priests, he stepped in as rector. Years later, he recalled: “After my ordination, things became difficult. I found myself practically alone. We were only a handful of priests in the diocese, but we tried to keep things going despite our small number. Life became tougher when Wau fell into the grip of Sudan’s first civil war.” Cardinal Zubeir said: “We were confined to Wau. One of our priests was killed. There were massacres and house arrests and some of us were on the hit list. We spent a number of nights under our beds. The morning after the shoot-out was our first chance to see who was still alive.” These were years of tough pastoral experience. Such experiences would mean he could look his priests in the eye when, as archbishop, he called them to remain steadfast in faith in spite of all the odds against them.

**Bishop at 34**
In 1975, Gabriel Zubeir Wako was named Bishop of Wau, at just 34 years old. War had ravaged his people and morale was poor. The seminary he had worked so hard to build up was struggling – only six students were there. The continuing war severely hampered outreach to the people. One hope remained – catechists, who provided the backbone of many parishes and mission centres. The youthful bishop set to work improving the catechists’ understanding of Scripture and Liturgy. But before he could see the task through, Bishop Zubeir Wako had to bid farewell to his home region. In 1979, he was appointed Archbishop of Khartoum. Still not yet 40, he had been handed what to many was a poisoned chalice. The 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement, which ended Sudan’s first civil war (1964-1972), was already under threat.

**Civil war returns**
By the time Zubeir Wako took over as Archbishop in 1981, President Jafaar Nimeiri was desperate for support to bolster his crumbling power base. He brokered a deal with Islamist hard-liners – and in September 1983 the much-feared Shari’a law was introduced. Tensions were compounded by the discovery of oil in southern Sudan. Relations between the Government and the south broke down with both sides claiming rights to the oil. The second civil war, in which so many were to lose their lives, had begun. The archbishop later recalled: “With the outbreak of civil war, the stream of internal refugees heading north to Khartoum and beyond soon became a flood. They were people who had lost everything.”

**Founding Save the Saveable schools**
Archbishop Zubeir Wako had to watch with shock and dismay as poverty-stricken Christian
families desperately struggled to give their children a little education in the misery of the displacement camps. He started to organise Church schools – and so the Save the Saveable schools programme was born. At first, only a few pre-school children took part in the scheme. But Save the Saveable soon spread throughout the displacement camps around Khartoum and further out into the neighbouring towns and villages. Central to the scheme was the provision of free food for the children and social support for families. Parents did not pay a penny – the diocese footed the bill, heavily reliant on help from agencies such as Aid to the Church in Need. The initiative aroused the deepest suspicions of the government. Undaunted, Archbishop Zubeir Wako insisted upon the Church’s right to its own education system, separate from government schools, where the heavy emphasis on Islamic doctrine discriminated against non-Muslims. The programme now covers the spectrum from nursery to 8th class involving 34 schools across Khartoum. It continues to be one of Aid to the Church in Need’s key projects.

The dawning of hope
In autumn 2003 two rays of hope illuminated the Church in Sudan. First came news of the long-awaited canonisation of Daniel Comboni, the nineteenth-century missionary regarded as the leading figure in the evangelisation of the region. Comboni’s canonisation coincided with the elevation of Archbishop Zubeir to the position of cardinal. The news caused amazement throughout the Sudanese Church – never before had Sudan been honoured with its own cardinal. Both events sent out a signal that the Church in Sudan was far from vanquished. They demonstrated that the people’s rock-like faith had stood firm through the most tempestuous of times to emerge as a beacon of hope. Their hope was to bear fruit and in 2005 the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed by the Government of Sudan and the rebel Sudanese People’s Liberation Army/Movement. It was the closest the country has come to drawing a line under a 20-year civil war, which Cardinal Zubeir Wako so desperately sought to end.

Preaching for peace
Cardinal Zubeir’s response to the slaughter of millions of innocents has not been one of self-righteous outrage. Rather, he has always advocated reconciliation and forgiveness. In his 2006 Easter message, he described how many Sudanese still bore the scars of civil war. Cardinal Zubeir asked Christians to fix their gaze on the risen Jesus who stands before them with the marks of the crucifixion – the marks of the nail and the lance – still on his body. The cardinal said that within that torn and lacerated body, Jesus had a heart which none of his torturers could touch. “That heart remained what it had always been: a heart full of infinite goodness, compassion, mercy and love.” He went on to urge all his hearers to forgiveness, despite all they had endured. Cardinal Zubeir said: “From that heart he asks us to relay to all who have done us wrong the prayer he offered for those who were crucifying him: ‘Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.’”

Source: Ref: http://www.acnuk.org/pages/cardinal-wako.html

Ref:

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Chapter Fifteen:

Christianity in South Sudan
South Sudan

South Sudan officially the Republic of South Sudan and previously known as Southern Sudan, is a landlocked country in east-central Africa that is part of the United Nations sub-region of Eastern Africa. Its current capital is Juba, which is also its largest city; the capital city is planned to be moved to the more centrally located Ramciel in the future. South Sudan is bordered by Ethiopia to the east, Kenya to the southeast, Uganda to the south, the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the southwest, the Central African Republic to the west and Sudan to the north. It includes the vast swamp region of the Sudd, formed by the White Nile and known locally as the Bahr al Jabal.

The modern states of South Sudan and Sudan were part of Egypt under the Muhammad Ali Dynasty, later being governed as an Anglo-Egyptian condominium until Sudanese independence was achieved in 1956. Following the First Sudanese Civil War, the Southern Sudan Autonomous Region was formed in 1972 and lasted until 1983. A second Sudanese civil war soon developed and ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005. Later that year, southern autonomy was restored when an Autonomous Government of Southern Sudan was formed.

South Sudan became an independent state on 9 July 2011, following a referendum that passed with 98.83% of the vote. It is a United Nations member state, a member state of the African Union, and a member state of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development. In July 2012, South Sudan signed the Geneva Conventions.

History

The Nilotic peoples—the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk and others—first entered South Sudan sometime before the 10th century. During the period from the 15th to the 19th centuries, tribal migrations, largely from the area of Bahr el Ghazal, brought these peoples to their modern locations. The non-Nilotic Azande people, who entered South Sudan in the 16th century, established the region’s largest state. The Azande are the third- or fourth-largest ethnic group in South Sudan (either the Azande or the Bari are third-largest). They are found in the Maridi, Yambio, and Tambura districts in the tropical rainforest belt of Western Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal. In the 18th century, the Avungara sib rose to power over the rest of Azande society and this domination continued into the 20th century. Geographical barriers prevented the spread of Islam to the southerners, thus enabling them to retain their social and cultural heritage, as well as their political and religious institutions.

The Azande have had difficult relations with the neighbors, namely the Moru, Mundu, Pôjulu, and the small groups in Bahr el Ghazal, due to the expansionist policy of their king, Gbudwe, in the 18th century. In the 19th century, the Azande fought the French, the Belgians and the Mahdists to maintain their independence. Egypt, under the rule of Khedive Isma'il Pasha, first attempted to control the region in the 1870s, establishing the province of Equatoria in the southern portion. Egypt’s first governor was Samuel Baker, commissioned in 1869, followed by Charles George Gordon in 1874 and by Emin Pasha in 1878. The Mahdist Revolt of the 1880s destabilized the nascent province, and Equatoria ceased to exist as an Egyptian outpost in 1889. Important settlements in Equatoria included Lado, Gondokoro, Dufile and Wadelai. In 1947, British hopes to join South Sudan with Uganda were dashed by the Juba Conference to unify North and South Sudan.
South Sudan has an estimated population of 8 million, but, given the lack of a census in several decades, this estimate may be severely distorted. The economy is predominantly rural and relies chiefly on subsistence farming. Around 2005, the economy began a transition from this rural dominance, and urban areas within South Sudan have seen extensive development. The region has been negatively affected by two civil wars since Sudanese independence: from 1955 to 1972, the Sudanese government fought the Anyanya rebel army during the First Sudanese Civil War, followed by the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) in the Second Sudanese Civil War for over twenty years. As a result, the country suffered serious neglect, a lack of infrastructural development and major destruction and displacement. More than 2.5 million people have been killed and millions more have become refugees both within and outside the country.

**Human rights**

Campaigns of atrocities against civilians have been attributed to the SPLA. In the SPLA/M's attempt to disarm rebellions among the Shilluk and Murle, they burned scores of villages, raped hundreds of women and girls and killed an untold number of civilians. Civilians alleging torture claim fingernails being torn out, burning plastic bags dripped on children to make their parents hand over weapons and villagers burned alive in their huts if rebels were suspected of spending the night there. In May 2011, the SPLA allegedly set fire to over 7,000 homes in Unity State. The UN reports many of these violations and the frustrated director of one Juba-based international aid agency calls them "human rights abuses off the Richter scale". In 2010, the CIA issued a warning that "over the next five years,...a new mass killing or genocide is most likely to occur in southern Sudan." The Nuer White Army has stated it wished to "wipe out the entire Murle tribe on the face of the earth as the only solution to guarantee long-term security of Nuer's cattle" and activists, including Minority Rights Group International, warn of genocide in the current Jonglei conflict.

Peter Abdul Rahaman Sule, the leader of the key opposition group United Democratic Forum, has been under arrest since November 3, 2011 over allegations linking him to the formation of a new rebel group fighting against the government.

**Demographics**

South Sudan has a population of around 8 million and a predominantly rural, subsistence economy. This region has been negatively affected by war for all but 10 years of the independence period (1956), resulting in serious neglect, lack of infrastructure development, and major destruction and displacement. More than 2 million people have died, and more than 4 million are internally displaced persons or became refugees as a result of the civil war and war-related impacts. Here the South Sudanese practice mainly indigenous traditional beliefs, although some practice Christianity, as a result of Christian missionary efforts. South Sudan contains many tribal groups and uses many more languages than Sudan. The major ethnic groups present in South Sudan are the Dinka at more than 1 million (approximately 15 percent combined), the Nuer (approximately ten percent), the Bari, and the Azande. The Shilluk constitute a historically influential state along the White Nile, and their language is fairly closely related to Dinka and Nuer. The traditional territories of the Shilluk and the Northeastern Dinka are adjacent.
Languages

The official language of South Sudan is English.

Religion

Religions followed by the South Sudanese include traditional indigenous religions, Christianity and Islam. The last census to mention the religion of southerners dates back to 1956 where a majority were classified as following traditional beliefs or were Christian while 18% were Muslim. Scholarly and U.S. Department of State sources state that a majority of southern Sudanese maintain traditional indigenous (sometimes referred to as Animist) beliefs with those following Christianity in a minority (albeit an influential one), making South Sudan one of the very few countries in the world where most people follow traditional indigenous religion. According to the Federal Research Division of the US Library of Congress: "in the early 1990s possibly no more than 10 percent of southern Sudan's population was Christian." In the early 1990s, official records of Sudan claimed that from population of what then included South Sudan, 25% of people followed traditional religions and 5% were Christians. However, some news reports claim a Christian majority, and the US Episcopal Church claims the existence of large numbers of Anglican adherents from the Episcopal Church of the Sudan: 2 million members in 2005. Likewise, according to the World Christian Encyclopedia, the Catholic Church is the largest single Christian body in Sudan since 1995, with 2.7 million Catholics mainly concentrated in South Sudan.

Speaking at Saint Theresa Cathedral in Juba, South Sudanese President Kiir, a Roman Catholic, said that South Sudan would be a nation that respects freedom of religion. Amongst Christians, most are Catholic and Anglican, though other denominations are also active, and animist beliefs are often blended with Christian beliefs.

Culture

Due to the many years of the civil war, South Sudan's culture is heavily influenced by its neighbors. Many South Sudanese fled to Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda where they interacted with the nationals and learnt their languages and culture. For most of those who remained in the country, or went north to Sudan and Egypt, they greatly assimilated Arabic culture.

It is also worth noting that most South Sudanese kept the core of their culture even while in exile and Diaspora. Traditional culture is highly upheld and a great focus is given to knowing one's origin and dialect. Although the common languages spoken are Arabi Juba and English, Kiswahili is being introduced to the population to improve the country's relations with its East African neighbors.

Humanitarian situation

South Sudan is acknowledged to have some of the worst health indicators in the world. The under-five infant mortality rate is 135.3 per 1,000, whilst maternal mortality is the highest in the world at 2,053.9 per 100,000 live births. In 2004, there were only three surgeons serving southern Sudan, with three proper hospitals, and in some areas there was just one doctor for every 500,000 people.
The epidemiology of HIV/AIDS in the South Sudan is poorly documented but the prevalence is believed around 3.1%.

At the time of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, humanitarian needs in Southern Sudan were massive. However, humanitarian organizations under the leadership of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) managed to ensure sufficient funding to bring relief to the local populations. Along with recovery and development aid, humanitarian projects were included in the 2007 Work Plan of the United Nations and partners. More than 90% of the population of South Sudan live on less than $1 a day, despite the GDP per capita of the entirety of Sudan being $1200 ($3.29/day).

In 2007, the United Nations OCHA (under the leadership of Éliane Duthoit) decreased its involvement in Southern Sudan, as humanitarian needs gradually diminished, slowly but markedly turning over control to the recovery and development activities of NGOs and community-based organizations.

Famine reportedly led to deaths in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap states in mid-2011, though the state governments of both denied hunger there was severe enough to cause fatalities.

In Pibor County in Jonglei State in December 2011 and January 2012, cattle raids led to border clashes that eventually resulted in widespread ethnic violence, with thousands of deaths and tens of thousands of South Sudanese being displaced, and hundreds of Doctors without Borders staff went missing. The government declared the area a disaster zone and took control from local authorities.

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Sudan
Chapter Sixteen:

Christianity in Turkey
Christianity in Turkey

Greek-Orthodox metropolises in Asia Minor, ca. 1880.

Christianity has a long history in Anatolia (now part of the Republic of Turkey), which is the birthplace of numerous Christian Apostles and Saints, such as Paul of Tarsus, Timothy, Nicholas of Myra, Polycarp of Smyrna and many others.

Two out of the five centers (Patriarchates) of the ancient Pentarchy are in Turkey: Constantinople (Istanbul) and Antioch (Antakya). Antioch was also the place where the followers of Jesus were called "Christians" for the first time in history, as well as being the site of one of the earliest and oldest surviving churches, established by Saint Peter himself. For a thousand years, the Hagia Sophia was the largest church in the world.

Turkey is also home to the Seven Churches of Asia, where the Revelations to John were sent. Apostle John is reputed to have taken Virgin Mary to Ephesus in western Turkey, where she spent the last days of her life in a small house, known as the House of the Virgin Mary, which still survives today and has been recognized as a holy site for pilgrimage by the Catholic and Orthodox churches, as well as being a Muslim shrine. The cave of the Seven Sleepers is also located in Ephesus.

All of the first seven Ecumenical Councils which are recognized by both the Western and Eastern churches were held in present-day Turkey. Of these, the Nicene Creed, declared with the First Council of Nicaea (İznik) in 325, is of utmost importance and has provided the essential definitions of present-day Christianity.

Today the Christian population of Turkey includes an estimated 45,000 Armenian Orthodox, 17,000 Assyrian- Syriac Orthodox, 8,000 Assyrians of the Chaldean Catholic, 3,000-4,000 Greek Orthodox, and smaller numbers of Bulgarians, Georgians, and Protestants.

Christian communities

Churches of the Byzantine rite

- Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople

Istanbul is the seat of the patriarchate, one of the oldest of the Eastern Orthodox Churches.
- Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch

Antioch is the official seat of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. Hatay Province including Antakya is not part of the canonic area of the Church of Constantinople. Most of the local orthodox persons are Arabic-speaking.

- Turkish Orthodox Church was created by the wish to create a Turkish national church.

**Churches of the Armenian rite**

- Armenian Apostolic Church (Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople)


  - Armenian Catholic Church
  - Armenian Evangelical Church

**Churches of the Syriac rite**

- Mor Hananyo Monastery, near Mardin, Turkey

- Syriac Orthodox Church
- Syriac Catholic Church
- Assyrian Church of the East
- Chaldean Catholic Church

**Roman Catholic Church**

- Vicariate Apostolic of Istanbul
  - Cathedral: Cathedral of the Holy Spirit, Istanbul
  - Basilica: St. Anthony of Padua Church in Istanbul, Istanbul
- Vicariate Apostolic of Anatolia
  - Cathedral: Cathedral of the Annunciation, İskenderun, İskenderun
  - Co-cathedral: Co-Cathedral of St. Anthony of Padua, Mersin, Mersin
- Archdiocese of Izmir
  - Cathedral: St. John's Cathedral, Izmir, Izmir
- Archeparchy of Istanbul (Armenian)
- Archeparchy of Diyarbakır (Chaldaean)
• Vicariate Apostolic of Istanbul (Byzantine)
• Church of St Peter of Antakya
  o Church: Church of St Peter

Anglican Church

The Anglicans in Turkey form part of the Eastern Archdeaconry of the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe. In 2008 the Bishop of Europe, Geoffrey Rowell caused controversy by ordaining a local man to minister to Turkish speaking Anglicans in Istanbul.

The main churches are at Ankara (St Nicholas), Istanbul (Christ Church) and Izmir (St John the Evangelist).

Other denominations

The Armenian Protestants own three Istanbul Churches from the 19th century. There is an Alliance of Protestant Churches in Turkey.

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_turkey
Chapter Seventeen:

Christianity in Iran
Christianity in Iran

Christianity in Iran has a long history, dating back to the early years of the faith. It is older than the State Religion, Islam itself. It has always been a minority religion, with the majority state religions — Zoroastrianism before the Islamic conquest, Sunni Islam in the Middle Ages and Shia Islam in modern times — though it had a much larger representation in the past than it does today. Christians of Iran have played a significant part in the history of Christian mission. Today, there are at least 600 churches in Iran.

Main denominations

The Armenian orthodox Vank cathedral of Isfahan is a relic of the Safavid era.

A number of Christian denominations are represented in Iran. Many members of the larger, older churches belong to minority ethnic groups – the Assyrians and Armenians – having their own distinctive culture and language. The members of the newer, smaller churches are drawn both from the traditionally Christian ethnic minorities and to an increasingly larger degree converts from non-Christian background.

The main Christian churches are:

- Armenian Apostolic Church of Iran (between 110,000 and 250,000 adherents)
- Assyrian Church of the East of Iran (about 11,000 adherents),
- Chaldean Catholic Church of Iran (about 7,000 Assyrian adherents),
- various other denominations, some examples are:
  - Presbyterian, including the Assyrian Evangelical Church
  - Pentecostal, including the Assyrian Pentecostal Church
  - Jama'at-e Rabbani (the Iranian Assemblies of God churches)
  - and the Anglican Diocese of Iran.

According to Operation World, there are between 7,000 and 15,000 members and adherents of the various Protestant, Evangelical and other minority churches in Iran, though these numbers are particularly difficult to verify under the current political circumstances.

The International Religious Freedom Report 2004 by the U.S. State Department quotes a somewhat higher total number of 300,000 Christians in Iran, and states the majority of whom are ethnic Armenians followed by ethnic Assyrians.
History

Qara Kelissa, West Azarbaijan. Believed by some to have been first built in 66 AD by Saint Jude. Local Armenians believe that he and Simon were both buried here. In 1329, the church was reconstructed after an earthquake destroyed the structure in 1319.

According to Acts 2:9 in the Acts of the Apostles there were Persians, Parthians and Medes among the very first new Christian converts at Pentecost. Since then there has been a continuous presence of Christians in Persia/Iran.

During the apostolic age, Christianity began to establish itself throughout the Mediterranean. However, a quite different Semitic Christian culture developed on the eastern borders of the Roman Empire and in Persia. Syriac Christianity owed much to preexistent Jewish communities and the Aramaic language. This language was spoken by Jesus, and, in various modern Eastern Aramaic forms is still spoken by the ethnic Assyrian Christians in Iran, northeast Syria, southeast Turkey and Iraq today.

From Persian ruled Assyria (Assuristan), missionary activity spread Eastern Rite Syriac Christianity throughout Assyria and Mesopotamia, and from there into Persia, Asia Minor, Syria, the Caucasus and Central Asia, establishing the Saint Thomas Christians of India and the Nestorian Stele and Daqin Pagoda in China.

Early Christian communities straddling the Roman-Persian border were in the midst of civil strife. In 313, when Constantine I proclaimed Christianity to be a tolerated religion in the Roman Empire, the Sassanid rulers of Persia adopted a policy of persecution against Christians, including the double-tax of Shapur II in the 340s. Christians were feared as a subversive and possibly disloyal minority. In the early 5th century official persecution increased once more.

However, from the reign of Hormizd III (457–459) serious persecutions grew less frequent and the church began to achieve recognised status. Political pressure within Persia and cultural differences with western Christianity were mostly to blame for the Nestorian schism, in which the Church of the East was labelled heretical. The bishop of the capital of the Sassanid Empire, Ctesiphon, acquired the title first of catholicos, and then patriarch completely independent of any Roman/Byzantine hierarchy.

Persia is considered by some to have been briefly officially Christian. Khosrau I married a Christian wife, and his son Nushizad was also a Christian. When the king was taken ill at Edessa a report reached Persia that he was dead, and at once Nushizad seized the crown and made the kingdom Christian. Very soon the rumour was prove false, but Nushizad was persuaded by persons who appear to have been in the pay of Justinian to endeavour to maintain his position. The action of his son was deeply distressing to Khosrau; it was necessary to take prompt measures, and the commander, Ram Berzin, was sent against the rebels. In the battle which followed Nushizad was mortally wounded and carried off the field. In
his tent he was attended by a Christian bishop, probably Mar Aba I, and to this bishop he
confessed his sincere repentance for having taken up arms against his father, an act which, he
was convinced, could never win the approval of Heaven. Having professed himself a Christian
he died, and the rebellion was quickly put down.

Many old churches remain in Iran from the early days of Christianity. The Church of St. Mary in
northwestern Iran for example, is considered by some historians to be the second oldest
church in Christendom after the Church of Bethlehem in the West Bank. A Chinese princess,
who contributed to its reconstruction in 642 AD, has her name engraved on a stone on the
church wall. The famous Italian traveller Marco Polo also described the church in his visit.

The Arab Islamic conquest of Persia, in the 7th century, was originally beneficial to Christians
as they were a protected minority under Islam. However, from about the 10th century religious
tension led to persecution once more. The influence of European Christians placed Near
Eastern Christians in peril during the Crusades. From the mid-13th century, Mongol rule was a
relief to Persian Christians until the Mongols adopted Islam. The Christian population gradually
declined to a small minority. Christians disengaged from mainstream society and withdrew into
ethnic ghettos (mostly Assyrian Aramaic and Armenian speaking).

In 1445, a part of the Assyrian Aramaic-speaking Church of the East entered into communion
with the Catholic Church (mostly in the Ottoman Empire, but also in Persia). This group had a
faltering start but has existed as a separate church since the consecration of Yohannan Sulaqa
as Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon in 1553 by the pope. Most Assyrian Catholics in Iran today
are members of the Chaldean Catholic Church. The Aramaic-speaking community that
remains independent is the Assyrian Church of the East. Both churches now have much
smaller memberships in Iran than the Armenian Apostolic Church.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Protestant missionaries began to evangelize Persia. Work was
directed towards supporting the extant churches of the country while improving education and
health care. Unlike the older, ethnic churches, these evangelical Protestants began to engage
with the ethnic Persian Muslim community. Their printing presses produced much religious
material in various languages. Some Persians subsequently converted to Protestantism and
their churches still exist within Iran (using the Persian language).

Current situation

In 1976, the Christian population numbered 168,593 people, mostly Armenians. Due to the Iran-
Iraq war in the 1980s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, almost half of the
Armenians migrated to the newly-independent Republic of Armenia. However, the opposite
trend has occurred since 2000, and the number of Christians with Iranian citizenship increased to 109,415 in 2006. At the same time, significant immigration of Assyrians from Iraq has been recorded due to massacres and harassment in post-Saddam Iraq. However, most of those Assyrians in Iran don't have Iranian citizenship. In 2008, the central office of the International Union of Assyrians was officially transferred to Iran after being hosted in the United States for more than four decades.

The government guarantees the recognized Christian minorities a number of rights (production and sale of non-halal foods), representation in parliament, special family law etc.. According to US-based Barnabas Fund, government intrusion, expropriation of property, forced closure and persecution, particularly in the initial years after the Iranian Revolution, have all been documented. Most prominent has been the death of Haik Hovsepian Mehr, bishop of the Jamiat-e Rabbani, in 1994. Recently the continuing imprisonment of Hamid Pourmand, a lay pastor of Jammiat-e Rabbani, and the murder of Ghorban Tourani, the pastor of an independent evangelical church have created international concern. Youcef Nadarkhani is an Ammiat-e Rabbani pastor allegedly "sentenced to death for refusing to recant his faith". However, Iranian official sources has described such claims as "propaganda".

Iranian Christians tend to be urban, with 50% living in Tehran. There are Satellite networks like Mohabbat TV and Sat7Pars that distribute educational and encouraging programs for Christians, especially targeting Persian speakers. Some Christian ex-Muslims emigrate from Iran for educational, political, security or economic reasons.

The Bible in languages of Iran

Armenian and Assyrian Christians use Bibles in their own languages.

The Bible was translated into the local languages early in the Christian period. More recently, a Bible translation in Persian Language was conducted by Henry Martyn in the 18th century. Current commonly used Persian Language translations are the Tarjumeh-ye Tafsiri (explained translation) and the older Standard Version. There is a newer translation of New Testament and the rest of the bible has not been completed yet. It's called "New Millennium Version" (NMV) or "Tarjumeh-ye Hezare-ye no". It's translated and published by Elam Ministries.

Portions of the Bible are translated into Azeri (New Testament, Jesus Film), Mazanderani (portions), Gilaki (Gospel of John, Story of Joseph, Jesus Film), Bakhtiari (portions, Jesus Film), Luri (portions, Jesus Film) and Kurdish (the Gospels).

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_Iran

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Chapter Eighteen:

Syro-Malankara Catholic Church

Syro-Malabar Catholic Church
The **Syro-Malankara Catholic Church** (also known as Malankara Syrian Catholic Church, Malankara Syriac Catholic Church; Malayalam) is a West Syrian Rite Eastern Catholic Church in full communion with the Holy See (of Rome). It has a total membership of around 500,000.

The Church is one of the Saint Thomas Christian churches centered in Kerala, India, which trace their origin to the evangelism of Saint Thomas the Apostle in the 1st century. It is one of two Saint Thomas Christian churches in the Catholic communion, the other being the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. Among the Eastern Catholic Churches, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church is

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<td>His Eminence Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis</td>
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a Major Archiepiscopal Church, headed by Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis (Thottunkal), who was elected in 2007. In Malankara tradition, the head of church is addressed as Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholica Bava. The Primate of the Church holds the office of Archbishop-Major of Trivandrum, though the hierarchs of the church have acclaimed their primate "Catholicos". As a Cardinal, he was assigned to the titular church of San Gregorio VII.

The Malankara Catholic church regained its Catholicity in on September 20, 1930, having lost it in the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653. The division happened from Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, an Oriental Orthodox church, and subsequently entered into communion with Rome. The Malankara Church itself had emerged out of the split within the Saint Thomas Christian community of the 16th century; previously the entire community had comprised a province of the Church of the East, which used East Syrian Liturgy, based in Persia Proper also known as Selucia - Ctesiphon Church. However, the collapse of that Church and influence from the Portuguese, who tried to bring it under the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church, led to a rift in the community. Eventually, the majority entered into communion with Rome as the Eastern Catholic Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, while the rest formed the Malankara Church and aligned with the Syrian Orthodox Church.

This latter group became gradually closer to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, leading to a series of splits concerning the extent to which the Patriarch would be given authority; the faction giving the Patriarch full administrative powers became the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church. Taking only five members of his Church with him, Mar Ivanios founded the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, on September 30, 1930.

**History**

*Thomas the Apostle is credited by tradition for founding the Indian Church in 52 A.D. This Nasrani faith had many similarities to Judaism, and, owing to the heritage of the Nasrani people, developed contacts with the non-Chalcedonian religious authorities of Edessa, Mesopotamia.*

The local church maintained its autonomous character under its local leader. When the Portuguese established themselves in India in the 16th Century, they found the Church in Kerala as an administratively independent community. Following the arrival of Vasco de Gama in 1498, the Portuguese came to South India and established their political power there. They brought missionaries to carry out evangelistic work in order to establish churches in communion with Rome under the Portuguese patronage. These missionaries were eager to bring the Indian Church under the Pope's control. They succeeded in their efforts in 1599 with the 'Synod of Diamper'. The representatives of various parishes who attended the assembly were forced by Portuguese authorities to accept the Papal authority.

Following the synod, the Indian Church was governed by Portuguese prelates. They were generally unwilling to respect the integrity of the local church. This resulted in disaffection which led to a general revolt in 1653 known as "The Coonan Cross Oath". This demanded administrative autonomy for the local church. Since it had no bishop, it faced serious difficulties.
It appealed to several eastern Christian churches for help. The Antiochene Syrian Patriarch responded and sent metropolitan Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem to India in 1665. He confirmed Marthoma I as the bishop and worked together with him to organize the Church.

**Modern times**

It was in this contentious context that Patriarch Mar Abdulla came to Malankara, and excommunicated Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril in the year 1911 (later Archbishop Mar Ivanios) played a vital role in reinstating the position of the excommunicated Metropolitan, and in regaining the self-governance of the Malankara Church. To ward off the undue interference of Patriarch Abdulla in the administration of the temporalities of the Church, Fr. P.T. Geevarghese with the blessing of Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril contacted Abed M’siha, the Patriarch of Antioch from whom Mar Abdulla usurped the Patriarchal See of Antioch, and invited him to visit Malankara and to establish a Catholicate here. Accordingly, Abed M’siha came to Malankara in 1912 and established the Malankara Catholicate. This created a split in the church:

- the faction resisting the Patriarch's administrative interference became the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, an autocephalous Church under its head the Catholicos.
- the faction supporting the Patriarch's administrative interference became the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Church

Baselios Paulose I (1912–1913), the first Catholicos, died after a short period of five months on 13 May 1913. After his demise, the See remained vacant until 1925. That was a period of litigation in the Malankara Church, and also a period of spiritual renewal. The litigation for Vattippanam (a fixed deposit of money in the name of the Church) and its after-effects in the community was at its zenith.

**Metropolitan Archbishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios**

Pope Pius XI, through the Apostolic Constitution *Christo Pastorum Principi* of June 11, 1932, established the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy for the reunited community and erected the Archiparchy of Trivandrum with the Eparchy of Tiruvalla as its suffragan. The Metropolitan Eparchy of Trivandrum was established in 1933. Mar Ivanios was enthroned as its first Metropolitan Archbishop. The Eparchy of Tiruvalla was established in 1933. Jacob Mor Theophilos was enthroned as its first Bishop.
In 1937, Joseph Mar Severios of the Orthodox Church reunited with the Catholic Church. In 1939, Thomas Mar Dioscoros, the Metropolitan of the Knanaya Jacobite Church, reunited with the Catholic Church.

In 1938, the missionary congregation of the Daughters of Mary was founded at Marthandom in Kanyakumari District.

Bishop Dioscoros died in 1943.

Ivanios consecrated Benedict Mor Gregorios as his Auxiliary Bishop in 1953. Ivanios died on 15 July 1953.

The Eparchy of Tiruvalla was led by Jacob Mor Theophilos and Joseph Mor Severios. Severios was the Administrator of the Eparchy until 1950 due to the ill health of Theophilos. In 1950 he was appointed as the Bishop of Tiruvalla. He was also invested with the title “Archbishop.” He died on 18 January 1955.

**Metropolitan Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios**
In 1955 Metropolitan Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios was enthroned as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Trivandrum and the Head of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church.

The Holy See appointed Mor Zacharias Athanasios as successor to Severios, whose consecration took place in 1954. Jacob Mar Theophilos died in 1956.

Francis Acharya, a Cistercian monk, came to the Eparchy of Tiruvalla. In the year 1957 he founded the Kristiya Sanyasa Samaj, Kurisumala Ashram in the high ranges of Vagamon.

In 1958 the territorial boundaries of the Eparchy of Tiruvalla was extended north to include the Malabar region of Kerala, the civil districts of Coimbatore and Nilgiris and Karoor Taluk in Tiruchirappally District of Tamil Nadu and districts of Mysore, Mandya, Coorg, Hasan, Chickamangalore, Shimoga and South Kanara of Karnataka State.

Mor Athanasios died in 1977.
Paulos Mor Philoxenos, the Metropolitan of the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, was received into the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church on 28 August 1977.

The appointment of Mor Isaac Yoohanon as Bishop of Tiruvalla and erection of the Eparchy of Bathery with the appointment of Cyril Mar Baselios as its first Bishop through the decree of the Holy See took place in 1978. Both prelates were consecrated that year.

The Eparchy of Bathery was officially inaugurated in 1978. In 1979 the Eparchial contemplative monastery, Dhyana Ashram, was founded in the Eparchy of Bathery by Fr. Silvester Kozhimannil.

Lawrence Mor Ephrem was consecrated Bishop in 1980. Wladyslaw Rubin, the then Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, was the Papal Delegate for the Jubilee. Other eminent participants included Maximos V, the Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of Alexandria and Jerusalem, Luciano Storero, the then Apostolic Pro-Nuncio to India and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Malankara Catholics within India but outside the canonical territorial boundaries of the Church were first organized as Malankara Catholic Associations, and later came to be erected as personal parish communities. A coordinator was appointed to oversee them, by the Council of Hierarchs of the Malankara Catholic Church.

St. Mary's Malankara Major Seminary, the first local seminary, was inaugurated at Pattom in 1983 and the new building was blessed at Nalanchira, Trivandrum was blessed in 1989.

Pope John Paul II visited on 8 February 1986 at St. Mary's Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum.

On 28 April 1987, Mar Yoohanon, the Bishop of Tiruvalla died.

Cardinal Lourdusamy, the then Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, visited the Malankara Catholic Church in August 1987.

Mor Geevarghese Timotheos succeeded Yoohanon as the Bishop of Tiruvalla. He was consecrated Bishop in 1988.

Metropolitan-Archbishop Benedict Mor Gregorios died in 1994 after serving 41 years.

**Major Archbishop Moran Mor Cyril Baselios Catholicos**

Cyril Mar Baselios, the Bishop of Bathery having been appointed by Pope John Paul II, was enthroned as Metropolitan Archbishop of Trivandrum and as the head of the Malankara Church on 14 December 1995. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios was consecrated Bishop of Bathery in the place of Cyril Mar Baselios on 5 February 1996. Achille Silvestrini, Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, visited the Malankara Catholic Church on February 1996. On the request of Cyril Mar Baselios, by an Apostolic Bull dated 16 December 1996, Pope John Paul II erected the Eparchy of Marthandom bifurcating the Metropolitan
Eparchy of Trivandrum. Lawrence Mar Ephrem was appointed as its first Bishop. He died after a few months of his enthronement as Bishop of Marthandom, on 8 April 1997.

In the meantime, the Eparchy of Tiruvalla was blessed with an Auxiliary Bishop in the person of Thomas Mar Koorilos who was consecrated Bishop on 17 July 1997. On 29 June 1998 Yoohanan Mar Chrysostom was consecrated as the Bishop of Marthandom and Joshua Mar Ignathios as the Auxiliary Bishop for the Metropolitan Eparchy of Trivandrum. Paulos Mar Philoxenos passed away on 3 November 1998.

Christu Jayanthi Maha Jubilee and the Sapthathy of the Re-union Movement of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church were celebrated jointly at Tiruvalla on December 2000. The Patriarch-Emeritus of Syrian Catholic Church, Moran Mor Ignace Moussa Cardinal Daoud, Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches was the Papal Delegate for the celebration.

A significant development in this period has been the establishment of parishes for the faithful of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in the United States of America. Pope John Paul II nominated the Proto-Syncellus of Bathery Isaac Thottunkal, as Apostolic Visitor and the Auxiliary Bishop of Trivandrum on 18 June 2001 for the Syro-Malankarites residing in North America and Europe. He was consecrated on 15 August 2001 at Tirumoolapuram, (Tiruvalla) and he assumed the name Isaac Mar Cleemis.

Bifurcating the Eparchy of Tiruvalla, the Eparchy of Muvattupuzha was erected on 15 January 2003 and Thomas Mar Koorilos was appointed as its first Bishop.

On 29 March 2003 Bishop Mar Timotheos tendered his resignation to the Holy See on the grounds of age and the Holy See appointed Isaac Mar Cleemis, the Apostolic Visitor to Europe and America, as the Bishop of Tiruvalla. Mar Cleemis took charge of the Diocese on 2 October 2003. On January 5, 2005 Joseph Mar Thomas was appointed as the Auxiliary Bishop of Trivandrum and Apostolic Visitor to North America and Europe.

On February 10, 2005, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church was raised to the status of a Major Archiepiscopal Church on that day by the papal document Ab ipso Sancto Thoma. and as such possesses a high level of autonomy under the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches’. Archbishop Pedro Lopez Quintana, the Apostolic Nuncio in India, read the official declaration at St. Mary’s Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum. The Hierarchical Head of the Church became a Major Archbishop who exercises patriarchal powers and governs the Church assisted by the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Church. The title “Catholicos” is used according to the Antiochene-Malankara Tradition in referring to the ”Major Archbishop” (a term recently adopted by the Latin Church to refer to Eastern bishops equal to patriarchal authority, without an historical Patriarchate).

On 19 February 2005, Joseph Mar Thomas was consecrated as Auxiliary Bishop of Trivandrum and Apostolic Visitor to North America and Europe. On 11 April 2005 the Faculty of Theology of St. Mary’s Malankara Major Seminary became affiliated to the Pontifical Urban University, Rome.
The enthronement of the Major Archbishop as the Father and Head of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church on May 14, 2005 was presided over by the Patriarch-Emeritus of the Syrian Catholics Ignatius I Moussa Daoud, Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. Also present was Archbishop Pedro Lopez Quintana, the Apostolic Nuncio in India. The Malankara Major Archiepiscopal Curia (Catholicate Centre) started functioning at the St. Mary's Campus, Pattom, Trivandrum. On May 20, 2005, the Catholicos Moran Mor Cyril Baselios blessed the Curia building. The Catholicos soon constituted the Holy Episcopal Synod. The first Synod of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church was convened from August 2005 at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, Trivandrum.

The first Holy Episcopal Synod constituted the Permanent Synod and the various Synodal Commissions headed by Bishops to take care of various apostolates of the Church. The official bulletin, *Malankara* is published from the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, to communicate the Synodal acts and voice of the Syro-Malankara Major Archiepiscopal Church.

The Platinum Jubilee of the Reunion Movement and the Year of the Eucharist were celebrated jointly at Mar Ivanios Nagar, Punnamoodu, Mavelikara on September 2005. Archbishop Pedro Lopez Quintana, Apostolic Nuncio in India, Shri Bhaironsingh Shekhawat, the Vice-President of India, and Sri Oommen Chandy, the Chief Minister of Kerala, participated in the celebrations.

By decrees of the Catholicos, the Metropolitan Province of Tiruvalla with the Eparchies of Bathery and Muvattupuzha as suffragans, was established on May 15, 2006 and Isaac Mar Cleemis was appointed as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Tiruvalla. On June 10, 2006 Isaac Mar Cleemis was enthroned as the first Metropolitan-Archbishop of Tiruvalla.

By the decree of the Catholicos, on January 1, 2007, the new Eparchy of Mavelikara was erected and Joshua Mar Ignathios, the Auxiliary Bishop and protosyncellus of the Major Archdiocese of Trivandrum, was appointed as its first Bishop.

The Second Ordinary Holy Episcopal Synod was convoked on December 6–7, 2006 and it was decided to revive monastic consecration according to the proper Tradition of the Antiochene Church, called Ramban (properly termed Rabban per the Syriac, but locally called Ramban); and Corepiscopo, to honour a number of priests for their meritorious service in the Church. Isaac Mar Cleemis, the Major Archbishop of Tiruvalla, conferred the consecrations on Saturday, January 13, 2007 on three priests at St. John’s Cathedral, Tiruvalla and Moran Mor Cyril Baselios Catholicos conferred these consecrations on priests on Wednesday 17, 2007 at St. Mary’s Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum.

On Thursday, January 18, 2007, Moran Mor Cyril Baselios, the first Catholicos of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church died. The Catholicos was entombed by the side of his great predecessors at St. Mary's Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum on January 20, 2007.
Major Archbishop Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos

Isaac Mar Cleemis was elected the Second Catholicos of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church through the first Episcopal Synod of election of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church held on February 7–10, 2007 at the Catholicate Centre, Pattom, Trivandrum. Pope Benedict XVI confirmed the election on 9 February and it was announced on 10 February at St. Mary's Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum.

Holy Qurbono in Syro-Malankara Rite

The installation of Aboon Mor Joshua Ignathios was held on 16 February 2007 at Mavelikara and Aboon Geevarghese Mar Divannasios, the Administrator of The Malankara Catholic Major Archiepiscopal Church presided over the installation ceremony. The new eparchy has a 30,825 Syro-Malankara Catholic faithful of a total population of 2,998,325 inhabitants. Of this 269,849 are Malankara non-Catholics and 598,824 Christians of other denominations.

On February 7, 2007, Pope Benedict XVI appointed Fr. Chacko Aerath OIC as the Apostolic Visitor with Episcopal status for the Malankara Catholic faithful residing in the Extraterritorial Regions of the Church within India.

Baselios Cleemis was enthroned as the Second Catholicos of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church on March 5, 2007 at St. Mary's Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum. His installation service was officiated by Geevarghese Mar Divannasios, the Synodal Administrator of the Church. Ecclesiastical and notable guests included Mar Varkey [Cardinal] Vithayathil (Major Archbishop of Syro-Malabar Church), Cardinal Telesphore Toppo (the President of the CBCI), and Sri. V. S. Achuthanandan (the Chief Minister of Kerala).

On Monday, March 26, 2007 the Aboon Thomas Mar Koorilos was appointed the Second Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla. His installation Ceremony was held on Wednesday, May 2, 2007 at St.John's Cathedral, Tiruvalla. Catholicos Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis was the main celebrant.

On Saturday, July 14, 2007 Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis declared Archbishop Mar Ivanios a Servant of God.

In accordance with the provisions of CCEO can. 1063 the Ordinary Tribunal of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church was constituted on November 15, 2007.

Aboon Abraham Mar Julios, Ph.D. was consecrated Bishop of the Eparchy of Moovattupuzha by Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis on February 9, 2008 at Moovattupuzha.

Baselios Cleemis blessed the newly built Tomb Chapel of the Servant of God Mar Ivanios in St. Mary’s Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum on July 1, 2008.

Cardinal Leonardo Sandri at St. Mary's Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum

Leonardo Sandri, Cardinal Prefect of Congregation for the Oriental Churches visited the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church on November 10, 2008. Holy Qurbono according to the Syro-Malankara Tradition was celebrated. Catholicos Baselios Cleemis was the main celebrant. In the following meeting Cardinal Sandri recognized Queen of Peace Pro-Cathedral at Palayam, Trivandrum as a Basilica. Catholicos Baselios Cleemis dedicated St. Mary, Queen of Peace Basilica on December 7, 2008.

Baselios Cleemis Catholicos, the Major Archbishop with the consent of the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church has created two new Eparchies in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. They are Pathanamthitta in Kerala and Puthur in the State of Karnataka. He appointed four new bishops, elected by the Holy Episcopal Synod. He announced the transfer of Bishop Yoohanon Mar Chrysostom, later Bishop of Marthandom, to the new See of Pathanamthitta and Bishop Geevarghese Mar Divannasios from the See of Bathery to the new See of Puthur. Joseph Mar Thomas, the Apostolic Visitator to North America and Europe was appointed Bishop of Bathery. To the See of Marthandom, vacant due the transfer of its Bishop, was appointed Vincent Kulapuravilai, Professor and Registrar of St. Mary's Malankara Seminary Trivandrum. Samuel Kattukallil, Syncellus of the Major Archeparchy of Trivandrum and Stephen Thottathil, Dean of the Faculty of Theology of St. Mary's Malankara Seminary were appointed Auxiliary Bishops of the Major Archeparchy of Trivandrum and the Archieparchy of Tiruvalla respectively. Antony Valiyavilayil, the Postulator of the Cause of Canonisation of Servant of God Archbishop Mar Ivanios and the Chancellor of the Major Archiepiscopal Curia, was appointed the Bishop of the Curia. The announcement was simultaneously made in Rome at
12 noon local time and in Trivandrum, the headquarters of the Syro-Malankara Church and at other Eparchial centres at 4.30 p.m. IST on January 25, 2010. In Trivandrum Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos made the announcement at St. Mary's Cathedral in the presence of bishops and many priests, religious and faithful of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. The bishops of the Church invested the bishops designate with episcopal insignia and congratulated them.

The Episcopal Ordination of Bishops Vincent Mar Paulos, Samuel Mar Irenios, Philipose Mar Stephanos and Thomas Mar Anthonios took place at Mar Ivanios Vidya Nagar in Trivandrum on March 13, 2010

Thomas Naickamparampil was appointed as the first Exarch of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Exarchate in the United States by Pope Benedict XVI, with consultation by the Catholicos and the Holy Synod of Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, on 14 July 2010. He was ordained bishop and received the name Aboon Thomas Mor Eusebius on 21 September 2010 at St. Mary's Malankara Syrian Catholic Cathedral, Trivandrum. His installation ceremony was on October 3, 2010 at Kellenberg Memorial High School, Uniondale, New York.

The Father and Head of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, Baselios Cleemis Catholicos was elevated to the College of Cardinals of the Catholic Church by Pope Benedict XVI at the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican on 24 November 2012. As Cardinal-Priest he was assigned the titular church of San Gregorio VII. He is the first bishop of the Syro-Malankara church and the fifth Keralite becoming cardinal. According to a Thursday, October 25, 2012, press release he said it was a sign of the Pope's appreciation of Indian Catholics' "unity in diversity", and cited the witness, the defense of human life, and the example of authentic prayer given by Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata.

In the course of the growth and development of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, besides the canonical institutions, various associations such as the Malankara Catholic Youth Movement (MCYM), the Malankara Catholic Association (MCA), the Legion of Mary, Matruvedi, Pithruvedi, and other pious associations have emerged.
The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church engages in humanitarian activities. One example of such services is Thapovanam, Shelter of Hope, Sulthan Bathery, a centre for the rehabilitation of the mentally ill.

**Eparchies**

- Major Archeparchy of Trivandrum
  - Eparchy of Marthandam
  - Eparchy of Mavelikara
  - Eparchy of Pathanamthitta
  - Exarchate of United States
- Archieparchy of Tiruvalla
  - Eparchy of Bathery
  - Eparchy of Muvattupuzha
  - Eparchy of Puthur
  - MCC Extra Territorial Regions

**Statistics**

*According to the Pontifical yearbook Annuario Pontificio for 2010, the Syro-Malankara Church had approximately 420,000 members.*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dioceses</th>
<th>members</th>
<th>Bishops</th>
<th>parishes</th>
<th>diocesan priests</th>
<th>religious priests</th>
<th>men religious</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Eparchy of Puthur</td>
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**Hierarchs**

The Malankara Syrian Catholic Church has 15 Hierarchs:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Hierarchs</th>
<th>Diocese</th>
<th>Cathedral / Location</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pope Benedict XVI</td>
<td>Bishop of Rome &amp; Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church</td>
<td>St. John Lateran Basilica / Vatican City, Rome, Italy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis</td>
<td>Major Archbishop-Catholicos of the Syro-Malankara Church</td>
<td>St. Mary's Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Pattom, Trivandrum, Kerala, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboon Thomas Mor Koorilos</td>
<td>Metropolitan Archbishop of Tiruvalla</td>
<td>St. John's Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Tiruvalla, Kerala, India</td>
</tr>
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<td>Aboon Joseph Mor Thomas</td>
<td>Metropolitan of Bathery</td>
<td>St. Thomas Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Sulthan Bathery, Kerala, India</td>
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<td>Metropolitan of Marthandom</td>
<td>Christuraja Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Marthandam, Tamil Nadu, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboon Abraham Mor Julios</td>
<td>Metropolitan of Muvattupuzha</td>
<td>St. Mary’s Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Vazhappilly, Mudavoor, Muvattupuzha, Kerala, India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboon Joshua Mor Ignathios</td>
<td>Metropolitan of Mavelikkara</td>
<td>St. Mary’s Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Punnamoodu, Mavelikkara, Kerala, India</td>
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<td>Aboon Yoohanon Mor Chrysostom</td>
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<td>St. Peter's Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Pathanamthitta, Kerala, India</td>
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<td>Aboon Geevarghese Mor Divannasios</td>
<td>Metropolitan of Puthur</td>
<td>St. Joseph’s Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Puthur, Karnataka, India</td>
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<td>Aboon Geevarghese Mor Timotheos</td>
<td>Metropolitan Emeritus of Tiruvalla</td>
<td>Emeritus of St. John's Syro Malankara Catholic Cathedral / Tiruvalla, Kerala, India</td>
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<td>Exarch of the United States</td>
<td>St. John Chrysostom Syro Malankara Catholic Pro-Cathedral / New Hyde Park, Long Island – New York, USA</td>
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<td>Aboon Jacob Mor Barnabas</td>
<td>Apostolic Visitor to North India</td>
<td>Mar Ivanios Bhavan Syro Malankara Catholic Center / New Delhi, India</td>
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</table>
Liturgy and worship

The liturgy of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church is of the Antiochene Rite, West Syrian in character. The liturgy today is celebrated in Malayalam, Syriac, English, Tamil, and Hindi. The church uses one of several Bible translations into Malayalam.

The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in North India

There are 39 Syro-Malankara communities in North India, including churches at Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and Hyderabad. Aboon Mar Jacob Barnabas is Apostolic Visitor for Syro-Malankara Catholics in North India.

The Church around the world

United States

In July 2010, Pope Benedict XVI erected an apostolic exarchate for Syro-Malankara Catholics in the United States, and appointed Father Thomas Naickamparampil, then head secretary general of the major archiepiscopate of the Syro-Malankara Church, as first apostolic exarch of the new exarchate. The bishop-elect was ordained to the episcopacy on 21 September 2010 at St. Mary's Malankara Syrian Catholic Cathedral, Pattom receiving the name "Aboon Thomas Mor Eusebius" and the Enthronement Ceremony in the United States was held on October 3, 2010 at Kellenberg High School, Uniondale, New York.

Canada and Europe

In July 2010 Pope Benedict XVI also appointed Aboon Thomas Mor Eusebius as Apostolic Visitor for Syro-Malankara Catholics in Canada and Europe, alongside his primary work as Apostolic Exarch of the above-mentioned newly created Syro-Malankara exarchate in the U.S. There are Syro-Malankara parishes and communities in Canada, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

Middle East

Thirteen Syro-Malankara communities are present in Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. Because parishes (Qatar has parish) have not yet been organized, as the Syro-Malankara does not have ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the Middle East, the people are under
the direct supervision of the Roman Catholic Apostolic Vicariates of Northern Arabia and Southern Arabia. Malanka Catholics of Abu Dhabi launched one of the early websites for the Syro Malankara Catholic Church before any official sites were existing and the first in the middle east. Now almost all communities in the Gulf have their own websites.

Recently John Padipurackal, a Syro Malankara priest serving in Kuwait, in the Apostolic Vicariate of Northern Arabia, is appointed the Coordinator of the Malankara Catholic Faithful in the Middle East. "In consultation with the Holy Episcopal Synod of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church convoked from 5–8 March 2012 His Beatitude the Catholicos Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis has appointed Rev. Dr. John Padipurackal the Ecclesiastical Coordinator of the Extraterritorial Region in Middle East. He has to oversee the pastoral engagement of the Syro-Malankara Priests and coordinate the pastoral activities of common interest in the Gulf Region" relates Malankara, the official Communiqué of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church regarding this new appointment.

**Colleges**

The Malankara Catholic Educational Society manages various ecclesiastical, charitable, and educational institutions. Baselios Cleemis Catholicos is the President and Samuel Mar Irenios the Vice Chairman of Malankara Catholic Educational Society.

**Malankara Catholic Youth Movement**

Malankara Catholic Youth Movement (MCYM) is the official organization for the youth in Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. The Catholic Youth Movement of Kerala dates back to the second half of the 1960s. Although there were some youth organisations in the parish level at different parts of Kerala, the spread of the organization of the youth movements in the diocese took place rather late. Two reasons seem to be of prime importance for the foundation of the youth organizations in the late 1960s.

**Malankara Catholic Association**

Founded in 1989, the Malankara Catholic Association (MCA) is the association of lay faithful of the Church. Baselios Cleemis Catholicos, is the patron; there are now diocesan sections in the Thiruvananthapuram, Thiruvalla, Bathery, Moovattupuzha and Marthandom Dioceses and in North America.

**His Eminence Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholicos**

*Major Archbishop and Catholicos of the*

*Syro-Malankara Catholic Church*

*Cardinal Priest of San Gregorio VII*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predecessor</td>
<td>Cyril Mar Baselios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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**Orders**
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<tr>
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### Personal details

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**Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis** is the current Major Archbishop and Catholicos of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. He was elevated to the College of Cardinals of the Catholic Church by Pope Benedict XVI at the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican on 24 November 2012.

**Early life**
Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis Catholicos was born on June 15, 1959 as "Isaac Thottunkal" in Mukkoor, a small village close to Mallappally Town in Pathanamthitta district in the State of Kerala in South India.
**Education**

He attended the Minor Seminary Formation in Tiruvalla from 1976 to 1979. He received a B.Phil. degree from St. Joseph's Pontifical Institute, Mangalapuzha, Aluva where he attended from 1979 to 1982. He received a B.Th. degree from the Papal Seminary, Pune where he attended from 1983 to 1986. Thottunkal was ordained a priest on June 11, 1986. He studied for the Master of Theology in Dharmaram College, Bangalore where he attended from 1986 to 1989. Thottunkal took his Doctorate in Ecumenical Theology from Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum), Rome in 1997.

**Career**

On his return from Rome he became the Vicar General (Proto Syncellus) of the Eparchy of Bathery. Pope John Paul II nominated Thottunkal as Apostolic Visitor and the Auxiliary Bishop of Trivandrum on 18 June 2001 for the Syro-Malankarites residing in North America and Europe. He was consecrated on 15 August 2001 at Tirumoolapuram, Tiruvalla, assuming the name Isaac Mar Cleemis.

The Holy See appointed Cleemis as sixth Bishop of the Eparchy of Tiruvalla on September 11, 2003. Cleemis was installed as the first Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archeparchy of Tiruvalla on June 10, 2006.

Mor Cleemis was elected the Second Major Archbishop Catholicos of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church through the first Holy Episcopal Synod of election of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church convoked on 7–10 February 2007 at Catholicate Centre, Pattom, Trivandrum. Pope Benedict XVI approved the election on 9 February and it was announced on 10 February at St. Mary’s Cathedral, Pattom, Trivandrum. Baseliós Cleemis was enthroned the Second Major Archbishop-Catholicos of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church on 5 March 2007 at St. Mary’s Cathedral, Pattom. Cardinal Telesphore Toppo, Cardinal Mar Varkey Vithayathil participated in the installation ceremony.

He was elevated to the College of Cardinals of the Catholic Church by Pope Benedict XVI at the Papal Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican on 24 November 2012.[1] As Cardinal-Priest he was assigned the titular church of San Gregorio VII. He is the first bishop of the Syro-Malankara church and the fifth Keralite becoming cardinal. According to a Thursday, October 25, 2012, he said it was a sign of the Pope's appreciation of Indian Catholics' "unity in diversity", and cited the witness, the defense of human life, and the example of authentic prayer given by Blessed Mother Teresa of Kolkata.

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moran_Mor_Baselios_Cleemis
**Syro-Malabar Catholic Church**

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Syrian Malabar Catholic Church</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total population</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 million[^1]</td>
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<tr>
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The **Syro-Malabar Catholic Church** is an East Syrian Rite, Major Archiepiscopal Church in full communion with the Catholic Church. It is one of the 22 *sui iuris* Eastern Catholic Churches in the Catholic Church. It is the largest of the Saint Thomas Christian denominations with around 4 million believers and traces its origins to the evangelistic activity of Thomas the Apostle in the 1st century. It is also the second largest Eastern Catholic Church in communion with the Bishop of Rome.
The church is headed by the Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly, Cardinal Mar George Alencherry. Saint Alphonsa is the first canonised saint from the Church. The members of the Church are known as Nasranis.
History

Mar George Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church

Origin of St. Thomas Christians

It is believed that St. Thomas the Apostle landed at Kodungalloor (Muziris) in 52 A.D. and established Christian communities in different parts of India and died at Mylapur in 72 A.D.\(^7\) According to tradition, he founded seven churches or communities in Kerala; at Kodungalloor, Niranam, Kollam, Chayal, Kottakkavu (North Paravur), Kokkamangalam and Palayoor.\(^8\)

East Syrian relationship

From early centuries the Church of St. Thomas Christians came into communication with the Christian communities that came to be known as the Church of the East.\(^9\) This relationship made the St. Thomas Christians share the liturgical, spiritual and other ecclesiastical traditions with the Church of the East (therefore they are classified as being of the East Syrian Rite). The Christians of St. Thomas kept their distinctive character especially in Church administration and socio-cultural and ascetic-spiritual life.\(^10\) At least from the 4th century until the end of the 16th century the Bishops of the Church of Malabar were sent from the East Syrian Church,\(^11\) appointed by the Patriarch of the Church of the East.\(^12\) While the bishops originally hailing from Persia who arrived here were placed in charge of liturgy, the administration of the church remained under the control of the local Archdeacon, who was also the head of the local community.\(^10\)

The bishops who came from the East Syrian Church, were concerned with spiritual matters. Essentially, the Thomas Christians followed three distinct ways of activity in their religious sphere: their liturgy was of the East Syrian Rite, their culture was purely Indian; they had their own style of life. The governance of the Church was through Palliyogam, Synod, etc. as was prevalent in Oriental Churches.\(^13\)

Arrival of Portuguese in Malabar

A Syro-Malabar Catholic Church in Kerala, with the Holy of Holies containing the Saint Thomas Cross veiled by a red curtain according to Eastern Christian practice

The Portuguese Admiral Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut on 20 May 1498.\(^14\) When he and the Portuguese missionaries arrived they found no Christians in the country except in Malabar Coast (modern day Kerala). The Christians they found were St. Thomas Christians. The Christians were friendly to Portuguese missionaries at first; there was an exchange of gifts between them, and these
groups were delighted at their common faith.\[15\]

Later, due to certain differences, mainly in the liturgy, the relations between them became more and more strained. Under the Padroado (patronage) agreement with the Holy See the Portuguese missionaries started to interfere and things took a turn for the worse. They suspected the Indian Christians of heresy and schism (also see: Schism in Christianity); and wanted to introduce the Latin customs and Latin manner of ecclesiastical administration, severing the East Syrian connection.\[16\]

The Portuguese began a Roman Catholic (Latin Rite) diocese in Goa (1534) and another at Cochin (1558) in the hope of bringing the St. Thomas Christians under real Catholic jurisdiction. At that time, the so-called Kerala Church was under the jurisdiction of heretic seats, (Nestorians, which was unanimously condemned by Universal Church council) mainly from Persia.\[17\] In a Goan Synod held in 1585, it was decided to introduce the Latin liturgy and practices among the Thomas Christians. In the Synod of Diamper of 1599, the Portuguese Archbishop, Don Alexis Menezes succeeded in appointing a Latin bishop to govern the St. Thomas Christians. The Portuguese padroado (patronage) was extended over them.\[18\] The strife between the Portuguese missionaries and the indigenous Christians and their Mesopotamian prelates was of an ecclesiological and jurisdictional character. Attempts to resist the Latinization process were branded as heretical. Under their Archdeacon, the Thomas Christians resisted, and, consequently, the once united Church in full communion with the East Syrian Patriarch ended up in various divisions.

Relationship of the Nasrani groups omissions.\[18\]

**Divisions among Saint Thomas Christians**

A protest took place in 1653 with the Coonan Cross Oath. Under the leadership of Archdeacon Thomas, the Thomas Christians publicly took an oath that they would not obey the Jesuit bishops.\[20\]

Rome sent Carmelites in two groups from the Propagation of the Faith to Malabar headed by Fr. Sebastiani and Fr. Hyacinth. Fr. Sebastiani arrived first in 1655. He began to deal directly with the Archdeacon, Mar Thoma I. Fr. Sebastiani gained the support of many, especially with the support of Parambil Mar Chandy, Alexandar Kadavil and the Vicar of Muttam. These were the three councilors of Mar Thoma I, who were reconciled with Gracia (SJ) before the arrival of Sebastaini, according to Jesuit reports.\[20\]
Between 1661 and 1662, out of the 116 churches, the Carmelites reclaimed eighty-four churches, leaving Archdeacon Mar Thomas I with thirty-two churches. The eighty-four churches and their congregations were the body from which the Syro Malabar Church has descended. The other thirty-two churches and their congregations represented the nucleus from which the Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites & Orthodox), Thozhiyur, Mar Thoma (Reformed Syrians), Syro Malankara Catholics have originated.[21]

In 1665 Mar Gregorios, a Bishop sent by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, arrived in India. The dissident group under the leadership of the Archdeacon welcomed him.[22] Though most of the St. Thomas Christians gradually relented in their strong opposition to the Western control, the arrival of the Bishop Mar Gregory of the Syriac Orthodox Church in 1665 marked the beginning of a formal schism among the St. Thomas Christians. Those who accepted the West Syrian theological and liturgical tradition of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch of Mar Gregory became known as the Jacobite, The Syrian Catholics remained in communion with Rome and later came to be known as the Syro Malabar Church. [22]

**Restoration of the Syro-Malabar hierarchy**

After the split in the church, some priests and laymen have attempted to persuade the hierarchy to improve the identity of the local church and for the appointment of bishops from local priests. To represent their position, Kerala's Syrian Catholics Joseph Kariattil and Parem makkal Thomma Kathanar went to Rome in 1778. While they were in Europe, Kariatty Joseph Kathanar in Portugal as the Archbishop of Kodungalloor Archdiocese. While journeying home, they stayed in Goa where Kariattil died before he could formally take charge. Before he died, Kariattil appointed Kathanar as the Administrator of Kodungalloor Archdiocese after him. The new administrator ran the affairs of the church establishing his headquarters at Angamaly. In 1792, the headquarters of the Archdiocese was shifted to Vadayar because of the attacks of Tippu Sultan. In the last four years of his life, Thomma Kathanar managed church administration from his own parish, Ramapuram.

After being under Chaldean bishops earlier and under Latin Rite Roman Catholic bishops from 1599, St. Thomas Christians got their own dioceses from 1887. They came to be known as the Syro Malabar Catholics from that point on, to differentiate them from the Latin Rite Catholics in Kerala. The Syro Malabar Hierarchy was restored on 21 December 1923 with Mar Augustine Kandathil as the first Metropolitan and Head of the Church.[23]

**Time line of events**

Time line of events

- Ancient Era
- Portuguese Era
- Era of Divisions
- Arrival of the Protestants and further splits
- Era of Self-governance
- A Sui iuris Church.

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Syro-Malabar Identity

The Syro-Malabar identity is unique to the state of Kerala in India and its people. According to Fr. Placid Podipara "they are Hindu or Indian in culture, Christian in religion and Syro-Oriental in worship". The head of the Church of St. Thomas Christians, sent by the Assyrian Church of the East Syrian/Chaldean church assumed the title The Metropolitan of All India.

Faith and communion of Syro-Malabarians

The St. Thomas Christians got their bishops from the Assyrian Church of the East/Chaldean Church from ca. 500 AD till the end of the sixteenth century, until it was stopped by the Portuguese Roman Catholics in 1597, after the death of Mar Abraham.

Liturgy

As per the East Syriac tradition, liturgical day of the Syro-Malabar Church starts at sunset (6 p. m.). Also the worshiper has to face the east while worshiping. According to the East Syriac tradition, the following are the seven times of prayer:

- **Ramsha** or the *Evening Liturgy* (6 p. m.)
- **Lelya** or the *Night Liturgy* (9 p. m.)
- **Qala d-Shahra** or the *Vigil Liturgy* (3 a. m.)
- **Sapra** or the *Morning Liturgy* (6 a. m.)
- **Quta'a** or the *Third Hour Liturgy* (9 a. m.)
- **Endana** or the *Noon Liturgy* (12 p. m.)
- **D-Bathsha Shayin** or the *Ninth Hour Liturgy* (3 p. m.)

The Holy Mass, which is called Holy Qurbana in East Syriac Aramaic and means 'Eucharist', is celebrated in its solemn form on Sundays and special occasions. During the celebration of the Qurbana, priests and deacons put on elaborate vestments which are unique to the Syro-Malabar Church.

Restoration of East Syrian liturgy

In the second half of 20th century, there was a movement for better understanding of the liturgical rites. A restored Eucharistic liturgy, drawing on the original East Syrian sources, was approved by Pope Pius XII in 1957 and for the first time on the feast of St. Thomas on July 3, 1962, the vernacular, Malayalam, was introduced for the celebration of the Syro-Malabar rite Mass. Currently they celebrate the Divine Liturgy of Addai and Mari in Malayalam, Syriac or English.

The Latinization of the Syro-Malabar rite churches was brought to a head when in 1896 Ladislaus Zaleski, the Apostolic Delegate to India, requested permission to translate the Roman Pontifical into Syriac. This was the choice of the Malabar prelates, who chose it over the East Syrian Rite and West Syrian Rite pontificals. Various problems and concerns delayed the approval of this translation, until in 1934 Pope Pius XI stated that Latinization was no
longer to be encouraged among Eastern Rite Catholics. He initiated a process of liturgical reform that sought to restore the oriental nature of the Latinized Syro-Malabar rite. A restored Eucharistic liturgy, drawing on the original East Syrian sources, was approved by Pius XII in 1957 and introduced in 1962.

The church uses one of several Bible translations into Malayalam.

**Liturgical calendar**

*Syro-Malabar liturgical calendar*

Syro Malabar Church has its own liturgical year. It is ordered according to the flow of salvation history. It focuses on the historical life of Jesus. There are nine seasons for the liturgical year. They are:

1. Annunciation (*Subara*)
2. Epiphany (*Denha*)
3. Great Fast (*Sawma Rabba*)
4. Resurrection (*Qyamta*)
5. Apostles (*Slihe*)
6. Summer (*Qaita*)
7. Elijah-Cross (*Elijah-Sliba*) Moses (*Muse*)
8. Dedication of the Church (*Qudas-Edta*)

**Major feasts**

Major feasts of the Church are,

- Dukrana of our Father in Faith - Mar Thoma Shliha Commemorated on July 3
- Marth Alphonsa - commemorated 28 July
- Mar Kuriakose Elias Chavara - commemorated 3 January
- Mar Varghese Payyappilly Palakkappilly – commemorated 5 October
- Blessed Euphrasia - commemorated 29 August
- Mar Bartholomeo Sleeha - commemorated 24 August
- Marth Shmoni and her 7 Children - commemorated 21 August
- The Assumption of Marth Mariam - commemorated on 15 August
• Transfiguration - commemorated 6 August
• Mar Addai and Mar Mari - commemorated on the Second Friday of Qaita (Summer)
• The 12 Apostles of our Lord, Iso’ Misiha - commemorated 19 July
• The 70 Apostles - commemorated 17 July
• Mar Quríaqos and mother Yolethe - commemorated 15 July
• Mar Aprem - Commemorated - commemorated 9 June
• Blessed Mariam Thresia - commemorated 8 June
• Holy Pentecost - commemorated on 31 May
• The Ascension of our Lord, Iso’ Misiha - commemorated 21 May
• Mar Addai Shliha - commemorated 10 May
• Mar Geevarghese Sahada - commemorated 24 April
• New Sunday - commemorated 19 April
• All Saints Day - commemorated on the first Friday of the Season of Resurrection
• Entry of our Lord, Iso’ Misiha into Jerusalem - Osana Sunday
• The Annunciation of Marth Mariam - commemorated 25 March
• Remembrance of all Departed Faithful - commemorated on Last Friday of Denha
• The feast of Denha, the Epiphany - commemorated on 6 January
• The Nativity of our Lord, God and Saviour Iso M’siha - commemorated 25 December
• Mar Thoma Sliba - commemorated 18 December
• Immaculate Conception of Marth Mariam - commemorated 8 December
• Mar Augustinose Kunjachan - commemorated 16 October

Syro-Malabar major archiepiscopal curia

Syriac inscription at Syro-Malabar Catholic Major Archbishop's House, Ernakulam.

The curia[30] of the Syro-Malabar Church began to function in March 1993 at the archbishop’s house of Ernakulam-Angamaly. Later, on 27 May 1995, it was shifted to new premises at Mount St. Thomas near Kakkanad, Kochi. The newly constructed curial building was opened on 3 July 1998.

The administration of the Syro-Malabar Church has executive and judicial roles. The major archbishop, officials, various commissions, committees, and the permanent synod form the executive part. The permanent synod and other offices are formed in accordance with the CCEO. The officials include the chancellor, vice-chancellor, and other officers. Various commissions are appointed by the major archbishop: Liturgy, Pastoral care of the migrant and Evangelisation, Particular Law, Catechism, Ecumenism, Catholic Doctrine, Clergy and Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. The members of the
commissions are ordinarily bishops. But there are also priests in different commissions. For judicial activities, there is the major archiepiscopal ordinary tribunal formed in accordance with CCEO and it has statutes and sufficient personnel with a president, as its head. The Major archiepiscopal curia functions in the curial building in Kerala, India. They have prepared the particular law for their Church and promulgated part by part in Synodal News, the official Bulletin of this Church. There are statutes for the permanent synod, for the superior and ordinary tribunals. Regarding economo, CCEO c. 122 § 2 is specific in the particular law, that the term of the office shall be five years and the same person shall not be appointed for more than two terms consecutively.\[31\]

_Saints, Blessed, Venerables, Servants of God\[32\]_

St. Joseph's Syro-Malabar Monastery, Mannanam, where the mortal remains Blessed Chavara are kept. Saint Thomas cross is seen in the picture on the top of church

_Saints_

- Mar Thoma Shliha
- Marth Alphonsa - Eparchy of Palai - canonized on 12 October 2008 by Pope Benedict XVI.

_Beatified people_

- Mar Augustinose Kunjachan – Eparchy of Palai - declared Blessed on 30 April 2006 by Mar Varkey Vithayathil, the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church at Ramapuram, Palai as the delegate of Pope Benedict XVI.
- Marth Euphrasia – Eparchy of Irinjalakuda - declared Blessed on 3 December 2006 by Mar Varkey Vithayathil, the Archbishop of Thrissur at Ollur, Thrissur as the delegate of Pope Benedict XVI.
Venerables

- Mar Thomas Kurialachery - Archeparchy of Changanassery - First Bishop of Changanassery (1872-1925)
- Mar Mathew Kadaliikkattil (1872-1935)

Servants of God

- Mar Mathew Makil, (1851-1914)
- Mar Joseph Vithayathil, (1865-1964)
- Mar Tommiyachan Poothathil, (1871-1943)
- Mar Varghese Payyappilly Palakkappilly (1876-1929)
- Mar Augustine John Ukken (1880-1956)
- Mar Joseph C. Panjikaran (1888-1949)
- Mar Antony Thachuparampil (1894-1963)
- Mar Mathew Kavukatt (1904-1969)
- Marth Maria Celine Kannanaikal (1931-1957)
- Marth Rani Maria (1954-1995)
- Mar Thommachen Putthenparampil

List of Eparchies

Syro-Malabar bishops at the Generalate of S. D.

There are 29 eparchies. Five of them are Archeparchies at present – Ernakulam-Angamaly, Changanacherry, Trichur, Tellicherry and Kottayam. There are other 13 eparchies – Bhadravathi, Belthangady, Irinjalakuda, Kanjirapally, Kothamangalam, Iduikki, Mananthavady, Mandya, Palai, Palghat, Ramanathapuram, Thamarassery and Thuckalay within the proper territory of the Major Archiepiscopal Church. There are 11 eparchies outside Kerala – Adilabad, Bijnor, Chanda, Gorakhpur, Jagdalpur, Kalyan, Rajkot, Sagar, Satna, Ujjain and the St. Thomas Eparchy of Chicago in the United States of America.[33]

Within the proper territory
There are sixteen eparchies within the proper territory of the Syro Malabar Church.

Archeaparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly has 510,000 members with 347 parishes, 731 religious/secular priests, 632 male religious and 4935 female religious. Archeaparchy of Trichur has 471,328 members with 195 parishes, 418 religious/secular priests, 358 male religious and
3315 female religious. Eparchy of Idukki has 400,000 members with 129 parishes, 119 religious/secular priests, 109 male religious and 1320 female religious.

Archeparchy of Changanacherry has 390,000 members with 266 parishes, 615 religious/secular priests, 534 male religious and 2705 female religious. Eparchy of Palai has 348,128 members with 169 parishes, 502 religious/secular priests, 127 male religious and 3312 female religious. Archeparchy of Tellicherry has 317,782 members with 222 parishes, 293 religious/secular priests, 263 male religious and 1664 female religious. Eparchy of Irinjalakuda has 258,200 members with 128 parishes, 233 religious/secular priests, 132 male religious and 2350 female religious.

Eparchy of Kothamangalam has 217,420 members with 115 parishes, 242 religious/secular priests, 163 male religious and 2210 female religious. Eparchy of Kanjirapally has 192,000 members with 136 parishes, 314 religious/secular priests, 210 male religious and 1840 female religious. Archeparchy of Kottayam has 175,300 members with 149 parishes, 161 religious/secular priests, 107 male religious and 1233 female religious. Archeparchy of Mananthavady has 170,100 members with 140 parishes, 413 religious/secular priests, 358 male religious and 1546 female religious. Eparchy of Thamarasserry has 129,600 members with 128 parishes, 247 religious/secular priests, 257 male religious and 1321 female religious. Eparchy of Palghat has 68,004 members with 106 parishes, 167 religious/secular priests, 82 male religious and 1360 female religious.[33]

According to a study conducted, in Kerala about 30 percent of the Syro Malabar Church members lived in the erstwhile Cochin State. The remaining 70 percent lived in Travancore state. In the Travancore State, Meenachil Taluk had the largest proportion, followed by Changanaserry Taluk. Erstwhile Cochin State, Meenachil and Changanaserry together had 56 percent of the total Syro Malabar Population. Kottayam, Muvattupuzha, Kanjirappally, Thodupuzha, Kothamangalam, Cherthala, Mukundapuram (irinjalakkuda-chalakkudy), Wadakkancherry, Thrissur, North Parur, Alwaye, Kunnamthunadu, Ambalapuzha, Kuttanad, Peerumedu, Nedumkandam and Devikulam etc. are the prominent taluks.[33]

**Outside the proper territory**

There are eleven eparchies outside the proper territory of the Syro Malabar Church. Eparchy of Kalyan has 100,000 members with 106 parishes, 146 religious/secular priests, 105 male religious and 270 female religious. St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago, USA has 85,000 members with 11 parishes, 45 religious/secular priests, 13 male religious and 16 female religious. Eparchy of Chanda has 14,079 members with 5 parishes, 51 religious/secular priests, 182 male religious and 352 female religious. Eparchy of Adilabad, has 13,273 members with 25 parishes, 50 religious/secular priests, 41 male religious and 143 female religious. Eparchy of Rajkot has 12,850 members with 12 parishes, 140 religious/secular priests, 142 male religious and 421 female religious.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_the_Syro-Malabar_Catholic_Church
George Alencherry
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

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### Orders

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### Personal details

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### Styles of George Alencherry
Mar George Alencherry is the current Major archbishop of Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and the archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly. He was appointed a Cardinal of the Catholic Church and the titular Archpriest of San Bernardo alle Terme in Rome on 18 February 2012 in Rome.[1] Elected by the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church Holy Synod, and ratified by Pope Benedict XVI, Mar George Allencherry is the current Major Archbishop of Ernakulam-Angamaly succeeding Mar Varkey Vithayathil.[2]

**Early life**

Mar George Alencherry was born on 19 April 1945 in the parish of Thuruthy in the archdiocese of Changanacherry as the sixth child of the ten children of Mr. Philipose and Mary Alencherry of whom two others are priests (Fr. Jose Alencherry and Fr. Francis Alencherry, SDB) and one, a religious sister Sr.Cherupushpam, S.A.B.S.). Geevarghese is his baptismal name. Mar George Alencherry had his primary schooling at St Mary's School, Thuruthy and secondary education at St Berchman's High School, Changanacherry. He began his priestly formation in 1961 at the archdiocesan minor seminary at Parel, Changanacherry. While he pursued his studies in the minor seminary, he obtained his BA in economics with second rank from St. Berchman's College. After the minor seminary studies he was sent to St Joseph's Pontifical Seminary, Aluva where he completed his philosophical and theological studies.

On 18 December 1972 Cardinal Antony Padiyara, the then archbishop of Changanacherry, ordained him priest at St Mary's Church, Thuruthy, for the archdiocese of Changanacherry. Later he continued his higher studies at the Pontifical Institute of Theology and Philosophy from where he obtained his master's degree in first rank. While Mar George Alencherry was pursuing higher studies at Aluva he served also as vicar of the filial church at Periyarmugham in the archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly. After completion of studies at Aluva Mar George Alencherry was appointed as assistant vicar at the Cathedral church of Changanacherry and Director of the Archdiocesan Faith Formation department. Thereafter he served three years as secretary of the Commission for Catechism of the Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council (KCBC). After his tenure in KCBC he was sent to Paris for higher studies. There he pursued his studies at Sorbonne University and the Catholic Institute from where he obtained his doctorate in biblical theology. On returning to India in 1986 Mar George Alencherry was appointed director of the pastoral Oriental Centre (POC) at Palarivattom and deputy secretary of KCBC. He served the Church in Kerala in that capacity until 1993. Simultaneously he had served also as professor at St Thomas Apostolic Seminary, Vadavathoor. He continued to teach at Vadavathoor until 1997. From 1994 to 1996 he was the protosyncellus of the metropolitan of Changanacherry.[3]

**Bishop of Thuckalay (1997–2011)**

The Diocese of Thuckalay was erected by the Papel Bull "Apud Indorum" on 11 November 1996. It was formed by separating the territory of the Archdiocese of Changanassery that extended over to the state of Tamilnadu. The then Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Changanacherry Very Rev. Fr. George Alencherry was appointed the first bishop of the new Eparchy. The Establishment of the diocese and appointment of the first bishop were promulgated on 18 December 1996. Very Rev. Fr. George Alencherry was ordained Bishop on 2 February
1997 by Mar Joseph Powathil, Metropolitan Archbishop of Changanassery, Mar Mathew Vattackuzhy, Bishop of Kanjirappally and Lawrence Mar Aprem, Bishop of Marthandam as co-consecrants. He was installed as Bishop of the Diocese on the same day by Mar Varkey Vithayathil Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. The total number of the Catholic faithful in the diocese is 25000.[4]

**Election and enthronement**

The Syro-Malabar Bishops' holy synod that began on 23 May 2011 at the Major Archiepiscopal Curia at Eranakulam elected Mar George Alencherry, the bishop of the Syro-Malabar Diocese of Thuckalay, the third Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church. The news of the election was announced in the Vatican as well as at Mount St Thomas, the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Curia at 3.30 pm on Thursday, 26th May 2011. Mar George Alencherry has been elected as the successor of the deceased Major Archbishop Cardinal Mar Varkey Vithayathil. He is the first head of the Syro-Malabar Church to be elected by its synod. When Pope John Paul II made the Syro-Malabar Church a major archiepiscopal church in 1992, appointing Mar Antony Padiyara as its first major archbishop, he reserved the power to appoint the major Archbishop and bishops. However, in 2004, the Holy See granted full administrative powers to the church, including the power to elect bishops.[3][5]

On 23 May, the first day of the synod, the synod elected Mar George Valiamattam, the Archbishop of Tellicherry, the president of the election synod. Then followed the procedures of election of the new Major Archbishop. Thereafter the president of the session asked Mar George Alencherry whether he accepted the election and in the following sitting the newly-elected expressed his acceptance by reading it out before the synod. Immediately the request was sent to the Pope, through the Apostolic Nunciature in New Delhi, for the approval of the election of Mar George Alencherry. The papal approval was given on Wednesday, 25 May evening and it was communicated to the Administrator, Mar Bosco Puthur, on Thursday, 26 May morning. The papal approval of the election of Mar George Alencherry was announced in the synod by Mar George Valiamattam, the president of the session. Thereafter the newly elected Major Archbishop, according to the canon Law, made his oath of fidelity and communion to the Holy Synod and the Church. Thereafter all the bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church expressed their respect and ecclesial communion with the new major archbishop. Major Archbishop Mar George Alencherry said his services will be for all people of India. He stressed inter-rite relations, inter-faith harmony and ecumenism.[3]

**Cardinalate**

On 18 February 2012, Pope Benedict XVI elevated him to the cardinalate, giving him a unique red biretta with a traditional Nasrani cross and gold ring during a ceremony in Saint Peter's Basilica[6] and create him Cardinal-Priest of San Bernardo alle Terme. Earlier cardinals belonging to the Syro Malabar Church were Joseph Parecattil (28 April 1969), Antony Padiyara (28 June 1988) and Varkey Vithayathil 21 February 2001).

His visit to Rome for his cardinal creation coincided with the arrest of Marine officers on board the Enrica Lexie who shot and killed two Keralite fishermen on a fishing vessel.[7] Comments he
made as part of an interview with Italian Press Agency Fides caused significant controversy as to the essence of his message, leading Cardinal Allencherry to issue clarifying press statements with Fides.[8]

On 24 April 2012 Cardinal Alencherry was made a member of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and a member of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. He will hold these memberships until his 80th birthday.[9]

Cardinal Alencherry participated as a cardinal-elector in the conclave that elected Pope Francis. During the conclave, Cardinal Alencherry was one of the four cardinal-electors who were from outside the Latin Church and wore different vestments, proper to their respective churches. The others were Coptic Catholic Patriarch Emeritus Antonios Naguib, Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros al-Rahi, and Syro-Malankara Major Archbishop Baselios Cleemis.[10]

**Views**

**Pastoral care of the Syro-Malabar Catholics outside the "proper" territory**

Historically the Prelates of St. Thomas Christians were called Archbishop of India. The titles used for them were "Metropolitan and Gate of All India" or "Gate of India". This indicates the highest rank of authority in the Indian Church and the extent of its jurisdiction. He enjoyed an All India Jurisdiction, the Ruler of the entire Holy Church of Christians of India.[11] The Vatican Codex 22, written in Cranganore in 1301 gives the titles as Metropolitan and the director of the entire holy church of Christian India.[12][13] In the year 1564 Pope Pius IV created Archdiocese of Angamali(With Jurisdiction over all India). In 1600 the Metropolitan status of the see of Angamaly (metropolitan of all India, or Gate of India) was abolished and was made suffragan to Goa, with far reaching consequences. The news of the reduction of the see of Angamaly from the Metropolitan to a suffragan caused much unrest among the St. Thomas Christians. They lost the title of "ALL INDIA" which belonged to the prelates of St. Thomas Christians for many centuries. Later the Metropolitan status was restored to the see of Angamaly but never the title "All India".[14] In 1896 Syro Malabar Catholic got their own hierarchy but instead of reestablishing the old Jurisdiction over all India, three Apostolic Vicariates were established in Trichur, Ernakulam and Changanassery.

By the second half of twentieth century members of the Syro-Malabar community have emigrated in big numbers to the other parts of India and to foreign countries. According to Vatican II and subsequent documents such as the Oriental and Latin Canon Laws, Catechism of the Catholic Church their pastoral needs have to be taken care by the priests of
their own rite and in their own rite. For the pastoral care of the Syro-Malabar Catholics in Bombay, Punai and Kerala and in USA and Canada were established the following dioceses in 1988 Diocese of Kalyan and in 2001 Diocese of Chicago.Besides these two dioceses there are many communities of Syro-Malabarians in many parts of India and in foreign countries. Big cities of India like Delhi, Bangalore, Madras, Calcutta etc. have big numbers of Syro-Malabar Catholics.\[14\]

The faithful of the Syro-Malabar Church are about four million, of which 3 million and 400 thousand live in the twenty-eight dioceses in India. Of these dioceses, eighteen are in the territory of the Syro-Malabar Church itself (Kerala, part of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka). We have a territorial jurisdiction only in these eighteen dioceses. And we'd like to have a territorial jurisdiction covering the whole territory of India: this is one of our appeals to the Holy Father and for us it is an important request. We believe it is our right. Before the arrival of Western missionaries – the Portuguese arrived in the sixteenth century – the jurisdiction of us _Christians of St Thomas_ was extended to all of India. Then the Western missionaries, because of the influence of European monarchs, took jurisdiction of India, restricting ours to the areas where we were more concentrated.\[15\]

Interview with H.B Mar George Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church by Roberto Rotondo and Gianni Valente

**References**

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2. ^ CONFERMA DELL’ELEZIONE DELL’ARCIVESCOVO MAGGIORE DI ERNAKULAM-ANGAMALY DEI SIRO-MALABARESI
3. ^ ab\(c\) [http://www.ernakulamarchdiocese.org/admin/cms/docs/n_high/222.pdf](http://www.ernakulamarchdiocese.org/admin/cms/docs/n_high/222.pdf)
4. ^ diocese thuckalay
5. ^ Bishop Alencherry is new Syro-Malabar Church head
6. ^ Pope Benedict XVI holds Consistory, announces canonizations
7. ^ Enrica Lexie Crew Arrested,
8. ^ Cardinal Alencherry back says he shares grief of fishermens families
9. ^
10. ^ Procession and entrance in Conclave on YouTube
11. ^ Rev. Dr. Francis Thonipara, "St. Thomas Christians: The First Indigenous Church of India" p.69
12. ^ MS Vat Syr 22; Wilmshurst, EOCE, 343 and 391.
13. ^ The Christians of St. Thomas in South India and their Syriac manuscripts by J. P. M. van der Ploeg –page 187
14. ^ a b Welcome to Delhi Syro-Malabar
15. ^ a b 30Giorni | "Ours is the faith of the apostles, handed down by St Thomas" (Interview with George Alencherry, Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church by Roberto Rotondo and
Chapter Nineteen:

Holy Land Churches and Leadership
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

The **Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem** (Latin: 'Patriarcha Hierosolymitanus Latinorum') is the title possessed by the Latin Church Catholic Archbishop of Jerusalem. The Archdiocese of Jerusalem has jurisdiction for all Latin Church Catholics in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, Jordan and Cyprus. In Jerusalem, the Catholic community is the largest Christian community, with some 4,500 people out of an estimated Christian population of about 11,000. Since June 2008, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem has been Fouad Twal. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem also holds the office of Grand Prior of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

In the Catholic Church, the title Patriarch is customarily reserved to the highest ranking bishops of the Eastern Catholic Churches. The Patriarch of Jerusalem is one of four bishops of the Latin Church to be called a patriarch, the others being the Patriarchs of Venice, Lisbon and the East Indies (Goa, India). These 'minor patriarchs' are bishops whose see has as a permanent privilege the honorific title of patriarch. The honorary patriarchal titles Latin Patriarch of Constantinople, Alexandria and Antioch were abolished in 1964. The title of Patriarch of Jerusalem is also used by the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem.

**Crusader patriarchate**

In 1054, the Great Schism split Christianity into the Eastern Orthodox Church - which consisted of the four Orthodox Christian Patriarchs of Antioch, Jerusalem, Constantinople and Alexandria - under the jurisdiction of Constantinople and the Roman Catholic Church - which consisted of the Pope of Rome and virtually all of Western Christianity. All Christians in the Holy Land came under the jurisdiction of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem.

In 1099, the Western Crusaders captured Jerusalem, set up the Kingdom of Jerusalem and established a Latin hierarchy under a Latin Patriarch (in communion with Rome), while expelling the Orthodox Patriarch. The Latin Patriarchate was divided into four archdioceses - their heads bearing the titles of Archbishop of Tyre, Archbishop of Caesarea, Archbishop of Nazareth, and Archbishop of Petra - and a number of suffragan dioceses. The Latin Patriarch took over control of the Latin quarter of the city of Jerusalem (the Holy Sepulchre and the immediate surroundings), and had as his direct suffragans the bishops of Lydda-Ramla, Bethlehem, Hebron, and Gaza, and the abbots of the Temple, Mount Sion, and the Mount of Olives.

The Latin Patriarch resided in Jerusalem from 1099 to 1187, while Orthodox Patriarchs continued to be appointed, but resided in Constantinople. In 1187, the Crusaders were forced to flee Jerusalem, and the Latin Patriarchy moved to Acre, while the Orthodox Patriarch returned to Jerusalem. The Catholic Church continued to appoint Latin Patriarchs. The Crusader Kingdom endured almost 200 years until the last vestiges of the Kingdom were conquered by the Mamluks in 1291, and the Latin hierarchy was effectively eliminated in the Levant. With the fall of Acre, the Latin Patriarch moved to Cyprus in 1291. From 1374, the Catholic Church continued to appoint titular Patriarchs of Jerusalem, who were based at the Basilica di San Lorenzo fuori le Mura in Rome.
In 1342, Pope Clement VI officially committed the care of the Holy Land to the Franciscans and the Franciscan Custos of the Holy Lands (The Grand Masters of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre) held the title *ex officio* under the Papal bull *Gratiam agimus* by Pope Clement VI, unless someone was specifically appointed to the honorary office.

**Modern patriarchy**

A resident Latin Patriarch was re-established in 1847 by Pius IX, with Bishop Joseph Valerga being appointed to the office. Though officially superseding the Franciscans, Valerga was also the Grand Master of the Order. On Valerga's death in 1872, Vincent Braco was appointed, and following his death in 1889, the Ottoman Sultan authorized the re-establishment of a Latin hierarchy. The Grand Masters of the Order continued to be named as Latin Patriarchs until 1905.

In 1987, Michel Sabbah became the first native Palestinian to be appointed Latin Patriarch. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem is now the diocesan bishop of Latin Catholics of the *Archdiocese of Jerusalem* and has jurisdiction for all Latin Church Catholics in Israel, the Occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan and Cyprus. Since 2008, the Patriarch has been Fouad Twal from Jordan.

The Co-Cathedral Church of the Holy Name of Jesus is the principal, or "mother" Church of the Latin Patriarchate, the church in which the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem has his official chair (cathedra). However, the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre has the title of cathedral of the patriarchate. The residence of the Patriarch is in the Old City of Jerusalem, near the Co-Cathedral, while the seminary, which is responsible for the liturgical education, is in Beit Jala, a town 10 km south of Jerusalem, where it has been since 1936.

The prerogatives of the Patriarch in his relation with government authorities overlap with the prerogatives of the Vatican Apostolic Nuncio to Israel, following the Fundamental Agreement between Israel and the Vatican signed on 30 December 1993, and Apostolic delegate to the Palestinian Authority.

**List of Latin Patriarchs of Jerusalem**

- Arnulf of Chocques (1099)
- Dagobert of Pisa (1099–1102)
- Ehremar (1102–1105)
- Dagobert of Pisa (restored) (1105)
- Ghibbelin of Arles (1107–1112)
- Arnulf of Chocques (re-appointed) (1112–1118)
- Garmond of Picquigny (1119–1128)
- Stephen of La Ferté (1128–1130)
- William of Malines (1130–1145)
- Fulk of Angoulême (1146–1157)
- Amalric of Nesle (1157–1180)
- Heraclius (1180–1191)

Jerusalem lost in 1187; seat of the Patriarch moved to Acre.
• Rodolfo (1191-1192)
• Michele de Corbeil (1193-1194)[4]
• Aimaro Monaco dei Corbizzi (1194–1202)
• Soffredo Errico Gaetani (1202–1204)
• Albert Avogadro (1204–1214)
• Raoul of Merencourt (1214–1225)
• Gerald of Lausanne (1225–1238)
  o vacant (1238–1240); Jacques de Vitry appointed but never served
• Robert of Nantes (1240–1254)
• Jacques Pantaléon (1255–1261), future Pope Urban IV of Rome
• William II of Agen (1261–1270)
• Thomas Agni of Cosenza (1271–1277)
• John of Versailles (1278–1279)
• Elijah (1279–1287)
• Nicholas of Hanapes (1288–1294)

Acre lost in 1291; moved to Cyprus then Rome after 1374; only honorary patriarchs until 1847.

• Antony Bek (1306–1311), also Prince-Bishop of Durham in England from 1284 to 1310

The Franciscan Custodian of the Holy Land held the title from 1342 to 1830 under the Papal bull Gratiam agimus by Pope Clement VI. The bull declared the Franciscans as the official custodians of the Holy Places in the name of the Catholic Church, "unless someone was specifically appointed in the honorary office".

• Peter Paludanus (1329–1342)
• Elie de Nabinal (1342–1348)
• Philippe de Cabassole (died 1372)
• Philippe of Alençon (died 1397)
• Bertrande de Chanac (?–1401?)
• Giovanni Antonio Sangiorgio (1500–1503)
• Rodrigo de Carvajal (1523–1539)
• Gian Antonio Facchinetti de Nuce (1572–1585), future Pope Innocent IX of Rome
• Scipione Gonzaga (1585?–?)
• Francesco Cennini de' Salamandri (1618–1645)
• Camillo Massimo (1653–1677)
• Bandino Panciatici (1689–1698?)
• Francesco Martelli (1698–1717?)
• Vincent Louis Gotti (1728–1729)
• Pompeo Aldrovandi (1729–1734)
• Thomas Cervini (1734–1751)
• Thomas de Moncada (1751–1762)
• Georgius Maria Lascaris (1762–1795)
  o vacant (1795–1800)
• Michele di Pietro (1800–1821)
• Francesco Maria Fenzi (1816–1829)
• Augustus Foscolo (1830–1847), later Latin Patriarch of Alexandria, 1847–1860

Restoration of resident Latin Patriarchs of Jerusalem in 1847.

• Joseph Valerga (1847–1872)
• Vincent Braco (1872–1889)

Latin patriarchate hierarchy re-established in 1889.

Alessio Ascalesi the Archbishop of Naples with Herbert Plumer, 1st Viscount Plumer & Luigi Barlassina the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem on the right, August 11, 1926

• Luigi Piavi (1889–1905)
  o vacant (1905–1906)
• Filippo Camassei (1906–1919)
• Luigi Barlassina (1920–1947)
  o vacant (1947–1949)
• Alberto Gori (1949–1970)
• Giacomo Giuseppe Beltritti (1970–1987)
• Michel Sabbah (1987–2008)
• Fouad Twal (2008-2016)
• Pierbattista Pizzaballa (2016-Present)
Latin Patriarch, His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa

Early
Born in Cologno al Serio in the province and diocese of Bergamo from Peter and Mary Magdalene Tadini, at an early age he moved to Romagna to undertake the training course at the Friars Minor of Emilia Romagna.

He dressed the habit 5 September 1984 in the convent of Santo Spirito in Ferrara and entered the novitiate of the sanctuary of La Verna as a lesser brother of the then Franciscan Province of Christ the King (Emilia-Romagna). Here he made his profession on 7 September 1985. After a period of a year in Rome, he moved to the Holy Land in Jerusalem, in October 1990.

In the Holy Land
He has been assistant professor of Biblical Hebrew and Judaism at the SBF and the Studium Theologicum Jerosolymitanum (STJ). He has served as Assistant General Auxiliary of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem for the pastoral care of the Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel and parochial vicar for the Hebrew-speaking Catholic community in Jerusalem.

Custos of the Holy Land
In 2004 he was appointed Custos of the Holy Land and Guardian of Mount Zion. Among many other responsibilities, the Custos of the Holy Land that of respect for the Status Quo. The pastoral work of Father Pizzaballa has been characterized by balance and strong strategic skills and diplomatic; in the complicated mediation between the state of Israel and the authorities Palestinians, he said he was open to dialogue with all the forces present in the territory, to ensure the presence of the Christian community in the Holy Land, which feels in danger. He ends his tenure as Guardian on 20 May 2016.

Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem
On June 24, 2016, Pope Francis appointed him Apostolic Administrator of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem of the Latins vacant. It was assigned the titular See of Verbe replacing the Patriarch Fouad Twal, who resigned for reasons of age. He formally took office on 15 July 2016.

He received his episcopal consecration on 10 September 2016 in the cathedral of Bergamo at the hands of Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, prefect of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, coconsacrant Patriarch Emeritus of Jerusalem of the Latins Fouad Twal, and Bishop of Bergamo Francesco Beschi. On September 21 2016, he made his solemn entry into Jerusalem.

Source: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierbattista_Pizzaballa
Former Latin Patriarch, His Beatitude Fouad Twal

Fouad Twal (born October 23, 1940 at Madaba) is a Roman Catholic archbishop. Since June 2008 he has served as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem.

He was ordained to the priesthood on June 29, 1966. After his ordination, he was the vicar of Ramallah. In 1972 he entered the Pontifical Lateran University where he studied for a doctorate in canon law. He was awarded his doctorate in 1975. He was appointed the prelate of the territorial prelature of Tunis by Pope John Paul II on May 30, 1992. He was concsecrated to the episcopate on July 22 later that year. In 1995, the territorial prelature was elevated to become the Diocese of Tunis, and Twal was made an archbishop ad personam. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI named him the coadjutor archbishop of Jerusalem. He succeeded Michel Sabbah as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem in 2008.

Receiving the Pallium

His Beatitude Fouad Twal received his pallium at the hands of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI at a mass in the Basilica of Saint Peter, Vatican City State, 29 June 2008 at around 12.05pm local (Palestinian) time.

His Beatitude on the situation of Palestine and its people

On the situation of Palestine and its people he has recently said: "We receive a lot of help and we are grateful but at the same time we say we need more. What we need is peace. We don’t only to be a begging Church, we don’t want to be beggars with a licence. I don’t like this. We need a political horizon, it’s time to put an end to the Wall, the Checkpoints, it’s time for a Palestinian State, it’s time for an end to our problems with visa’s."

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fouad_Twal
Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East

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The **Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East** is a province of the Anglican Communion stretching from Iran in the east to Algeria in the west, and Cyprus in the north to Somalia in the south. It is the largest and the most diverse Anglican province. The church is headed by a President Bishop, currently the Most Reverend Mouneer Hanna Anis, who ranks as a representative primate in the Anglican Communion. The Central Synod of the church is its deliberative and legislative organ. The province is divided into four dioceses:

- Diocese of Jerusalem — covering Israel, Palestinian territories, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon,
- Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf — covering Cyprus, the Persian Gulf states, Arabia and Iraq,
- Diocese of Egypt with North Africa, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia and Djibouti — also covering Algeria, Tunisia and Libya,
- Diocese of Iran.

Each diocese is headed by a bishop. The President Bishop is chosen from among the diocesan bishops, and retains diocesan responsibility. The current President Bishop also serves as Bishop of Egypt and North Africa. The province estimates that it has around 35,000 baptized members in 55 congregations. The province has around 40 educational or medical establishments and 90 clergy. Today, in Jerusalem, Anglicans constitute a large portion of the Christian community.
History

Origins

The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East began as a number of missionary posts of the Church Mission Society (CMS) in Cyprus, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. The Church Mission Society continues to provide the province with lay mission partners and ordained chaplains, but now the majority of its ministry is drawn from local congregations.

During the 1820s, CMS began to prepare for permanent missionary stations in the region.

In 1833, a missionary station was established in Jerusalem with the support of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (a Jewish Christian missionary society now known as the Church’s Ministry Among Jewish People or CMJ). In 1839, the building of the Church of Saint Mark, Alexandria was begun.

In 1841, Michael Solomon Alexander, a converted rabbi, arrived in Jerusalem as bishop. His diocese originally covered the mission stations in the Middle East and Egypt, and was a joint venture with the Evangelical Church in Prussia (the so-called Anglo-Prussian Union), serving Lutherans and Anglicans.

In 1849, Christ Church, Jerusalem, became the first Anglican church in Jerusalem.

In 1881, the Anglo-Prussian Union ceased to function, and it was formally dissolved in 1887. From that time, the diocese became solely Anglican.

Saint George’s Cathedral was built in 1898 in Jerusalem as a central focus for the diocese.

Later history

Although the diocese of Jerusalem began as a foreign missionary organization, it quickly established itself as part of the Palestinian community. In 1905, the Palestinian Native Church Council was established to give Palestinians more say in the running of the church. This led to an increase in the number of Palestinian and Arab clergy serving the diocese.

In 1920, the Diocese of Egypt and the Sudan was formed, separate from the Diocese of Jerusalem, with Llewelyn Gwynne as its first bishop. In the 1920s the Bishop founded St. George’s College as a seminary for local clergy-in-training. Bishop Gwynne established the second cathedral of All Saints’, Cairo (the present cathedral is the third building) in 1938.

In 1945, Sudan became a separate diocese from Egypt.

In 1957, the Diocese of Jerusalem was elevated to the rank of an archdiocese (its bishop being an archbishop) under the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Archbishop in Jerusalem had metropolitan oversight of the entire area of the current province with the addition of the Sudan (five dioceses in all). In that same year, Najib Cubain was consecrated Bishop of Jordan,
Lebanon and Syria, the first Arab bishop, assistant to the Archbishop in Jerusalem. During the 1950s, political unrest in Egypt left the diocese in the care of four Egyptian clergy under the oversight of the Archbishop in Jerusalem.

An Anglican Bishop of Egypt was appointed in 1968, and, in 1974, the first Egyptian bishop, Ishaq Musaad, was consecrated. In 1976, Faik Hadad became the first Palestinian Anglican bishop in Jerusalem.

**Current position**

In 1976, the structure of the Anglican church in the region was overhauled.

Jerusalem became an ordinary bishopric, and the four dioceses had equal status in the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East. The Archbishop of Canterbury relinquished his metropolitan authority to a Presiding Bishop and the Central Synod, with the four dioceses rotating the responsibility of the Bishop President and Synodical Leadership. The Central synod includes the four dioceses of the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East. When a Bishop reaches the age of 68, a coadjutor Bishop should be elected to work alongside the Bishop for two years.[1]

The Diocese of Egypt was expanded to take in the chaplaincies of Ethiopia, Somalia, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria.

The Sudan became a fully separate and independent province.

In 1970, the Cathedral of All Saints' in Cairo was demolished to make way for a new Nile bridge. In 1977, work on a new building on Zamalek was begun, and completed in 1988.

**Dioceses**

**Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf**

Main Article Anglican Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf

Diocesan seats are St Paul's Cathedral, Nicosia, Cyprus and St Christopher's Cathedral, Manama, Bahrain.

The current bishop is Michael Lewis.

The diocese is divided into two archdeaconries: one for Cyprus and one for the Persian Gulf.

Countries served:

- Bahrain
- Cyprus
- Iraq
- Kuwait
• Oman
• Qatar
• Saudi Arabia
• United Arab Emirates
• Yemen

**Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa**

The diocesan seat is All Saints' Cathedral, Zamalek, Cairo, Egypt

The current bishops include: Most Revd Mouneer Hanna Anis, diocesan Bishop of Egypt (Presiding Bishop of the Church in Jerusalem); the Rt Revd Bill Musk, Area Bishop for North Africa.

80% of the communicants of this diocese are refugees, owing to the civil war in Sudan. The churches of Holy Trinity, Algiers, and Christ Church, Mogadishu, are currently without chaplains due to local unrest.

Countries served:

• Algeria
• Djibouti
• Egypt
• Eritrea
• Ethiopia
• Libya
• Somalia
• Tunisia

**Diocese of Iran**

The Diocese of Iran was first established in 1912 as the Diocese of Persia and was incorporated into the Jerusalem Archbishopric in 1957. The current bishop is the Rt Rev Azad Marshall. The diocesan seat is Saint Luke's Church, Isfahan, Iran.

**Diocese of Jerusalem**

The current Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem is Suheil Dawani, who was installed on April 15, 2007. The Diocese of Jerusalem covering Israel, Palestinian territories, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The diocesan seat is Cathedral Church of St George the Martyr, Jerusalem.

The parish with the largest congregation is the Church of the Redeemer in Amman, Jordan. The cornerstone of the church was laid in 1949, and the church houses both Arabic- and English-speaking congregations today

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Episcopal_Church_in_Jerusalem_and_the_Middle_East

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The Right Rev'd Suheil S. Dawani, A.A., B.Th., M.Th, D.D. Biography:

The 14th Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem
The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

Bishop Suheil S. Dawani was elected on June 15, 2005 as the Coadjutor Bishop of The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem and the Middle East and succeeded Bishop Riah H. Abu El Assal on April 15th, 2007 when he was Installed in his dual role as the 14th Anglican Bishop in succession in Jerusalem at St. George's Cathedral, East Jerusalem and as the Diocesan Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem.

The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem covers Jerusalem, Israel, The Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. (It is a member of the Central synod of Cyprus and the Gulf, Iran, Egypt and Jerusalem and the Middle East).

The first Anglicans arrived in the Holy Land in 1841. The Cathedral of St. George was built in 1898 and the first Palestinian born Anglican Bishop, the late Bishop Faik Hadad (the 11th in Succession to the Jerusalem See) became the Diocesan in 1976. The diocese has an active indigenous membership of 7,000 Anglicans, with 33 service institutions, 27 parishes, 1500 employees, 200 hospital beds in two General Hospitals in Gaza and Nablus and 6,000 students in 11 diocesan schools.

Bishop Dawani was born in Nablus, West Bank in 1951, married to Shafeeqa Fu'ad Massad; they have three daughters Sama, Tala, and Luban. Mrs. Dawani has been a leader in the empowerment of Lay Churchwomen within the life of the Church.

The Bishop completed his primary and secondary education in the West Bank City of Nablus, obtained his Associate degree in Arts in 1973 from the West Bank's Bir-Zeit University, and graduated from the New East School of Theology in Beirut in 1975 with a Bachelor in Theology degree. In 1976, he was ordained as deacon and served at St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem for eight months.

In 1977 he was ordained to priesthood and assigned to serve the West Bank's Ramallah and Bir-Zeit congregations. In 1985, he was admitted as a student at the Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia (Episcopal Church, USA), where he graduated with a degree of Master in Theology. In 1987 he became the Vicar of St. John's and St. Luke's Church in Haifa, Israel. In 1992, he was assigned as the Priest in Charge of St. Andrew’s, Ramallah, and Bir-Zeit.

During that time, Bishop Suheil:
1. Founded the ecumenical center;
2. He established the St. Andrew's Ecumenical Housing Project for young Christian couples with thirty-three apartments;
3. Was able, with the leaders of the Churches in Ramallah, to set the same date each year to celebrate the major Christian feasts - Christmas and Easter;
4. Established the first evangelical Boy Scouts group with the Lutheran Church.
In 1989, he returned to the Virginia Theological Seminary for the Doctor of Ministry degree. He was able to finish three summers along with the Pastoral Counseling exam. However, because of continuous moving in the assignment of his congregations, he was unable to complete all the degree requirements. In 2007, the Virginia Theological Seminary granted him the Doctoral degree of Doctor of Divinity, honoris causa.

In 1997, Bishop Suheil was appointed the Arab Canon Pastor at St. George's Cathedral, Jerusalem, and was elected as the General Secretary of the Diocese and continued as the General Secretary until his election as the Bishop Co-adjutor.

During his ministry at St. George's Cathedral, the Kids for Peace program was established bringing Christian, Muslim and Jewish children together in an Interfaith environment and collegiality.

In 1998 as the Canon pastor, he established, in Jerusalem, the first scholarship fund with the generous matched contribution of the children of the late Judge and Mrs. Jamil I. Habiby in which hundreds of Christian students have benefited, and in 2001, he led the first Kids for Peace gathering to Camp Allen in Houston Texas.

Bishop Suheil is the chairman of the Helen Keller Board in Jerusalem, a member in the Clergy for Peace Group, in the Council of the Dialogue between Faiths and served for six years as a member in the Central Synod of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East. Deeply committed to Ecumenical and Interfaith collegiality and cooperation, he has been invited by His Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury to participate in several Interfaith Meetings held at Lambeth, Palace, in London, and has participated in Ecumenical meetings on the Holy Land held in Germany, Australia, Switzerland, Ireland and the Netherlands as well as in the United States. In Jerusalem, he meets regularly with the other Religious Leaders to coordinate their endeavors in the Holy City. As the Diocesan Bishop, he serves as the Chair of the 33 Diocesan Institutions, with diocesan offices in Jerusalem, Amman and Nazareth. He travels around the diocese, providing pastoral care to his clergy and parishes, in his efforts to support Christians in the Land of the Holy One, building peace and reconciliation among all.
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Classification</strong></th>
<th>Protestant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Lutheran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Polity</strong></td>
<td>Interdependent local, and national expressions with modified episcopal polity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leader</strong></td>
<td>Rev. Dr. Munib Younan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Associations</strong></td>
<td>LWF, Middle East Council of Churches, WCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Geographical areas</strong></td>
<td>Jordan, Israel, Palestinian territories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Origin</strong></td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Branched from</strong></td>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land** (ELCJH) is a Lutheran denomination that has congregations in Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian territories (i.e. the Holy Land). First recognized as an autonomous religious community by King Hussein in 1959, the church currently has 3,000 members in six congregations.

The current bishop is the Rev. Dr. Munib Younan. Younan has also been serving as the president of Lutheran World Federation since his election in 2010.

**History**

**Early history**

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land has its origins in the arrival of German and English Protestant missionaries to Jerusalem in the mid 19th century. Protestant missions had begun in the early 19th century but Protestant Christians had no legal protection in the Ottoman Empire unlike the Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox who were legally protected by treaty. In 1840, the King of Prussia, Frederick William IV sent his diplomat, Christian von Bunsen to present a proposal to Queen Victoria of Great Britain for the establishment of a joint Protestant bishopric under the protection of both Prussia and Great Britain.

An agreement was reached to establish a joint bishopric of the Anglican Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Prussia, comprising Lutheran, Calvinist and united Protestant congregations, known as the Anglican-German Bishopric in Jerusalem and this was facilitated by the passing of the Bishops in Foreign Countries Act 1841. The first Bishop was a Jewish convert, Michael Solomon Alexander, who arrived in 1842.

**Early Lutheran mission**

In 1851, Theodor Fliedner was invited to bring four deaconesses to begin a hospital and the first formal school for girls in the Levant, Talitha Kumi, was set up in Jerusalem. In 1860, Johann Ludwig Schneller set up the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem for orphaned and homeless children that were the result of civil war in the region.

A provisional chapel for the use of the Prussian Protestant was erected in 1871 on land granted by Sultan Abdülaziz in the Muristan area of Jerusalem. Due to political and theological differences, the joint bishopric was finally abolished in 1886 and the Evangelical mission continued work independently of the Anglicans. Lutherans focused primarily on social work and education while the Anglicans focused on evangelism. served as the headquarters of the Evangelical mission.

**Autonomy and independence**

After the Second World War the World Lutheran Federation (WLF) took care of the remnants of the German-initiated Evangelical missions, combining Lutheran, Calvinist and united Protestant efforts. Due to the influence of the WLF the Lutheran aspect prevailed. In 1947, the Lutheran mission was granted autonomy from the Evangelical Church in Germany and in 1959 was
recognised as an autonomous religious community by King Hussein of Jordan. The church was then officially named the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan (ELCJ). The ELCJ had by then grew beyond Jerusalem and had set up congregations in Ramallah and Amman to serve Lutheran Palestinians who were refugees of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In 1974, the ELCJ joined the WLF and in 1979 the first Palestinian bishop, the Rev. Dr. Daoud Haddad, was elected to lead the church. In 2005, the Synod of the ELCJ decided to rename the church to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land to more accurately reflect the work and ministry of the church that spans Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian territories.

**Current developments**

In July 2010, the Bishop of the ELCJH, the Rt Rev Dr Munib Younan, was elected the president of the Lutheran World Federation.

**Structure**

At present, there are 6 congregations of the ELCJH:

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem
- Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, Bethlehem
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope, Ramallah
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation, Beit Jala
- Evangelical Lutheran Church, Beit Sahour
- Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Amman

**Schools and educational programs**

The ELCJH runs four primary schools and other educational projects that serve the broader educational needs of the Palestinian people as a whole. The four primary schools are:

- Dar al-Kalima Evangelical Lutheran School, Bethlehem
- The Evangelical Lutheran School, Beit Sahour
- The Evangelical Lutheran School of Hope, Ramallah
- Talitha Kumi Evangelical Lutheran School, Beit Jala

The ELCJH also actively supports the Near East School of Theology in Beirut, Lebanon.

Ref:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Lutheran_Church_in_Jordan_and_the_Holy_Land
Bishop Munib Younan

Munib Younan (2008)

Munib Younan (born September 18, 1950 in Jerusalem) is the elected president of the Lutheran World Federation since 2010 and the Evangelical Lutheran Church Bishop of Palestine and Jordan in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land since 1998.

**Early life and education**

Bishop Younan was born into a native Jerusalemite family of Rûm and Greek origin that had converted to Protestantism.

He has studied deaconry and theology in Finland. He began studies in deaconry at Luther Opisto (college) in Järvenpää 1969-1972. Thereafter Younan studied theology at the Helsinki University in 1972-1976, receiving an MA in Theology in 1976. He also studied theology at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in 1988 and holds an honorary doctorate from Wartburg College in Iowa in 2001.

**Career and activities**

Younan was ordained at the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem and served pastorates in Jerusalem, Beit Jala, and Ramallah. Since 1990 Younan served as the president of the ELCJHL synod. In 1998 Younan was consecrated as bishop of the ELCJHL.

He has also chaired the Board of Directors for the LWF owned Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem. Younan is the patron of Gospel Riders Jerusalem and Finland - a motorcycle club operating in cooperation with Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission.

Younan has been actively engaged in the Middle East Council of Churches, in various positions since 1985 and presently as the president of its Evangelical Family. Younan served as president of the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) in 2004-2010, which during his presidency unanimously voted in favor of the ordination of women as pastors. Youann is also a founding member of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), serving as the chair of Local Reference Group since 2002.
Younan is a co-founder of the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land, made up of the two chief rabbis of Israel, heads of the local churches, the Chief Judge of the Islamic Court in Palestine and other Muslim leaders.

Bishop Younan was elected on July 24, 2010 as President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), an organization that represents 145 churches in 79 countries around the world representing 70 million Christians. Previously he had served as the LWF vice president for the Asian region from 2004 to 2009.

**Achievements**

Younan is the author of *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and in the World* published by Augsburg Fortress Press in 2003. In this volume, Younan presents the historical and social context of the Palestinian situation, beginning with the not-well-known story of Arab Christianity and his own background. He elaborates his own theology of nonviolence, centered on the call to witness, heeding a call to justice, inclusion, and forgiveness. He is author of many other articles and a participant at conferences throughout the world.

Younan is also recognized as a leader of interfaith dialogue and an advocate for dialogue, peace and justice in Palestine and Israel.

Younan has received numerous awards, including:

- Mikael Agricola Medallion, Finland (2008);
- Templar Peace Prize (2007);
- Bethlehem Star Award from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (2005);
- Holyland Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) Prize, Washington, DC (2004);
- Bethanien (Bethany) Prize, Methodist Church, Oslo, Norway (2004);
- Human Rights Award from the United Nations Association, Washington, DC (2001);

**Family**

Younan is married since 1980 to Suad Yacoub from Haifa, whose family originates from Kfar Bir'im. Mrs. Younan is the Director of the Helen Keller School for the Blind in Beit Hanina. They have three children and one grandchild.

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munib_Younan
Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem

Archbishop Nourhan Manougian

Archbishop Nourhan Manougian's ministry has taken him to three continents in the service of the Armenian Church and people. Born in Aleppo, Syria, in 1948, he entered the seminary of the Catholicate of Cilicia in Antelias, Lebanon, at the age of 14: a turning point which set him on the road of the priestly vocation.

In 1966 he applied and was immediately accepted to the theological seminary of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem. There, under the tutelage of such figures as the late Patriarch Yeghishe Derderian and the historian Hrant Nakashian, the young man—now a deacon—showed a special taste and aptitude for literature, especially the works of the Armenian canon as well as those of writers like Tolstoy, Shakespeare, Wilde, and Dostoyevsky. His student days at the Patriarchate culminated in his ordination to the priesthood and his acceptance of membership in the St. James brotherhood, in 1971. After an additional year in the Holy City serving as assistant to the dean of the seminary, he accepted a post as pastor to the Armenians of Switzerland.

Subsequently, he returned to the Middle East to teach at the Sts. Tarkmanchats secondary school, and went on to serve as the pastor to the Armenian communities of Jaffa and Haifa. In 1980, he left for Europe again—this time to serve the Armenian community of Holland.

During a visit to the U.S. shortly thereafter, Fr. Nourhan was encouraged by the Diocesan Primate of the time, Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, to pursue graduate studies at New York's General Theological Seminary. Fr. Nourhan's subsequent service to the Eastern Diocese included tenures as pastor of the St. Mark Church of Springfield, MA, and the St. Kevork Church of Houston, TX. Fr. Nourhan returned to Jerusalem at the request of the late Patriarch, His Beatitude Archbishop Torkom Manoogian; there Fr. Nourhan was elected Grand Sacristan of the Holy See in 1998. A year later, the Catholicos of All Armenians, His Holiness Karekin II, elevated him to the episcopal rank.

During his decade and a-half as Grand Sacristan, Archbishop Manougian was an extremely influential figure in Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter and in the city's broader religious circles—second only to the Patriarch himself. In the Holy City's frequently unpredictable and even combative inter-religious and political arenas, Archbishop Manougian was a commanding advocate for the Armenian Christian community, defending and preserving its long historic presence in the region. On January 24, 2013, during the 22nd session of the general assembly of the St. James monastic brotherhood, Archbishop Nourhan Manougian was elected as the 97th Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, succeeding Patriarch Torkom and continuing a line that extends back to the first Armenian Patriarch of the Holy City, the 7th-century figure Abraham.

Ref: The Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation article on January 24, 2013
Palestinian Christians

Palestinian Christians are Christians descended from the peoples of the geographical area of Palestine, that is within modern Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan, as well as Christians who emigrated to the area. In this area, there are churches and believers from many Christian denominations, including Oriental Orthodoxy, Anglican, Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholic (Eastern and Western rites), Protestant, and others. In both the local dialect of Palestinian Arabic and in classical or modern standard Arabic, Christians are called Nasrani (a derivative of the Arabic word for Nazareth, al-Nasira) or Masihi (a derivative of Arabic word Masih, meaning "Messiah"). In Hebrew, they are called Notzri (also spelt Notsri), which means "Nazarene".

Today, Christians comprise less than 4% of Palestinians living within the borders of former Mandate Palestine. They are approximately 4% of the West Bank population, less than 1% in Gaza, and nearly 10% of Israel's Palestinian population. According to official British Mandate estimates, Mandate Palestine’s Christian population in 1922 comprised 9.5% of the total population and 7.9% in 1946. Today, the majority of Palestinian Christians live outside of the former Mandate Palestine because of emigration. The reasons for the emigration are hotly debated, but the same pattern is unfolding in several other Arab countries where Christian communities are under increasing pressure.

**Demographics and denominations**

Many ethnicities have lived in the area of Mandate Palestine dating back thousands of years. Consequently, Palestinian Christians are the descendants of the many peoples who have lived in the area.

Today, the majority of Palestinian Christians live abroad. In 2005, it was estimated that the Christian population of the Palestinian territories was between 40,000 and 90,000 people, or 0.9-1.7% of total population of West Bank and Gaza combined. Most are in the West Bank, but there is a community of 5,000 in the Gaza Strip. Palestinian Christians in Israel number between 144,000 and 196,000, or 2.1 to 2.8% of the total population, and about 9.8% of the non-Jewish Palestinian population.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Christians currently live outside of the Palestine region.

According to the CIA world factbook, as of 2009, the following statistics are available on Palestinian Christians.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population group</th>
<th>Christian population</th>
<th>% Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Bank*</td>
<td>167,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaza Strip</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestinians in Israel</td>
<td>123,000</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Arabs in Israel**</td>
<td>29,000</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population group</th>
<th>Christian population</th>
<th>% Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (only Arabs)</td>
<td>302,000</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (including non-Arabs)</td>
<td>331,000</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The figure includes Samaritans and other unspecified minorities.

** Non-Arabs in Israel do not necessarily identify as Palestinian.

Around 50% of Palestinian Christians belong to the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, one of the 16 churches of Eastern Orthodoxy. This community has also been known as the Arab Orthodox Christians. There are also Maronites, Melkite-Eastern Catholics, Jacobites, Chaldeans, Roman Catholics (locally known as Latins), Syriac Catholics, Orthodox Copts, Catholic Copts, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic, Quakers (Friends Society), Methodists, Presbyterians, Anglicans (Episcopal), Lutherans, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Baptists and other Protestants; in addition to small groups of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons and others.

The Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Theófilos III, is the leader of the Palestinian and Jordanian Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, but Israel has refused to recognize his appointment. If confirmed, he would replace Patriarch Irenaios, whose status within the church became disputed after a term surrounded by controversy and scandal given that he sold Palestinian property to Israeli Orthodox Jews. Archbishop Theodosios (Hanna) of Sebastia is the highest ranking Palestinian clergyman in the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Fouad Twal, is the leader of the Roman Catholics in Jerusalem, Palestinian territories, Jordan, Israel and Cyprus. The Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem is Suheil Dawani, who replaced Bishop Riah Abou Al Assal. Elias Chacour, a Palestinian refugee, of the Melkite Eastern Catholic Church is Archbishop of Haifa, Acre and the Galilee. Bishop Dr. Munib Younan is the president of the Lutheran World Federation and the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).

### History

#### Background and early history

The first Christian communities in Palestine were Aramaic speaking Jews, Gentiles, and Latin speaking Romans, who were in part descended from previous settlers of the regions, such as Syro-Phoenicians, Arameans, Greeks, Persians, Hebrews, Nabataeans, and Arabs. To the contrary of the rest of oriental Christians, the vast majority of Palestinian Christians followed the Byzantine Christianity of the emperors after the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., and were known by other Syrian Christian as Melkites (followers of the king). The Melkites were heavily Hellenised in the following centuries abandoning their distinct Western Aramaic languages in favour of Greek. By the 7th century, Jerusalem and Palestine became the epicentre of Greek culture in the orient.

Soon after the Muslim conquests, the Melkites began abandoning Greek for Arabic, a process which made them the most Arabicised Christians in the Levant.
Most Palestinian Christians nowadays see themselves as culturally and linguistically Arab Christians with ancestors dating back to the first followers of Christ. They claim descent from a mixture of Jewish Christians and Gentiles who converted to Christianity in the first few centuries AD, Romans, Ghassanids, Byzantines, and Crusaders. The region called Israel/Palestine is considered the Holy Land by Christians. Major Christian holy cities such as Bethlehem, Nazareth and Jerusalem are located in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

Modern history

Elias Chacour, the Palestinian Archbishop

Palestinian Christian Scouts on Christmas of

Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and All Galilee

Eve in front of the Nativity Church in

of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church.


The category of 'Palestinian Arab Christian' came to assume a political dimension in the 19th century as international interest grew and foreign institutions were developed there. The urban elite began to undertake the construction of a modern multi-religious Arab civil society. When the British wrested the country from the Ottoman Empire in 1917, and began to assume their obligations under the Mandate, many British dignitaries in London were surprised to discover so many Christian leaders in the Palestinian nationalist movement, and had difficulty understanding the indigenous Arab Christian commitment to Palestinian nationalism.

After the war of 1948 the Christian population in the West Bank, under Jordanian control, dropped rapidly, falling by more than half between that year and 1961 in Jerusalem alone. The same process occurred in Israel where Christians emptied out en masse after 1948. Constituting 21% of Israel's Arab population in 1950, they now make up just 9% of that group. These trends accelerated after the 1967 war in the aftermath of Israel's takeover of the West Bank and Gaza.

Christians within the Palestinian territories constitute around one in seventy-five residents. In 2009,
Reuters reported that 50,000 – 90,000 Christians remained in the West Bank, with around 17,000 following the various Catholic traditions and most of the rest following the Orthodox church and other eastern denominations. Both Bethlehem and Nazareth, which were once overwhelmingly Christian, now have Muslim majorities. Today about three-quarters of all Bethlehem Christians live abroad, and more Jerusalem Christians live in Sydney, Australia than in Jerusalem. Christians now comprise 2.5 percent of the population of Jerusalem. Those remaining include a few born in the Old City when Christians there constituted a majority.

In a 2007 letter from Congressman Henry Hyde to President George W. Bush, Hyde stated that "the Christian community is being crushed in the mill of the bitter Israeli-Palestinian conflict" and that expanding Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were "irreversibly damaging the dwindling Christian community".

There have been reports of attacks on Palestinian Christians in Gaza from Muslim extremist groups. Gaza Pastor Manuel Musallam has voiced doubts that those attacks were religiously motivated. The Palestinian President, Prime Minister, Hamas and many other political and religious leaders condemned such attacks.

After Pope Benedict XVI's comments on Islam in September 2006, five churches not affiliated with either Catholicism or the Pope—among them an Anglican and an Orthodox church—were firebombed and shot at in the West Bank and Gaza. A group called "Lions of Monotheism" claimed responsibility. Former Palestinian Prime Minister and current Hamas leader Ismail Haniya condemned the attacks, and police presence was elevated in Bethlehem, which has a sizable Christian community.

Armenians in Jerusalem, identified as Palestinian Christians or Israeli-Armenians, have also been attacked and received threats from Jewish extremists; Christians and clergy have been spat at, and one Armenian Archbishop was beaten and his centuries old cross broken. In September 2009, two Armenian Christian clergy were expelled after a brawl erupted with a Jewish extremist for spitting on holy Christian objects.

In February 2009, a group of Christian activists within the West Bank wrote an open letter asking Pope Benedict XVI to postpone his scheduled trip to Israel unless the government changes its treatment. They highlighted improved access to places of worship and ending the taxation of church properties as key concerns. The Pope began his five-day visit to Israel and the Palestinian Territories on Sunday, 10 May, planning to express support for the region's Christians. In response to Palestinian public statements, Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Yigal Palmor criticized the political polarization of the papal visit, remarking that "[i]t will serve the cause of peace much better if this visit is taken for what it is, a pilgrimage, a visit for the cause of peace and unity".

In November 2009, Berlanty Azzam, a Palestinian Christian student from Gaza, was expelled from Bethlehem and was not allowed to continue her studying. She has two months left for the completion of her degree. Berlanty Azzam said the Israeli military handcuffed her, blindfolded her, and left her waiting for hours at a checkpoint on her way back from a job interview in Ramallah. She described the incident as "frightening" and claimed Israeli official treated her like a criminal and denied her an education because she is a Palestinian Christian from Gaza.

Today, there are a small number of Christians in the Palestinian territories who claim East African and West African origin, most of whose ancestors had been brought to Palestine through the Arab Slave
trade in the early to modern Islamic and then Ottoman eras of Palestine.

**Historic denominations**

The 1922 census of Palestine recorded over 200 localities with a Christian population. The totals by denomination for all of Palestine were: Greek Orthodox 33,369, Syriac Orthodox (Jacobite) 813, Roman Catholic 14,245, Greek Catholic (Melkite) 11,191, Syrian Catholic 323, Armenian Catholic 271, Maronite 2,382, Armenian Orthodox (Gregorian) 2,939, Coptic Church 297, Abyssinian Church 85, Church of England 4,553, Presbyterian Church 361, Protestants 826, Lutheran Church 437, Templars Community 724, others 208.

**Political and Ecumenical Issues**

The mayors of Ramallah, Birzeit, Bethlehem, Zababdeh, Nazareth, Jifna, Ein 'Arik, Aboud, Taybeh, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour are Christians. The Governor of Tubas, Marwan Tubassi, is a Christian. The former Palestinian representative to the United States, Afif Saffieh, is a Christian, as is the ambassador of the Palestinian Authority in France, Hind Khoury. The Palestinian women's soccer team has a majority of Muslim girls, but the captain, Honey Thaljieh, is a Christian from Bethlehem. Many of the Palestinian officials such as ministers, advisers, ambassadors, consulates, heads of missions, PLC, PNA, PLO, Fateh leaders and others are Christians. Some Christians were part of the affluent segments of Palestinian society that left the country during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. In West Jerusalem, over 51% of Christian Palestinians lost their homes to the Israelis, according to the historian Sami Hadawi.

**Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center: Sabeel**

The Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center is a Christian non-governmental organization based in Jerusalem; was founded in 1989 by the Anglican (Episcopal) Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, former Canon of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. According to its web site, "Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, to promote unity among them toward social action. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on love, justice, peace, nonviolence, liberation and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word "Sabeel" is Arabic for "the way" and also a "channel or spring of life-giving water."

**Kairos Palestine**


The document declares the Israeli occupation of Palestine a "sin against God" and against humanity. It calls on churches and Christians all over the world to consider it and adopt it and to call for the boycott of Israel. Section 7 calls for —the beginning of a system of economic sanctions and boycott to be applied against Israel. It states that isolation of Israel will cause pressure on Israel to abolish all of what it labels as "apartheid laws" that discriminate against Palestinians and non-Jews.

**Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation**
The Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) was founded in 1999 by an ecumenical group of American Christians to preserve the Christian presence in the Holy Land. HCEF stated goal is to attempt to continue the presence and well-being of Arab Christians in the Holy Land and to develop the bonds of solidarity between them and Christians elsewhere. HCEF offers material assistance to Palestinian Christians and to churches in the area. HCEF advocates for solidarity on the part of Western Christians with Christians in the Holy Land.

**Christians of Gaza**

Gaza’s Christian community mostly lives within the city, especially in areas neighbouring the three main churches: Church of Saint Porphyrius, The Holy Family Catholic Church in Zeitoun Street, and the Gaza Baptist Church, in addition to an Anglican chapel in the Al-Ahli Al-Arabi Arab Evangelical Hospital. Saint Porphyrius is an Orthodox Church that dates back to the 12th century. Gaza Baptist Church is the city’s only Evangelical Church; it lies close to the Legislative Council (parliamentary building). Christians in Gaza freely practice their religion. They also may observe all the religious holidays in accordance with the Christian calendars followed by their churches.

Those among them working as civil servants in the government and in the private sector are given an official holiday during the week, which some devote to communal prayer in churches. Christians are permitted to obtain any job, in addition to having their full rights and duties as their Muslim counterparts in accordance with the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, the regime, and all the systems prevailing over the territories. Moreover, seats have been allocated to Christian citizens in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in accordance with a quota system that allocates based on a significant Christian presence.

A census revealed that 40 percent of the Christian community worked in the medical, educational, engineering and law sectors. Additionally, the churches in Gaza are renowned for the relief and educational services that they offer, and Muslim citizens participate in these services. Palestinian citizens as a whole benefit from these services. The Latin Patriarchate School, for example, offers relief in the form of medication and social and educational services. The school has been offering services for nearly 150 years.

In 1974, the idea of establishing a new school was proposed by Father Jalil Awad, a former parish priest in Gaza who recognized the need to expand the Latin Patriarchate School and build a new complex. Today, the Holy family school has 1,250 students and the Roman Catholic primary school, which is an extension of the Latin Patriarchate School, continues to enroll a rising number of young students. The primary school was established approximately 20 years ago. Aside from education, other services are offered to Muslims and Christians alike with no discrimination. Services include women’s groups, students' groups and youth groups, such as those offered at the Baptist Church on weekdays.

In October 2007, Rami Ayyad, the Baptist manager of The Teacher's Bookshop, the only Christian bookstore in the Gaza Strip, was murdered, following the firebombing of his bookstore and the receipt of death threats from Muslim extremists angry at what they viewed to be his missionary activity.
Christian emigration

A pre-1948 celebration of the Feast of St. Elias, on Mount Carmel, on 20 July

In addition to neighboring countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan, many Palestinian Christians emigrated to countries in Latin America (notably Argentina and Chile), as well as to Australia, the United States and Canada. The Palestinian Authority is unable to keep exact tallies. The share of Christians in the population has also decreased due to the fact that Muslim Palestinians generally have higher birth rates than the Christians.

The causes of this Christian exodus are hotly debated, with various possibilities put forth. The vast majority of Palestinian Christians in the diaspora are those who fled or were expelled during the 1948 war and their descendants. Reuters has reported that the emigrants since then have left in pursuit of better living standards. The BBC has also blamed the economic decline in the Palestinian Territories as well as pressure from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for the exodus report on Bethlehem residents stated both Christians and Muslims wished to leave but the Christians possessed better contacts with people abroad and higher levels of education. The Vatican and the Catholic Church blamed the Israeli occupation and the conflict in the Holy Land for the Christian exodus from the Holy Land and the Middle East in general.

The Jerusalem Post (an Israeli newspaper) has stated that the "shrinking of the Palestinian Christian community in the Holy Land came as a direct result of its middle-class standards" and that Muslim pressure has not played a major role according to Christian residents themselves. It reported that the Christians have a public image of elitism and of class privilege as well as of non-violence and of open personalities, which leaves them more vulnerable to criminals than Muslims. Hanna Siniora, a prominent Christian Palestinian human rights activist, has attributed harassment against Christians to "little groups" of "hoodlums" rather than to the Hamas and Fatah governments.

According to a report in The Independent, thousands of Christian Palestinians "emigrated to Latin America in the 1920s when Palestine was hit by drought and a severe economic depression."

Today, Chile houses the largest Palestinian Christian community in the world outside of the Palestine region. As many as 350,000 Palestinian Christians reside in Chile, most of whom were from Beit Jala, Bethlehem, and Beit Sahur. Also, El Salvador, Honduras, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Venezuela, and other Latin American countries have significant Palestinian Christian communities, some of whom immigrated almost a century ago during the time of Ottoman Palestine. During the 2008 Gaza War, Palestinian Christians in Chile demonstrated against the Israeli bombardment of Gaza. They were hoping to move the government into altering it's relations with Israel.
In a 2006 poll of Christians in Bethlehem by the Palestinian Centre for Research and Cultural Dialogue, 90% reported having Muslim friends, 73.3% agreed that the Palestinian Authority treats Christian heritage in the city with respect, and 78% attributed the ongoing exodus of Christians from Bethlehem to the Israeli occupation and travel restrictions on the area. Daniel Rossing, the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs’ chief liaison to Christians in the 1970s and 1980s, has stated that the situations for them in Gaza became much worse after the election of Hamas. He also stated that the Palestinian Authority, which counts on Christian westerners for financial support, treats the minority fairly. He blamed the Israeli West Bank barrier as the primary problem for the Christians.

The United States State Department’s 2006 report on religious freedom criticized both Israel for its restrictions on travel to Christian holy sites and the Palestinian Authority for its failure to stamp out anti-Christian crime. It also reported that the former gives preferential treatment in basic civic services to Jews and the latter does so to Muslims. The report stated that, generally, ordinary Muslim and Christian citizens enjoy good relations in contrast to the "strained" Jewish and non-Jewish relations. A 2005 BBC report also described Muslim and Christian relations as "peaceful".

The Arab Human Rights Association, an Arab NGO in Israel, has stated that Israeli authorities have denied Palestinian Christians in Israel access to holy places, prevented repairs needed to preserve historic holy sites, and carried out physical attacks on religious leaders.

**Notable Palestinian Christians**

**Beatified**

- Blessed Marie-Alphonsine Danil Ghattas — founder of the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters, the only Arab religious order in the Holy Land to date

**Monks**

- Cosmas of Maiuma
- Dorotheus of Gaza
- Theodore of the Jordan
- Sabbas the Sanctified
- Theophanes the Branded
- Zosimas of Palestine

**Clergymen**

- Munib Younan — president of the Lutheran World Federation since 2010 and the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jerusalem, Palestine, Jordan and the Holy Land since 1998
- Archbishop Theodosios (Hanna) of Sebastia — Bishop of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem
- Michel Sabbah — former Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (Roman Catholic)
- Fouad Twal — Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (Roman Catholic)
• Naim Ateek — founder of Sabeel Christian Ecumenical Foundation
• Mitri Raheb — pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem
• Suheil Salman Ibrahim Dawani — the current Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem
• Elias Chacour — Archbishop of Akko, Haifa, Nazareth and Galilee of the Melkite Eastern Catholic Church.
• Riah Hanna Abu El-Assal — former Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem
• Anis Shorrosh — Palestinian Evangelical Christian pastor
• Benny Hinn — televangelist
• Patriarch Theophilos III of Jerusalem - current Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem
• Boutros Mouallem — retired Melkite Eastern Catholic Church archbishop of Acre, Haifa and the Galilee
• Samir Kafity — prominent former Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem
• Salim Munayer — the founder of Musalaha, a non-profit organization that works towards reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians based on the Biblical principles of peace, works mainly among Palestinian Evangelicals and Messianic Jews
• Rev. Fahed Abu-Akel — was the 214th moderator of the General Assembly in the Presbyterian Church (USA)
• Patriarch Diodoros of Jerusalem - late Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem
• Patriarch Irenaios - former Orthodox patriarch of Jerusalem
• Torkom Manoogian - the current Patriarch of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem

Palestinian Roman Catholics

Politicians

• Joe Hockey - Australian politician in the House of Representatives.
• Raymonda Tawil — poet, political activist, journalist, writer and the mother-in-law of the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat
• Antonio Saca — President of El Salvador from 2004 to 2009
• Justin Amash — a U.S. Representative for Michigan's 3rd congressional district which encompasses the Grand Rapids area, and a member of the Republican Party
• Vera Baboun - the first female mayor of Bethlehem
• Azmi Bishara — Arab-Israeli politician
• Janet Mikhail — the current mayor of Ramallah
• Karim Khalaf — attorney and politician who served as the Mayor of Ramallah, but was removed from office in 1982 by Israel
• Victor Batarseh — the former mayor of Bethlehem
• Elias Bandak — the former mayor of Bethlehem
• Hanna Nasser — the former mayor of Bethlehem
• Elias Freij — the mayor former of Bethlehem
• Emil Habibi — politician born in British-mandate Palestine, leader of the Israel Communist Party and Member of the Israeli Knesset
• Ameer Makhoul — the founder of the Haifa-based Ittijah (the Union of Arab Community-Based Associations, a network for Palestinian NGOs in Israel), who is currently jailed in Israel, after some claims for spying on behalf of Hezbollah. Amnesty International expressed concern that "his human rights activism on behalf of Palestinians" may be the reason for his imprisonment.
• George Habash — Politician, founder of the PFLP and the Arab Nationalist Movement
• Nayif Hawatmeh — Palestinian politician, founder and General Secretary of the DFLP
• Dr. Hanan Ashrawi — politician, legislator, activist, and scholar. Currently, she is a leader of the Third Way party. She was previously notable as a spokesperson for Arafat.
• Afif Safieh — diplomat and currently Palestinian ambassador to the Russian Federation
• Joudeh George Murqos — ex-Palestinian minister of tourism
• Ghazi Hanania — member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and Fatah
• Emil Ghuri — the former Secretary of the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), the official leadership of the Arabs in the British Mandate of Palestine. He was also the general secretary of the Palestine Arab Party
• Hanna Nasser (academic) — academic, political figure and ex-president of Birzeit University
• Ghassan Andoni — a professor of physics at Birzeit University, co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) and founder of the International Middle East Media Centre
• Daud Turki — poet and was the leader of the Jewish-Arab left-wing group called the Red Front
• Imal Jarjoui— former member of the Palestinian Legislative Council and the PLO executive committee
• Huwaida Arraf — rights activist and co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM)
• Michael Tarazi — lawyer and former adviser to the Palestine Liberation Organization
• Kamal Nasser — PLO political leader, writer and poet
• Daniel Abugattas - Peruvian Politician and businessman.

Cultural figures
• Edward Said — Palestinian literary theorist, cultural critic, political activist
• Rosemarie Said Zahlan — historian and writer
• George Antonius — founder of modern Arab nationalist history
• Khalil Beidas — scholar, educator, translator and novelist during the Al-Nahda cultural renaissance
• Khalil al-Sakakini — educator, scholar, poet, and Arab nationalist during the Al-Nahda cultural renaissance
• Tawfiq Canaan — physician, researcher of Palestinian popular heritage
• May Ziade — poet, essayist and translator during the Al-Nahda cultural renaissance
• Anton Shammas — writer and translator
• Elia Suleiman — Palestinian film maker and actor
• Raja Shehadeh — lawyer and writer
• Rifat Odeh Kassis — human rights activist
• George Saliba — Professor of Arabic and Islamic Science at the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies, Columbia University, New York, United States
• Rami George Khouri — journalist and editor
• Hisham Zreiq — an award-winning independent film maker, poet and visual artist
• Ray Hanania — Palestinian-American journalist also known for his stand-up comedy
• Joseph Massad — an Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History in the Department of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies at Columbia University
• Rim Banna — singer, composer, and arranger who is well known for her modern interpretations of traditional Palestinian folk songs
• Amal Murkus — singer
• Anton Shammas — an essayist, writer of fiction and poetry and translator
• Fady Andraos — singer and actor
• Karl Sabbagh — Palestinian-British writer, journalist and television producer
• Sabri Jiryis — writer and lawyer
• Leila Sansour — film director
• Makram Khoury — actor
• Clara Khoury — actress
• Kamal Boullata — artist & writer. Boulatta is the author of several studies on Palestinian art in particular, *Palestinian Art* (Saqi 2009) and *Between Exits: Paintings by Hani Zurob* (Black Dog 2012).
• Steve Sabella- artist

Other
• Yousef Beidas — founder of Intra Bank
• Hind Khoury — Palestinian Delegate-General to France
• Sirhan Sirhan — assassin of United States Senator Robert F. Kennedy
• Chris Bandak — Palestinian Christian militant and a leader of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades and the Tanzim, both resistance wings of the Fatah movement, currently prisoned in Israel
• Hanna Siniora — publisher and human rights activist
• Sumaya Farhat Naser — peace activist
• Elinor Joseph — First female Arab-Israeli combat soldier in the Israel Defense Forces
• Zahi Khouri — Palestinian-American businessman and entrepreneur
• Mubarak Awad — Palestinian-American psychologist and an advocate of nonviolent resistance
• Alex Odeh — Palestinian-American anti-discrimination activist
• Khalil Jahshan — Lecturer in International Studies and Languages at Pepperdine University and Executive Director of its Seaver College Washington DC Internship Program
• Salim Joubran - Justice on the Israeli Supreme Court
• Mira Awad - singer, actress and songwriter
• Hasib Sabbagh — entrepreneur and businessman
• Huda Naccache - "first Arab model to appear on the cover of an Arabic magazine in a bikini;" Israel’s representative to the Miss Earth beauty pageant in Thailand in December 2011.
• Dr. Wadie Haddad — was a member and the leader of the national resistance wing of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who was allegedly killed by Israel
• Roberto Bishara — Palestinian football defender
• Ibrahim Hazboun — Palestinian astrologer
• Michel Shehadeh - Palestinian-American, Member of the Los Angeles 8

Further reading

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_Christians
WHO ARE THE PALESTINIAN ARAB CHRISTIANS OF THE HOLY LAND?

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? .... And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and [k]Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphyelia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and [l]visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God.”

Acts 2:1-11

After two thousand years, Christian families are still living and worshiping in the land where Jesus was born, died, and resurrected. These Christians are not immigrants. They are not converts from Judaism or Islam. They are the descendants of those who first believed in Jesus Christ. They live in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and other places in Palestine and Israel. These Christians, whether they live in Israel, the West Bank or Gaza, are ethnically Palestinian. They are the Arab Palestinian Christians—Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. They have maintained a continual living witness in the land of our Savior’s birth and have helped preserve the Holy Sites sacred to all of Christianity. **Together, they comprise the Mother Church.**

There are many practical ways this local Church lives the gospel. These living witnesses of Christ’s historic presence in the Holy Land can help us understand the Bible by giving us a deeper understanding of its cultural context. Palestinian Christians are also ideally placed as bridge-builders in a land associated with conflict. They share the Old Testament with the Jewish people. They share the culture, language and national aspirations with the Islamic peoples of the Holy Land. They also act as a conduit between the Churches and cultures of the East and West. They provide a buffer between the growth of both Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism in the region. **They are the “Living Stones.”** They are the living Church giving both breath and hands as evidence of the faith to which the physical stones of the Holy Sites give witness.

Yet, many Christians are unaware that there is even an indigenous Palestinian Christian population in the Holy Land. Even fewer know the severity of the conditions they endure. It is easy to see how the Palestinian Christians have come to feel as though they suffer in solitude, without the solidarity of the rest of the Body of Christ. It is also easy to see why Christians are leaving the Holy Land in vast numbers.

In 1948, the Christian population of the Holy Land was over 18%. Today, it is less than 1.5 %. In Jerusalem, in 1944, Christians numbered 30,000. Today, that number has dwindled to 9,000. The estimated number of Christians in the West Bank, Gaza and
Jerusalem is 1.37% of the population. The percentage of Arab Christians in Israel, including Israeli-controlled parts of Jerusalem is 1.66%. The Bethlehem Governorate is home to the highest percentage of Christians in Palestine (43.4%). Almost 6% of the Palestinian Christian population lives in the Gaza Strip.

The Arab Christian population continues to shrink as Christians emigrate for safer conditions. The Holy Land Christians are the living church in the land where Jesus was born, died, and was resurrected. They do not want to leave the land where their families have lived for centuries. If they continue to leave at the current rate, there may soon be no living church left in the Holy Land. There will always be holy sites to visit, but there will be no living stones, no living Body of Christ. This creates a very real concern that Christianity in the Holy Land could become a dead religion without the presence of vibrant living communities.

Chapter Twenty:

Prominent Middle East Christian Leadership
Chaldean Catholic Eparchy of Saint Thomas the Apostle of Detroit

Francis Y. Kalabat (born May 13, 1970) is a bishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church in the United States and serves the over 150,000 Chaldeans in the Detroit area. He began undergraduate (philosophy) studies at the University of San Diego's Saint Francis de Sales Center for Priestly Formation, in San Diego, California. Subsequently, he began the requisite graduate theological training for the Chaldean Catholic priesthood at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, in Detroit, Michigan. Ordained a priest on July 5, 1995, he was appointed Parochial Vicar (Associate Pastor) of Mother of God Church in Southfield, Michigan, the city where the Eparchy has its Cathedral. Since 2001, Eparch Kalabat has been Pastor of Saint Thomas Church in Detroit, Director of Vocations for the Eparchy, and has been involved with the Center for Re-Evangelization. He speaks Arabic, English and Aramaic, and also knows Spanish. He received his episcopal ordination, and was installed as Eparch on June 14, 2014.

SOURCE:

AMECC Comment: Bishop Kalabat is a promising new generation of Chaldean priests that are well suited to guide the Church and its followers in America. He has been promoting interfaith and interreligious movements. He has been advocating causes of Middle East Christians and Christianity at the United Nations and Washington D.C.
His Excellency Archbishop Paul Nabil Sayah

*Maronite Clerics Brief on Religious Freedom in Mideast*

Paul Nabil Sayah, Vicar General of the Maronite Church, speaks at a press conference on the situation of religious freedom in the Middle East.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Born</td>
<td>Ain El-Kharroubé</td>
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<td>6 Aug 1967</td>
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<td>Appointed</td>
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<td>5 Oct 1996</td>
<td>Ordained Bishop</td>
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<td>6 Jun 2011</td>
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<td>Curial Bishop of Antiochia {Antioch} (Maronite), Lebanon</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 Jun 2011</td>
<td>Confirmed</td>
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Rev. Dr. Fahed Abu-Akel

Rev. Dr. Fahed Abu-Akel is on the Mission Staff at First Presbyterian Church of Atlanta and has been Executive Director and Founder of the Atlanta Ministry with International Students, Inc. (AMIS, Inc.) (www.amis-inc.org), since 1978. AMIS, Inc. is a Ministry of Friendship and Hospitality with the 5,500 International students & Scholars from more than 140 countries studying in the 20 Metro Atlanta Colleges & Universities. On June 15, 2002 Dr. Abu-Akel was elected General Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (www.pcusa.org), the nation’s largest Presbyterian body.

Dr. Abu-Akel, a Native of Kuffer Yassif, Galilee, Israel and son of Palestinian Christian Arab parents is greatly involved in the community. He is Chair of both the Peacemaking Committee of the Greater Atlanta Presbytery and International Understanding Kiwanis Georgia District. He is currently President of Friends of the Union of the Palestinian Medical Relief Committees in the U.S.A. and Canada (UPMRC) and Board Member of The Interfaith Coalition of Metro Atlanta. He is also director of the Christmas International house program, which provides holiday homes for international students in 32 cities. Dr. Abu-Akel has served as past president, of Northside Kiwanis Clubs of Atlanta, past board member of The Christian Council of Metro Atlanta and past member of The Interfaith Advisory Task Force for the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, GA.

In Dr. Abu-Akel's 24 years as an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church he has been granted many honors and awards. He is a recipient of the Kiwanis Leadership Award, The Interfaith Leadership Award and The Arab American Community of Georgia Award. In 1998 he was presented with the Greater Atlanta Presbytery Peace Making Award.

Dr. Abu-Akel holds a bachelor's of arts degree from Southeast College in Lakeland, FL, a master’s of divinity from Columbia Theological Seminary in Atlanta, GA and a doctor of ministry from McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, IL.

SOURCE:
http://dlaa.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=PNM_Content&file=index&sw=pg&eid=50
Father Professor Fadi Daou
- Doctor of Theology, M.A. Political Philosophy
- Coordinator of the Ecumenical relations and the Inter-religious Relations at the Maronite Patriarchate
- Chairman and CEO of ADYAN - Lebanese foundation for inter-religious studies and spiritual solidarity
- Professor of Theology and Political Philosophy

FORMATION
- **2002 PhD in Theology / Strasbourg II - UMB** (France)
  - Thesis: "Inculturation in the" Crescent "The Eastern Catholic Churches in perspective of an Arab Church."
  - With Honours cum laude unanimously.
- **2001 MA in Philosophy Politics / Strasbourg II - UMB (France)**
  - Thesis: "Think tolerance in multicultural globality."
- **1998 MA in Theology / Angers - UCO (France)**
  - Thesis: "Inculturation: Reflections on the present state of the question."
- **1996 BTh / Pontifical Faculty of Theology - USEK (Lebanon).**
- **1989-1991 Architecture (A1, 2) - USEK (Lebanon)**
- **1989 Bachelor - Series Mathematics / Lebanon**

LANGUAGES
- **Languages:** French, English and Arabic (reading, speaking, writing)
- **Ancient languages:** Hebrew, Syriac, Greek, Latin

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
2005
- Director of ISSR (Higher Institute of Religious Sciences), LSU - Beirut
- University Teaching: Lecturer

2002
- USEK - Pontifical Faculty of Theology, Kaslik - Lebanon
- USJ - ISSR (Higher Institute of Religious Sciences), Beirut - Lebanon
- USJ - FSR (Faculty of Religious Sciences), Beirut - Lebanon

2005-2006
- CIEL (Centre Intercultural Euro-Lebanese), Master of intercultural mediation
- USJ - UPT (University for All), Beirut - Lebanon

2003-2004
- USJ - IGE (Institute of Business Management), Beirut - Lebanon
- ULS - Faculty of Canon Law, Beirut - Lebanon
Courses Taught:
- Fundamental Theology, Inculturation, Missiology, Cultural Approach phenomenon
- Religious Phenomenology of religion, religious environment of the Middle Eastern Religions and Cultures, Eastern Churches, Christian contemporary Arab.

Directed research seminars (License):
- Receipt of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "a new hope for Lebanon, "Contextual Theology in Pastoral Letters of Catholic Patriarchs Orient.

Directed research seminars (Master)
- Theology of Religions (Jacques Dupuis) ecclesiology of the local church (Jean-Marie Tillard).

2006
- University Research: Coordinator of the varsity team in Beirut, the research project international "Religions and Cultures" (IFCU) Theme worked: "Religious Diversity and Conflict identity."

2004-2005

1999-2002
- University Research: Practical Theology, UMB, Strasbourg II - France

2005
- TV program: Team leader preparation program content "Chouf el-farq wmaf tarreq "on LBCI.

PASTORAL RESPONSIBILITIES
Currently:
- Member of the Episcopal Commission for Culture and the cultural property Lebanon.
- Member of the Episcopal Commission theological and biblical in Lebanon.
- Member of the Diocesan Vocations Service (Jbeil).
- Priest cooperative parish (Mastita - Jbeil).

Experience:
- Secretary General of the CCCL (Catholic Cultural Council for Lebanon).
- Member and Maronite Patriarchal Synod expert.
- Responsible for the service of vocations - Jbeil Maronite Diocese.
- Youth Ministry and international gatherings (Scouting Taizé WYD Young Professionals, Young Middle East ...).
OTHER ACTIVITIES

- Founder and member of CIRDiC (International Centre for Cultural encounter and dialogue).
- Founder and honorary member of the ALF - France (French-Lebanese Friendship).
- Member of the ecumenical group LAMA *theological reflection* - Lebanon.
- Host of "Collective" 28 against the death penalty in Lebanon.
- Founder of "Naturasport" (Association for Nature by sport).
- Former member of the *Coordination of Faculties of Theology in France*.
- Former member of the Pontifical Faculty of Theology USEK (Lebanon).
- Animation *training sessions* for youth and adults.
- Animation *spiritual retreats*.
- Arranging and conducting of *cultural tours* and *pilgrimages* (France, Lebanon).

SEMINARS, CONFERENCES, CONVENTIONS

- "To the shores of religion", UNESCO Chair in Comparative Religious Studies, mediation and dialogue, Saint Joseph University, Beirut, 2004.
- "The gospel, citizenship full time! "MECC, Cyprus, 2005.
- "Word of God, religious diversity and commitment to the city," Summer University CIRDIC-ISSR, Roumilleh (Lebanon), 2005.
- "Religion and Human Rights", MECC-ATIME, Cairo, January 2006.
- "Interreligious dialogue face triangularity: Media, religion, civil society," Observatory SKY (Intercultural Centre Euro-Lebanese), March 2006.
KEY PUBLICATIONS


• **Articles**:  
  - "A hope in action. The challenges of the Maronite Patriarchal Synod "*ecumenical Mail*, 46 (2003), 16-25.  

Multimedia:  

• Catechesis and inculturation in a Muslim *Mounting Cdrom* (in Arabic).  
• Several contributions on the site: [www.theologia.fr](http://www.theologia.fr)  
• Broadcast e-mail: "Let Iraq Live", May 2001.  
• "Humanity threatened", November 2003.

Print:  
Many contributions to the local press (*L'Orient-le-jour, Annahar ...*) and international (La Croix, West France ...)
• "The Catholic Church and the Death Penalty" (Arabic), *Annahar*, 20/12/2003.  
• "In the book The Da Vinci Code prohibits" (Arabic), *Annahar*, 19/06/2005.  
• "Martyr of the culture of freedom" (Arabic), *Annahar*, 15/12/2005.  
• "A burning question: can we overcome the political sectarianism? "*The East-to-day*, 04.04.2006.

Ref:

Vision
Religions play an important yet different role in the composition of contemporary societies, representing a decisive factor in their development and stability. On the other hand, religions are linked to political problems and conflicts that endanger coexistence within nations and destabilize international peace. The Middle East, cradle of many religions including Judaism, Christianity and Islam, is shaken by violent conflicts and witness to a growing emigration. These problems are often attributed to religions, to the challenge of diversity and to the will for coexistence.

Yet Adyan believes in the positive contribution of religions at both individual and social levels. In fact, religious experience can help individuals in opening up to others. Religions can also play a role in developing social relations between religious communities, which are greatly needed for harmony and brotherhood between humans, as well as for peace between nations. On the other hand, Adyan considers that the extremism of certain religious groups, the tension between religious communities, and the manipulation of religion and its exploitation for political interests deprive individuals from living their faith with awareness and a sense of responsibility. These situations may prepare the ground for conflicting relations between nations that threaten stability and peace, damaging both religion and society.

Mission
Adyan works for the clarification of main religious and theological concepts especially in relation with social and political issues. The foundation also works on building and strengthening solidarity and positive interaction among people belonging to different religious groups, through mutual understanding and common commitment. Adyan thus hopes to be an active participant in the promotion of social cohesion and peace building, nationally and internationally.

Strategic Objectives (2012-2016)
1. Foster Cross-Cultural Arab-West dialogue and mutual understanding
2. Raise awareness on the grassroots level (Youth, CSO, FBO…) on religious pluralism, geopolitics of religions and interfaith relations
3. Introduce in the national educational policies and programs for schools, the education on inclusive citizenship for religious diversity and coexistence
4. Empower teachers, trainers and policy makers in religious pluralism, multi-faith education and inclusive citizenship
5. Develop programs that foster and disseminate modern Islamic discourse and culture
6. Contribute to understanding and coping with issues related to Salafism and Political Islam
7. Promote the multi-cultural and multi-religious dimensions of Arab civilization in regards to shared Christian and Muslim heritage
8. Develop and expand interfaith Networks and Spiritual Solidarity
9. Develop programs and partnerships that promote interfaith social solidarity with the vulnerable
10. Develop Adyan communication for the promotion of its concepts and values
11. Develop a methodology to assess the effectiveness of intercultural and interfaith
Mr. Habib Afram (Ephrem)
President of the Syriac League in Lebanon and Secretary General of the Federation of Christian Associations in Lebanon

Expert and Lecture on the Christians of the Middle East
- President of the Syriac League of Lebanon 1984-Present
- Secretary General of the Union of Christian Leagues of Lebanon 1980-Present
- President of the Syriac Universal Alliance 1999

Experience
Lectures:
- Christian Status in the Middle East- Suffering and Hope-2000
- The Ten Commandments to the Survival of Christianity in the ME International Maronite Conference- 2002
- The Christians of Iraq Convention in Amsterdam- 2003
- The Christians of the Middle East Aramaic-Assyrian- Chaldean- Syriac Union Festival in Suderthalyia, Sweden- 2002
- The Future of Christians in Iraq Chaldean- Assyrian- Syriac General Convention in Baghdad-- 2003
- Lecture on the Christians in the Middle East The 72nd Annual Assyrian National Convention in Boston-- 2005
- Lecture on the Turkish- Armenian, Syriac Relations in light of the Massacre University of Istanbul- Turkey- 2006
• Defending the Survival of Minorities in the Middle East
  Zurich Convention for the Minorities in the ME- Switzerland- 2007
• Democracy, Islam and Minorities
  The 2nd Convention on Democracy and Reform in the Arab World
  Doha- Qatar- 2007
• The Future of Christians in the ME
  The International Assyrian Convention in Tehran- Iran- 2007
• Christians in the New Iraq
  The Chaldean- Assyrian- Syriac convention- Erbil- Iraq- 2007
• The Syriac Language: Challenges and Survival
• The Challenges of Religious Co-Existence Today
  The High Institute for Religious Studies in Zeitouna University- Tunisia In Partnership with the Conrad Eidenower Foundation- 2008
• Religious Co-existence in the Middle East
  Convention on the Religious, Sectarian and Ethnic Variety in the Middle East
  Lebanon- 2009
• A Dignified Return to the Christians of Iraq
  Convention on the Future of Iraqi Christians hosted by the Hamourabi
  League of Human Rights- Baghdad 2009
• A Call for Considering the Syriac Language a Mother Tongue
  Unesco center- the International Day of Language Preservation
  Lebanon- 2008
• A Symposium on the “assassination of the nation” on the Armenian and
  Syriac massacres in 1915 and the fate of Christians in the easterners at
  Harvard University Institute of Politics
  Boston- USA 2010
• Christians of the Middle East: Tamish Monastery- Lebanon 2011

Participation
• International Conference on the Dialogue of Religions hosted by the Saudi
  King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz- Madrid 2008
• Follow up Committee of the International Conference of Religions-
  Member- Vienna- 2009
• Hosted the Conference on Religious, Sectarian and Ethnic Diversity in the
  Middle East- Lebanon- 2009
• The 9th Conference of Interfaith Dialogue- Qatar 2010
• The conference of the International Syriac Media- Erbil- Iraq 2010
• The conference of the American Middle East Christians Congress in
  Detroit 2012
Achievements

- Receiver of the Syriac –Mor Aphram‖ Honorary Legion
- Member of the Union of Lebanese Writers
- Author of three Arabic poetry books:
  - War Is…
  - What was it a nation, when was it a love?
  - I read a chapter of her era

Career

Investa Financial Institution
CEO
Jdeideh, Lebanon

Education

American University of Beirut
BA Political Science and Public Administration
1977
Rateb Y. Rabie, KCHS, President/CEO, Holy Land Ecumenical Foundation

Silver Spring, MD

Rateb Y. Rabie, KCHS, the Founder, President & CEO of the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF), was born in Amman, Jordan to Palestinian parents.

He came to the United States in 1976, for his education. From 1981 to 1986, he was Director of Operations for a British/Saudi corporation — Saudi Support Services, Ltd. He moved to Jordan where he worked for his own company, Reem Support Services. In 1989, he moved to Washington, D.C. where he worked for Marriott Corp. and managed and owned several businesses which he founded (Image Printing & Publishing, Inc., as well as Vison Management & Consulting, Inc.) Sir Rabie is co-founder and past national president of the Birzeit Society; co-founder, Vice President, and Treasurer of the Institute for Health, Development, and Research in Palestine. He is also a Knight Commander of the Equestrian order of Holy Sepulchre, and a 4th Degree Knight of Columbus, founder and Co-Chair of the Holy Land Outreach Committee of the Knights of Columbus, Maryland State Council.

In 1998, he founded the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF), with other Americans and Palestinians concerned about the presence of the Arab and Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land. HCEF is charitable 501 (c) (3) faith-based development organization, with over 20 programs and offices in Washington, DC area and Bethlehem. You can read more about HCEF online at www.hcef.org. In 2007, The Arab American Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) selected Sir Rateb Rabie to receive the Faith and Tolerance Award. This award is given to individuals working with faith-based organizations to encourage cooperation and peacemaking in the Middle East.

Sir Rateb is committed to improving living conditions for Palestinians Christians in their homeland, to preserving Palestine’s Christian heritage, and strengthening their identity in the worldwide diaspora. He pursues this mission under the motto —Let us work together to replace despair with HOPE, fear with HUMAN SECURITY and humiliation with DIGNITY‖. Sir Rateb advocates for peace and justice in Palestine.

Sir Rateb is married to his wife of 34 years Rocio, who he met in the United States. Together they have four grown daughters, who they raised both in the Middle East and in America. They are also the proud grandparents of two young boys, and are active longtime parishioners at the Shrine of the St. Jude, in Rockville, Maryland.
Bishop (Mar) Aprim Khamis

Mar Aprim Khamis is the Assyrian Church of the East Bishop of the Western United States.[1] Mar Aprim Khamis was ordained as a bishop (along with Mar Daniel Yakob) on March 2, 1973 as Bishop for Basra. He left the diocese in the same year and transferred to become Bishop of the United States and Canada.

Since 1994, he serves as Bishop for the Diocese of Western United States, with his see in Phoenix, Arizona.

SOURCE: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mar_Aprim_Khamis

Archbishop Avak Asadourian

Archbishop Avag Asatourian, working together with the Diocesan Council, has established many programs. In 1985 he established Sunday Schools in the Church Headquarters Church and in different parishes.

Chapter Twenty-One:

Prominent Middle East Christian Organizations
The Center For The Christians Of The Orient

— The Center For The Christians Of The Orient [1] is a civil association registered at the Lebanese Ministry of Interior- Beirut, registration number 1414/2008, and founded by a group related to all Christian Churches of the Orient: Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholics, Syriacs, Assyrians, Copts, Armenians, Chaldeans, Evangelists.

The founders are aware of the increasing level of internal emigration to the cities, and external emigrations to Diaspora countries, where the Christians are cut off. We aim to achieve the following goals:

1- Census of the Christians of the Orient in their countries and the Diaspora (total detailed home and activities addresses).
2- Stress the awareness of their leading roles in the development of the Orient at all levels.
3- Work on the dangers and challenges facing them in their villages, countries and abroad.
4- Establishing solid liaisons through:
   a- Rich and updated website
   b- News letters
   c- Radio programs
   d- TV programs
   e- Studies and Research Center
   f- Editing Center
   g- Special programs
5- Thus:
   a- Creating solid human, cultural, social, educational and economic contacts with and among them;
   b- Spreading awareness about the dangers of emigration, selling their properties;
   c- Encourage their definitive or temporary return to their homeland;
   d- Helping them create projects of all sorts, in their villages, countries and abroad.

Center for the Christians of the Orient, Administrative Coordinator, Simon El Khoury

Phone: 961 1899455
Fax: 961 1 899456
Web: www.christiansoforient.org, E-mail: info@christiansoforient.org
Middle East Council of Churches

After many years of preliminary moves, the Middle East Council of Churches was inaugurated in May 1974 at its First General Assembly in Nicosia, Cyprus. Initially it contained three "families" of Christian Churches in the Middle East, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Protestant Churches. These were joined in 1990 at the MECC Fifth Assembly by the seven Catholic Churches of the region.

It is a regional council affiliated with the ecumenical World Council of Churches.

The MECC initially had three co-presidents, representing each of the Christian "families", becoming four after the Catholic Churches joined in 1990.

The first General Secretary of the MECC from 1974 to 1977 was Rev. Albert Istero. He was succeeded by Gabriel Habib, from 1977 to 1994. In November 1994, Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour was elected General Secretary. He was replaced after two terms by Guirgis Saleh, a Coptic Orthodox theologian and professor, at the Eighth General Assembly in 2003.

The MECC has offices in Beirut, Cairo, Limassol and Amman, with liaison offices in Damascus, Jerusalem and Tehran.

**Member Churches**

**Oriental Orthodox Family**

- The Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia
- The Coptic Orthodox Church
- The Syriac Orthodox Church

**Eastern Orthodox Family**

- Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa
- Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East
- Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem
- Church of Cyprus

**Catholic Family**

- Armenian Catholic Church of Cilicia
- Chaldean Catholic Church of Babylon
- Coptic Catholic Church of Alexandria
- Greek Melkite Catholic Church & Jerusalem[1]
- Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem[2], part of the larger Latin Rite of the Catholic Church
- Maronite Catholic Church [3]
- Syriac Catholic Church of Antioch
**Evangelical Family**

- Evangelical Church of Egypt (Synod of the Nile)
- Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East
  - Diocese of Egypt
  - Diocese of Jerusalem
  - Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf
  - Diocese of Iran
- Episcopal Church of Sudan
- Evangelical Church in Sudan
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land
- Synod of the Evangelical Church in Iran
- National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon
- National Evangelical Union of Lebanon
- Presbyterian Church in the Sudan
- Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East
- Protestant Church of Algeria
- Reformed Church of Tunisia
- National Evangelical Church in Kuwait

Web site: http://www.mec-churches.org/main_eng.htm

Ref: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East_Council_of_Churches
The National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus

Recognized by the 208th General Assembly, the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus (NMEPC) brings together all PC(USA) Middle Eastern Presbyterians, congregations, fellowships, Bible study groups and mission personnel serving in the Middle East. The Caucus’ mission statement is as follows:

“As Christian Middle Eastern Americans who trace their faith origin to the apostolic age, we have a particular responsibility to be faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, to actively support the mission, witness and stewardship of the PC(USA) and to be a voice of justice, peace and reconciliation in the United States and the Middle East.”

The Caucus’s nine-member executive committee represents Middle Eastern Presbyterians before the denomination’s General Assembly, synods and presbyteries.

800) 728-7228, x5385
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville, KY 40202

Reference and Web Site: http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/middleeastern/national-middle-eastern-presbyterian-caucus/
The Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation

HCEF VISION STATEMENT, MISSION STATEMENT, CORE VALUES AND GOALS

HCEF Vision Statement

We envision a world where:

- Americans and others understand the plight of Arab Christians in the Holy Land.
- The Christian identity of where Christians live (for example, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem) is healthy and recognized.
- There are strong bonds of solidarity between Arab Christians in the Holy Land and elsewhere.
- All Palestinian Arab Christians in the Holy Land are free to practice their faith.
- All Palestinian Arab Christians in the Holy Land have adequate housing and economic opportunities.
- Palestinian Arab Christians are no longer forced to emigrate from the Holy Land.
- Palestinian Arab Christians are empowered to
  - Determine the contours of their own present and future.
  - Join their Palestinian brothers and sisters in preserving heritage, building civic society, and promoting investments.
  - Be the natural bridge for peace among Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

HCEF Mission Statement

- HCEF is committed to the continued presence, empowerment, and well-being of Arab Christians in the Holy Land and to developing the bonds of solidarity between them and Christians elsewhere.

HCEF Core Values

Our mission and core values underpin everything we do. When we are designing programs, putting together a conference, disseminating news from the Holy Land or from parishes around the U.S. and elsewhere, we look at whether we are living these values well. These core values give our programs the roots they need to sustain the work when challenges arise. So, HCEF is:

- **Ecumenical**
  
  From the very beginning, HCEF was an ecumenical organization. There are multiple Christian denominations in the Holy Land, and our programs aim at supporting all of them. We encourage Palestinian Christians to be ecumenical in their outreach to Christians around the world, and we encourage HCEF’s supporters to be ecumenical in their support and prayers as well. Because the Christian population of the Holy Land comprises less than 2% of the population, it is important that they build their support for one another on the Christian faith that they have in common.

- **Based on Christian Faith**
  
  It is a core belief of Christians that we are one mystical Body in Christ. We want all of our work to reflect that unity and to demonstrate that if any part of the body suffers, we all suffer.
By the same belief, we also demonstrate that when one part of the body rejoices, we all rejoice.

- **Dedicated to Peace and Justice**

  We firmly believe that a just peace in the Holy Land is the only long-term solution to the tough living conditions that have brought almost all of the Christians to emigrate. We encourage the work of those who help to bridge the distance between the political factions that exacerbate the situation in the Holy Land.

- **Service-Oriented**

  Each person at HCEF seeks to be a servant leader following the example of Jesus Christ. We serve both the Christians in the Holy Land and our amazingly generous supporters around the world. We want each person who interacts with us to feel that we have given them our full attention, and we want each of our programs to reflect the importance of people-to-people connections.

- **Transparent**

  We want our work to be transparent. We want people to understand how we build relationships between Holy Land Christians and how each of our programs operates. We want HCEF supporters to connect in personal ways with the Christians whom they support in the Holy Land.

**HCEF Goals**

HCEF lives its mission and core values by witnessing the teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ.

- We educate people around the world about the presence of Arab Christians in the Holy Land and remind them of their moral, practical, and spiritual obligation to the Mother Church.

- We build community between Christians throughout the world and Arab Christians of the Holy Land through communication, publications, pilgrimages, and joint endeavors.

- We develop bonds of solidarity through church-to-church, family-to-family, and person-to-person partnership programs in order to bring Christians together in community for future cooperation.

- We promote peace, justice, interfaith dialogue, and reconciliation in the Holy Land by removing the causes of suffering and replacing despair with hope, fear with human security, and humiliation with dignity.

- We undertake specific projects designed to empower Arab Christians and advance better living conditions in the Holy Land. Projects focus on creating economic opportunities, advancing education, building and renovating houses, and developing the healthy growth of children.

*“Let us work together to replace despair with HOPE, fear with HUMAN SECURITY, and humiliation with DIGNITY”*

SOURCE: www.hcef.org
Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, Jerusalem

Sabeel Purpose Statement
Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, to promote unity among them toward social action. Sabeel strives to develop a spirituality based on love, justice, peace, nonviolence, liberation and reconciliation for the different national and faith communities. The word "Sabeel" is Arabic for "the way" and also a "channel or spring of life-giving water."

Sabeel also works to promote a more accurate international awareness regarding the identity, presence and witness of Palestinian Christians as well as their contemporary concerns. It encourages individuals and groups from around the world to work for a just, comprehensive and enduring peace informed by truth and empowered by prayer and action.

Palestinian Liberation Theology
Palestinian Liberation Theology is an ecumenical grassroots movement, rooted in Christian Biblical interpretation and nourished by the hopes, dreams and struggles of the Palestinian people. Originating in the land where Christ lived, this theology seeks to provide a holistic vision of God’s redeeming activity in the midst of the current reality. In a situation where justice has been long neglected, Palestinian Liberation Theology opens new horizons of understanding for the pursuit of a just peace and for the reconciliation proclaimed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

By learning from Jesus - his life under occupation and his response to injustice - this theology hopes to connect the true meaning of Christian faith with the daily lives of all those who suffer under occupation, violence, discrimination, and human rights violations. Additionally, this blossoming theological effort promotes a more accurate international awareness of the current political situation and encourages Christians from around the world to work for justice and to stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people.

History of Sabeel
In 1989 an ad hoc committee was formed to implement, on a practical level, a Palestinian Liberation Theology. On a pastoral level, some of the Palestinian clergy were listening to the cries of the people at the grassroots. They felt the need to respond not only to their physical sufferings, but also to the way these sufferings were being aggravated by the religious argument in the political conflict. People where asking "Where is God in all of this oppression and injustice?" We needed to work out a Palestinian theology of liberation as a pastoral response to such questions. Many of the Palestinian Christians also wanted to abandon the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, which was being used to justify their suffering. As Christians, however, the Bible is essential to our faith, so it was necessary to find in the Bible the God of justice, the God who is concerned with the oppressed.
The Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek convened a committee of ten clergy and lay people to explore ways in which this theology could be developed and shared with fellow Palestinian Christians. They decided to host an international conference that would put Palestinian Liberation Theology in the context of other Liberation Theologies from around the world. Several local workshops were held to formulate ideas and prepare people for full participation in the conference.

In March 1990 the conference took place at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute. Local and international theologians developed the themes of the conference: Palestinian Reality; Palestinian Christian Identity; Power, Justice, and the Bible; Women, Faith, and the Intifada; and International Responses to the Quest for Palestinian Theology. The proceedings were published in a book entitled Faith and the Intifada (Orbis Books 1992), edited by Palestinian Liberation Theologian Naim Stifan Ateek, Jewish American Theologian Marc Ellis and American Theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether. The conference led to the founding of Sabeel as a liberation theology movement.

The Sabeel Center is located in Jerusalem, serving Bethlehem, Ramallah and the surrounding areas, with a branch office in Nazareth to serve the Galilee.

In recent years, International Friends of Sabeel chapters have been founded in Australia, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, and the United States. International Friends of Sabeel Chapters provide support for Sabeel’s work in advocacy, education, and nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation.

Vision
Sabeel affirms its commitment to make the gospel relevant ecumenically and spiritually in the lives of the local indigenous Church. Our faith teaches that following in the footsteps of Christ means standing for the oppressed, working for justice, and seeking peace-building opportunities, and it challenges us to empower local Christians. Since a strong civil society and a healthy community are the best supports for a vulnerable population, Sabeel strives to empower the Palestinian community as a whole and to develop the internal strengths needed for participation in building a better world for all.

Only by working for a just and durable peace can we provide a sense of security and create ample opportunities for growth and prosperity in an atmosphere void of violence and strife. Although remaining political and organizational obstacles hinder the full implementation of programs, Sabeel continues to develop creative means to surmount these challenges. We seek both to be a refuge for dialogue and to pursue ways of finding answers to ongoing theological questions about the sanctity of life, justice, and peace.

SOURCE: http://www.sabeel.org/etemplate.php?id=2
Awareness and advocacy are the two fundamental components of IDC’s work. Awareness is broadly focused on bringing attention in the United States and the western world to the plight of the ancient Christian communities of the Middle East. Advocacy is narrowly focused on the U.S. foreign policy community, influencing policymakers to promote values abroad that are consistent with the universal human rights of religion and conscience.

These values are not exclusively Christian, nor does IDC seek only to protect the human rights of Christians, but all religious groups. These rights are universal, applicable to all human persons. In this sense, “Christian” refers not only those who confess the Christian faith, but also Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Baha‘i, and even the freedom to confess no religious belief at all.

IDC believes that America’s foreign policy apparatus, especially the State Department, too often projects indifference on the question of persecuted religious minorities in the region, especially Christians – a policy that only invites further violence. In some instances, the U.S. government even provides significant foreign aid to regimes that persecute Christians, as with Pakistan and now Egypt. With a vigorous and sustained public awareness and advocacy campaign, IDC believes this can change.

Freedom of religion and conscience is among the most fundamental of human rights, a basic right that supersedes the claims of any nations or groups or persons. While Christian victims of discrimination and persecution around the world constitute the principal focus of IDC’s work, the organization is not exclusively an advocacy group for Christians. To speak of the defense of the rights of Christians or Muslims or Jews is to speak to the rights of all human beings.

Among the great religions, this idea is captured well in the Qur’an, in which it is written (chapter 109): “To you be your Way, and to me mine. Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion; you shall have your religion and I shall have my religion.”

Not all confessional groups have respected freedom of conscience in accordance with the teachings of the great religions and in accordance with right reason. Some have even utilized the tools of government to compel particular religious beliefs. IDC believes that neither nation-states nor organizations may coerce the conscience of the individual to demand confession of a particular religion. It is the duty of government to protect this right, not infringe upon it.

It is worth noting that, historically, societies that protect and promote the free exercise of religion and conscience tend also to flourish, culturally and economically. IDC therefore seeks to protect vulnerable religious minorities through the promotion of religious freedom and human dignity.

SOURCE: http://www.indefenseofchristians.org/
Chapter Twenty-Two:
The Church and Islam
The Church and Islam. "La Civiltà Cattolica" Breaks the Ceasefire

Through the prestigious magazine, the Vatican denounces with unusual harshness the oppression of Christians in Muslim countries. A testimony from Egypt

by Sandro Magister

"La Civiltà Cattolica," edited by a group of Jesuits in Rome, is a very special magazine. Every one of its articles is reviewed by the Vatican secretary of state before publication. So the magazine reflects his thought faithfully.

In its October 18 edition, "La Civiltà Cattolica" published a strikingly severe article on the condition of Christians in Muslim countries. The central thesis of the article is that "in all of its history, Islam has shown a warlike and conquering face"; that "for almost a thousand years, Europe lived under its constant threat"; and that what remains of the Christian population in Islamic countries is still subjected to "perpetual discrimination," with episodes of bloody persecution.

What follows is an ample extract from the article printed in "La Civiltà Cattolica" no. 3680, October 18, 2003, and used here with the kind permission of the magazine:

Christians in Islamic Countries

by Giuseppe De Rosa S.I.

How do Christians in Muslim-majority countries live? [...] We must first highlight a seemingly rather curious fact: in all the countries of North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco), before the Muslim invasion and despite incursions by vandals, there were blossoming Christian communities that contributed to the universal Church great, such as Tertullian; Saint Ciprian, bishop of Carthage, martyred in 258; Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo; and Saint Fulgentius, bishop of Ruspe. But after the Arab conquest, Christianity was absorbed by Islam to such an extent that today it has a significant presence only in Egypt, with the Coptic Orthodox and other tiny Christian minorities, which make up 7-10 percent of the Egyptian population.

The same can be said of the Middle East (Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Mesopotamia), in which there were flourishing Christian areas prior to the Islamic invasion, and where today there are only small Christian communities, with the exception of Lebanon, where Christians make up a significant part of the population.

As for present-day Turkey, this was in the first Christian centuries the land in which Christianity bore its best fruits in the areas of liturgy, theology, and monastic life. The invasion of the Seljuk Turks and the conquest of Constantinople by Mehmet II (1453) lead to the founding of the Ottoman empire and to the near destruction of Christianity in
the Anatolian peninsula. Thus today in Turkey Christians number approximately 100,000, among whom are a small number of Orthodox, who live around Phanar, the see of the ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople, who has the primacy of honor in the Orthodox world and who holds communion with eight patriarchs and many autocephalous Churches in both East and West, with approximately 180 million faithful.

In conclusion, we may state in historical terms that in all the places where Islam imposed itself by military force, which has few historical parallels for its rapidity and breadth, Christianity, which had been extraordinarily vigorous and rooted for centuries, practically disappeared or was reduced to tiny islands in an endless Islamic sea. It is not easy to explain how that could have happened. [...] In reality, the reduction of Christianity to a small minority was not due to violent religious persecution, but to the conditions in which Christians were forced to live in the organization of the Islamic state. [...] 

THE WARRIOR FACE OF ISLAM: "JIHAD"

According to Islamic law, the world is divided into three parts: dar al-harb (the house of war), dar al-islam (the house of Islam), and dar al-`ahd (the house of accord); that is, the countries with which a treaty was stipulated. [...] As for the countries belonging to the "house of war," Islamic canon law recognizes no relations with them other than "holy war" (jihad), which signifies an "effort" in the way of Allah and has two meanings, both of which are equally essential and must not be dissociated, as if one could exist without the other. In its primary meaning, jihad indicates the "effort" that the Muslim must undertake to be faithful to the precepts of the Koran and so improve his "submission" (islam) to Allah; in the second, it indicates the "effort" that the Muslim must undertake to "fight in the way of Allah," which means fighting against the infidels and spreading Islam throughout the world. Jihad is a precept of the highest importance, so much so that it is sometimes counted among the fundamental precepts of Islam, as its sixth "pillar."

Obedience to the precept of the "holy war" explains why the history of Islam is one of unending warfare for the conquest of infidel lands. [...] In particular, all of Islamic history is dominated by the idea of the conquest of the Christian lands of Western Europe and of the Eastern Roman Empire, whose capital was Constantinople. Thus, through many centuries, Islam and Christianity faced each other in terrible battles, which led on one side to the conquest of Constantinople (1453), Bulgaria, and Greece, and on the other, to the defeat of the Ottoman empire in the naval battle of Lepanto (1571).

But the conquering spirit of Islam did not die after Lepanto. The Islamic advance into Europe was definitively halted only in 1683, when Vienna was liberated from the Ottoman siege by the Christian armies under the command of John III Sobieski, the king of Poland. [...] In reality, for almost a thousand years Europe was under constant threat from Islam, which twice put its survival in serious danger.
Thus, in all of its history, Islam has shown a warlike face and a conquering spirit for the
_glory of Allah._ [...] against the "idolaters" who must be given a choice: convert to Islam,
or be killed. [...] As for the "people of the Book" (Christians, Jews, and "Sabeans"),
Muslims must "fight them until their members pay tribute, one by one, humiliated"
(Koran, Sura 9:29). [...] 

THE REGIME OF THE "DHIMMA"

According to Muslim law, Christians, Jews, and the followers of other religions
assimilated to Christianity and Judaism (the "Sabeans") who live in a Muslim state
belong to an inferior social order, in spite of their eventually belonging to the same race,
language, and descent. Islamic law does not recognize the concepts of nation and
citizenship, but only the umma, the one Islamic community, for which reason a Muslim,
as he is part of the umma, may live in any Islamic country as he would in his homeland:
he is subject to the same laws, finds the same customs, and enjoys the same
consideration.

But those belonging to the "people of the Book" are subject to the dhimma, which is a
kind of bilateral treaty consisting in the fact that the Islamic state authorizes the "people
of the Book" to inhabit its lands, tolerates its religion, and guarantees the "protection" of
its persons and goods and its defense from external enemies. Thus the "people of the
Book" (Ahl al-Kitab) becomes the "protected people" (Ahl al-dhimma). In exchange for
this "protection," the "people of the Book" must pay a tax (jizya) to the Islamic state,
which is imposed only upon able-bodied free men, excluding women, children, and the
old and infirm, and pay a tribute, called the haram, on the lands in its possession.

As for the freedom of worship, the dhimmi are prohibited only from external
manifestations of worship, such as the ringing of bells, processions with the cross,
solemn funerals, and the public sale of religious objects or other articles prohibited for
Muslims. A Muslim man who marries a Christian or a Jew must leave her free to
practice her religion and also to consume the foods permitted by her religion, even if
they are forbidden for Muslims, such as pork or wine. The dhimmi may maintain or
repair the churches or synagogues they already have, but, unless there is a treaty
permitting them to own land, they may not build new places of worship, because to do
this they would need to occupy Muslim land, which can never be ceded to anyone,
having become, through Muslim conquest, land "sacred" to Allah.

In Sura 9:29 the Koran affirms that the "people of the Book," apart from being
constrained to pay the two taxes mentioned above, must be placed under certain
restrictions, such as dressing in a special way and not being allowed to bear arms or
ride on horseback. Furthermore, the dhimmi may not serve in the army, be functionaries
of the state, be witnesses in trials between Muslims, take the daughters of Muslims as
their wives, be the guardians of underage Muslims, or keep Muslim slaves. They may
not inherit from Muslims, nor Muslims from them, but legacies are permitted.

The release of the dhimma came about above all through conversion of the "people of
the Book" to islam; but Muslims, especially in the early centuries, did not look favorably
upon such conversions, because they represented a grave loss to the treasury, which flourished in direct proportion to the number of the dhimmi, who paid both the personal tax and the land tax. The dissolution of dhimma status could also take place through failure to observe the "treaty"; that is, if the dhimmi took up arms against Muslims, refused to remain subject or to pay tribute, abducted a Muslim woman, blasphemed or offended the prophet Mohammed and the Islamic religion, or if they drew a Muslim away from Islam, converting him to their own religion. According to the gravity of each case, the penalty could be the confiscation of goods, reduction to slavery, or death - unless the person who had committed the crimes converted to Islam. In that case, all penalties were waived.

CONSEQUENCE: THE EROSION OF CHRISTIANITY

It is evident that the condition of the dhimmi, prolonged through centuries, has led slowly but inexorably to the near extinction of Christianity in Muslim lands: the condition of civil inferiority, which prevented Christians from attaining public offices, and the condition of religious inferiority, which closed them in an asphyxiated religious life and practice with no possibility of development, put the Christians to the necessity of emigrating, or, more frequently, to the temptation of converting to Islam. There was also the fact that a Christian could not marry a Muslim woman without converting to Islam, in part because her children had to be educated in that faith. Furthermore, a Christian who became Muslim could divorce very easily, whereas Christianity prohibited divorce. And apart from all this, the Christians in Muslim territories were seriously divided among themselves - and frequently even enemies - because they belonged to Churches that were different by confession (Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian Churches) and by rite (Syro-oriental, Antiochian, Maronite, Coptic-Alexandrian, Armenian, Byzantine). Thus mutual assistance was almost impossible.

The regime of the dhimma lasted for over a millennium, even if not always and everywhere in the harsh form called "the conditions of 'Umar," according to which Christians not only did not have the right to construct new churches and restore existing ones, even if they fell into ruins (and, if they had the permission to construct through the good will of the Muslim governor, the churches could not be of large dimensions: the building must be more modest than all the religious buildings around it); but the largest and most beautiful churches had to be transformed into mosques. That transformation made it impossible for the church-mosques ever to be restored to the Christian community, because a place that has become a mosque cannot be put to another use.

The consequence of the dhimma regime was the "erosion" of the Christian communities and the conversion of many Christians to Islam for economic, social, and political motives: to find a better job, enjoy a better social status, participate in administrative, political, and military life, and in order not to live in a condition of perpetual discrimination.

In recent centuries, the dhimma system has undergone some modifications, in part because the ideas of citizenship and the equality of all citizens before the state have gained a foothold even in Muslim countries. Nevertheless, in practice, the traditional
conception is still present. [...] The Christian, whether he wish it or not, is brought back in spite of himself to the concept of the dhimmi, even if the term no longer appears in the present-day laws of a good number of Muslim-majority countries.

To understand the present condition of these Christians, we must refer back to the history of the 19th and 20th centuries. In the Ottoman empire of the 19th century, where the millet system was in force, the tanzimat, "regulations" of a liberal character, were introduced. [...] From the second half of the 19th century to the end of the first World War, there was a "Reawakening" (Nahda) movement in the Arab world, under Western influence, in the fields of literature, language, and thought. Many intellectuals were conquered by liberal ideas.

On another front, the Christians created strong ties with the Western powers - France and Great Britain in particular - which, after the dissolution of the Ottoman empire, obtained the protectorate of the countries that had belonged to the empire. This permitted the Christians both greater civil and religious liberty and cultural advancement. Moreover, during the first half of the 20th century various political parties of nationalist and socialist, and thus secularist, tendencies were born, such as the Ba’th, the Socialist Party of the Arab Renewal, founded at the end of the 1930’s in Damascus by Syrian professor Michel ‘Aflaz, a Greek Orthodox. In 1953 this party was united with the Syrian Popular Party, founded in 1932 by Antun Sa’ada, a Greek Orthodox from Lebanon. In brief, political regimes inspired by the liberal and secular principles of Western Europe rose up in various Islamic countries.

THE BIRTH OF RADICAL ISLAM

These events provoked a harsh reaction in the Islamic world, due to fears that the secularist ideas and "corrupt" customs of the Western world, identified with Christianity, would endanger the purity of Islam and constitute a deadly threat to its very existence. This reaction was fed by strong resentment against the Western powers, which had dared to impose their political rule upon Islam, "the greatest nation ever raised up by Allah among men" (Koran, s. 3:110), and against their customs "despised" by the "nation (umma) that urges to goodness, promotes justice, and restrains iniquity" (ibid, s. 3:104).

Thus was born "radical Islam," which set itself up as the interpreter of the frustrations of the Muslim masses. Hasan al Banna, Sayyd Qutb, Abd al-Qadir ‘Uda in Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood; Abu I-A´li al-Mawdudi in Pakistan, and the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran are its most significant witnesses, and their followers have spread from Dakar to Kuala Lumpur. […]

THE PRESENT CONDITION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

Radical Islam, which proposes that shari´a law be instituted in every Islamic state, is gaining ground in many Muslim countries, in which groups of Christians are also present. It is evident that the institution of shari´a would render the lives of Christians rather difficult, and their very existence would be constantly in danger. This is the cause
of the mass emigration of Christians from Islamic countries to Western countries: Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia. [...] The estimated number of Arab Christians who have emigrated from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Israel in the last decade hovers around three million, which is from 26.5 to 34.1 percent of the estimated number of Christians currently living in the Middle East.

Furthermore, we must not underestimate grave recent actions against Christians in some Muslim-majority countries. In Algeria, the bishop of Orano, P. Claverie (1996), seven Trappist monks from Tibehirini (1999), four White Fathers (1994), and six sisters from various religious congregations have been brutally killed by Islamic fundamentalists, although the murders were condemned by numerous Muslim authorities. In Pakistan, which numbers 3,800,000 Christians among a population of 156,000,000 (96 percent Muslim), on October 28, 2001, some Muslims entered the Church of St. Dominic in Bahawalpur and gunned down 18 Christians. On May 6, 1998, Catholic bishop John Joseph killed himself for protesting against the blasphemy law, which punishes with death anyone who offends Mohammed, even only "by speaking words, or by actions and through allusions, directly or indirectly." For example, by saying that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, one offends Mohammed, who affirmed that Jesus is not the Son of God, but his "servant." With this kind of law, Christians are in constant danger of death.

In Nigeria - where 13 states have introduced shari´a as state law - several thousand Christians have been the victims of incidents. Serious incidents are taking place in the south of the Philippines and in Indonesia, which, with its 212 million inhabitants, is the most populous Muslim country in the world, to the harm of the Christians of Java, East Timor, and the Moluccas. But the most tragic situation - and, unfortunately, forgotten by the Western world! - is that of Sudan, where the North is Arab and Muslim, and the South black and Christian, and in part, animist. Since the time of president G.M. Nimeiry, there has been a state of civil war between the North, which has proclaimed shari´a and intends to impose it with fierce violence on the rest of the country, and the South, which aims to preserve and defend its Christian identity. The North makes use of all of its military power - financed by oil exports to the West - to destroy Christian villages; prevent the arrival of humanitarian aid; kill the cattle, which are the means of sustenance for many South Sudanese; and carry out raids, for Christian girls in particular, who are brought to the North, raped, and sold as slaves or concubines to rich, older Sudanese men. According to the 2001 report of Amnesty International, "at the end of 2000, the civil war, which started again in 1983, had cost the lives of almost two million persons and had caused the forced evacuation of 4,500,000 more. Tens of thousands of persons have been compelled by terror to leave their homes in the upper Nile region, which is rich in oil, after aerial bombardments, mass executions, and torture."

We must, finally, recall a fact that is often forgotten because Saudi Arabia is the largest provider of oil to the Western world, and the latter therefore has an interest in not disturbing relations with that country. In reality, in Saudi Arabia, where wahhabism is in force, not only is it impossible to build a church or even a tiny place of worship, but any act of Christian worship or any sign of Christian faith is severely prohibited with the
harshest penalties. Thus about a million Christians working in Saudi Arabia are deprived by violence of any Christian practice or sign. They may participate in mass or in other Christian practices - and even then - with the serious danger of losing their jobs - only on the property of the foreign oil companies. And yet, Saudi Arabia spends billions of petrodollars, not for the benefit of its poor citizens or of poor Muslims in other Muslim countries, but to construct mosques and madrasas in Europe and to finance the imams of the mosques in all the Western countries. We recall that the Roman mosque of Monte Antenne, constructed on land donated by the Italian government, was principally financed by Saudi Arabia and was built to be the largest mosque in Europe, in the very heart of Christianity.
For the first time, a unique Catholic-Muslim forum was held at The Vatican from November 4-6, 2008. This forum was established by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and by Muslim representatives in the wake of the open letter on October 13, 2007 to His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI and to the other heads of churches and ecclesial communities by 138 Muslim leaders. The theme of the forum was “Love of God, Love of Neighbor.” This meeting was held to discuss issues of commonality and diversity of the two religions. Twenty-five members of each side met behind closed doors to come up with a joint declaration and to develop an environment for a better understanding between the members of the two major religions.

On the third day, there was a final public session in the main lecture hall of the famous Gregorian University in Rome, where a fifteen-point declaration was read, omitting any reference to many important and controversial problems of apostasy and religious conversion in the Middle East and the plight of the Middle East Christians in general and the Iraqi Christians in particular.

At this session, Dr. Ramsay F. Dass, President of the American Middle East Christians Congress, in response to the comments of the Muslim delegation leadership, commented on the plight of the Iraqi Christians, their persecution, forced conversion, destruction of their churches, killing of their religious leaders, and forced emigration. These comments were confirmed by Archbishop Louis Sako, head of the Chaldean Catholic community in Kirkuk, Iraq and representative of the Chaldean community to the forum. This was the first time that such an issue was brought into the open at the forum. This comment sparked the interest of the international, national, religious, and local media, such as British Broadcasting Channel (BBC), National Public Radio (NPR), and others. Dr. Dass even challenged the Muslim delegation to visit the Middle East for a fact-finding mission to see for themselves the plight of the indigenous Middle East Christians in general and other indigenous religious minorities who have been subjected to similar acts as the Iraqi Christians.

A concerted effort, the majority of the Arab and Muslim countries’ leadership, including King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, other Muslim heads of state, and Muslim organizations over the world and especially in the western world, have been converging on such meetings. Such meetings took place in Madrid, Spain, the United Nations, and other places, especially in the aftermath of the September 11th events, in order to project Islam and Muslims in a favorable image. The fact is that the western world Muslim emigree population enjoys a full spectrum of freedom of worship, equal civic and political rights, and privileges more than many of their Muslim fellows enjoy in the Arab and Muslim world.
This is in contrast to the non-Muslim indigenous minorities and ethnics in many Arab world and Muslim countries, where such privileges that the Muslim emigree communities in the West enjoy. These minorities are subjected to degradation, loss of human rights, restrictive freedom of religion, and other acts that are contrary to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights that the Arab and Muslim countries have signed.

Our observation was that the Arab and Muslim countries' governments, communities, and their organizations in the West are in unionism in their acts with a definitive agenda, vision and mission to enter into as many dialogues, forums, and international meetings with the western world leadership that is secular (except the Vatican), and that the western countries are poorly prepared to attend such meetings or synchronized and mostly by apologetic leadership, ignoring the reality and the plight of the Christians in the West and the Muslim/Arab world.

There are well-founded Middle East Christian organizations in the West, with over six million Middle East Christians just in the United States, many millions in the West, and millions of others in the Arab and Muslim world. Such a powerful number must come together to parallel the Arab and Muslim countries and their surrogate organizations and project the plights, aspirations, and richness of their religion and culture at such meetings, or such meetings will be one-sided in dimension.
For two days this week, 50 leading Catholic and Muslim scholars from Europe, the Middle East and America sat behind closed doors in an anonymous-looking Vatican-owned building in the street leading up to St Peter’s Basilica, mulling over what divides and what unites their two faiths.

Together, Muslim and Christian believers account for almost half the world’s population.

The members of the new Catholic-Muslim Forum - 25 from each side - were attempting to establish a new dialogue after the disastrous fall-out from a speech by Pope Benedict in Germany two years ago, which was interpreted in many parts of the Islamic world as equating Islam with violence.

Some 138 Muslim leaders from around the world later wrote a letter to the Pope suggesting a new attempt to find common ground between the two religions. This week’s carefully-prepared forum hosted by the Vatican was the result of that initiative.

On the third and last day of their discussions, the participants all trooped off to attend a private papal audience in the Renaissance splendour of a Vatican audience hall where Pope Benedict told them they must overcome past prejudices, and correct the often distorted images they have of each other.

The Pope did not mention his Regensburg speech.
But a professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University in Washington, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, from Iran, reminded him that throughout history "various political forces" - both Christian and Muslim - had carried out violence.

**Christians in Iraq**

Later in the day, the scholars and clerics assembled for a final public session in the main lecture hall of the Gregorian University in Rome. This is the Jesuit-run centre of Catholic learning where a good proportion of the world's most influential Catholic bishops have studied or lectured at one time or another in their lives.

They issued a 15-point declaration full of fine words about loving God and one's neighbour, but omitting any reference to the thorny problems of apostasy and religious conversion in the Middle East.

However, these are real issues for some of the delegates.

Taking part in the discussions was Archbishop Louis Sako, head of the beleaguered Catholic minority in Kirkuk, northern Iraq, where Islamic militants have kidnapped and killed Christians or forced them to convert to Islam. Many Iraqi Christians have chosen to flee abroad rather than convert.

"There is a difference between freedom of religion and freedom of conscience," the archbishop told me.

"In our context, freedom of religion means you can go to church and pray. But nothing else. You cannot change your religion when you are not convinced. Freedom of conscience is something else. You are responsible. In Islam there is no change of religion. They don't allow it. It is something bad.

"The Muslim scholars here have shown us their solidarity. We don't know why Christians are being attacked in Iraq. Every time I leave my country I don't know whether I shall be allowed back."

Dr Ingrid Mattson from Canada, president of the Islamic Society of North America, who also took part in the Vatican forum, explained that Christian minorities have existed in Muslim societies for centuries.

"If you look in Iraq at the mass migrations of Sunni and Shia, there is no middle class left. Unfortunately some people are trying to exploit religious hatred."
'Desire to understand'

Dr Ramsay Dass, an Iraqi medical doctor who now lives and works in Detroit and is president of the Middle East Christians Congress in the USA, sat among the few members of the public admitted to the final session of the forum.

He claims to represent an organisation of some six million Christians of all denominations now living in America who are refugees from Muslim countries.

"Christians are being persecuted for only one reason in the Middle East - because they are Christians. They have no civil liberties, they are treated as second class citizens," he told me.

"If Professor Nasr says this is not true I should like to invite him and take him around to see the true situation. I think this meeting has no teeth, it is full of spin," he added.

The new Catholic-Muslim Forum agreed to meet again in two years' time in a Muslim country yet to be decided.

I asked Cardinal Jean Louis Tauran, head of the Vatican's Council for inter-religious dialogue, who chaired the discussions, what he thought had been accomplished in Rome this week.

"We reached a good level of mutual understanding," he said. "When you see Muslims and Christians acting as brothers and sisters it's a powerful antidote to violence and war," he added.

"What is new is the atmosphere, full of fraternity, humility and a desire to understand the other. We already have meetings with the Muslims of Egypt every two years. We believers know how to live diversity in unity. This is a talent that we can put at the disposal of society."

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Christians in Egypt. The Humiliation Continues

An interview with Youssef Sidhom, director of "Watani"

CAIRO - Youssef Sidhom is the director of the weekly "Watani" ("My Homeland"). Founded in 1958 by his father, Antoun Sidhom, it has always published news and commentary on the Church and Christianity, themes completely overlooked by all the other Egyptian newspapers. Many believe it to be a newspaper of the Coptic Orthodox Church, but that’s not true. It is independent, and has no particular relationship with that Church, nor does it receive financial support from it. [...] 

What are the main problems of the Christians in Egypt?

"The most striking problem is the extreme difficulty in receiving permission to build a church. Current legislation offers all of the incentives for the construction of mosques, but it poses almost insurmountable obstacles to the construction of churches. In 1934, the undersecretary for the minister of the interior, Muhammad al-´Azabi, made ten conditions for giving permission for the construction of a church, and those conditions are still valid. Let’s cite a few of them: a church must not be built on farm land; it must not be close to a mosque or monument; if it is to be constructed in a zone in which Muslims also live, one must first obtain their permission; there must be a sufficient number of Christians in the area; there must not be other churches nearby; police permission must be obtained if there are bridges or canals of the Nile near or if there is a railroad; the signature of the president of the republic must be obtained. All these conditions cause insurmountable difficulties. In fact, more than ten years can go by while waiting for police permission, and in the meantime mosques are hurriedly erected in the vicinity of the area where the church was meant to be, and the project stumbles against another prohibition. Moreover, it is not specified how many Christians there must be for them to have the right to a church. If, for example, there are 1,500, the government can say that that’s not a sufficient number, when a hundred would be enough to fill one of our churches."

But hasn’t President Mubarak facilitated the granting of these permissions by delegating the matter to the provincial prefects?

"Yes, he allowed the permits to be given by the provincial prefects, and a year later he ruled that they can also be given by the territory’s local authority. But this delegated authority only regards the permits to repair and restructure the churches. The permission to construct a new church is still the sole prerogative of the president of the republic. [...] This discrimination in the matter of the construction of churches leads Christians to the bitter conviction that the state considers them second-class citizens. For the state, a Christian is a kafir, an infidel, he doesn’t know the true religion or have the true faith, so it’s not worth it to listen to him. In Egypt we live with humiliating discrimination on religious grounds." [...] 

Does the discrimination regard only the construction of churches, or other aspects of social life for Christians in Egypt as well?

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"It regards our entire life. There’s discrimination in state offices. According to the constitution, the president must be a Muslim. The Islamic religion is the foundation of Egyptian legislation. Today, no Christian can be prime minister, even though there have been Christian prime ministers in the past. Of the thirty-two ministers, only two are Christians: the finance minister and the minister of the environment. No city or village mayor can be a Christian. The high posts in the military, the police, and the presidential guard are filled only with Muslims. There are hundreds of persons in the diplomatic corps, but only two or three Christians. No Christian can attain high office in the tribunals. According to the law, two witnesses are necessary to justify a sentence, but if one of them is Christian, the judge may refuse his testimony because it comes from an infidel. The rectors of the universities must be Muslim. [...] In any office, the career of a Muslim who has just arrived will advance beyond that of a Christian who has been in his post for years. In the 2000 elections, the al-Watani party, which dominates politics in the country, listed only three Christians among 888 candidates. A Christian may not teach Arabic, because this material is linked to the teaching of the Islamic religion. Discrimination is at work even on our identity card, where the religion of one’s father is shown."

And in case of divorce?

"The law provides that the children should remain with their mother. But if the father wants to divorce because he has become a Muslim, which happens frequently, the judge rules that the children should remain on the side that has the true faith, meaning the father. So children born to Christians grow up in a completely Muslim family."

"Is changing religions permitted?"

"Anyone who becomes Muslim is welcomed with big parties. They change his identity card very quickly; he is helped in his job, with his house, etc. But if a Muslim wants to become Christian, they not only seek to dissuade him by any means, but his very life is in danger. I believe that every day there are Egyptians who change religions, but it’s impossible to know how many. Al-Ahzar would willingly publish the statistics, which would be a sign of victory and glory, but the Church could never make a choice like this, because it would bring about many tragedies. In any case, there is a ruling by the tribunal that establishes that if an Egyptian is born non-Muslim, becomes Muslim, and then wants to return to his original faith, he may do it. But a Muslim by birth may never change religions, on pain of exclusion from his inheritance and from the society to which he belongs - with danger to his own safety."

(Interview by Camillo Ballin and Francesco Strazzari)
Arab Christian and Arab Muslim: Invested in brotherhood.

By Fr. Labib Kobti (Arab Roman Catholic Priest)
October 1999

In my article I shall address the following:

1) Harmony between Christians and Muslims
2) What did Arab Christians give to Arabs?
3) Our responsibility together
4) The Responsibility of Muslims toward Christians

1) Harmony between Christians and Muslims

A friend, like a brother of mine, Issam Nashashibi, wrote me a letter from which I will quote:

"As a child and early teen in Jerusalem, I grew up in a family who celebrated Christmas, Easter, and the two Muslim Holidays, Eid el-Fitr and Eid el-Adha. The family got together on those occasions.

We, as children, had the greatest time"..."I never felt any difference between me and my cousins, the Abu-Dayyehs. We are one family; we shared the good and the bad times then, as we do now. I did not hear of differences between Christians and Muslims until I left Jerusalem. I know there are no differences. The proof is my formative years in Jerusalem"...."These Jerusalem experiences make it difficult for me to believe anyone who mentions differences between Muslims and Christians. To me, people who talk about these differences do not know what I know. In reality, the differences are imaginary. These alien images were planted by parties who want to keep us apart so they can remain in charge of our destiny..."

In fact, we have been Arabs for about 6,000 years.
We have been Arab Christians for 2,000 years.
We have been Arab Muslims for about 1,500 years.

Our community as Arabs is older than our different religious communities. We have proven that being an Arab is more important than being either Christian or Muslim, when we fought together against colonialism, and when we built our various countries. The colonialism of the past, as well as the present occupation do not differentiate between us. They see us as merely Lebanese, Iraqis, Palestinians, Syrians, Egyptians... all suffering the same fate under the same circumstances.

Some countries do not want any harmony between Arab Muslims and Arab Christians. We have to be aware of that. We should put our hand together to fight against that. Let me tell you about the beautiful harmony we do have in our home countries, despite the up and downs.
The Arab Christians are the minority; the Arab Muslims are the majority. Arab Christians were the first to build schools, universities, hospitals, and other humanitarian organizations. The majority of our Arab Muslims used to study in these schools and do so today, as well. Some schools have more than 70% Muslim students. That same percentage is at the Christian Bethlehem and Bir-Zeit Universities. A high percentage of Muslims are at the Jesuit University and the American University of Beirut, as well.

The Arab-Christian investment in their home country serves everyone, not just Christians. The relief services of Christian institutions serve everyone equally.

If some Arab Muslims suffer economic hardship, it is not because of any actions on the part of their Arab-Christian brethren. It is because of the economic situation in Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon. This economic hardship is affecting everyone, because of certain discriminatory laws like the one of the state of Israel against all non-Jews (Note: These laws never refer to "Arabs"), and because of the difficult situations in the other countries where resources are minimal. And, as usual, the majority suffers more than the minority. Christians are less than 2% in the Holy Land, while the majority is their Muslim blood brothers.

On this difficult economic situation, we as Arab Muslims and Christians are living and suffering the same. Some Arab Christians as well some Arab Muslims are rich, very rich sometimes, and they unfortunately forget their other brothers and sisters be they Muslims or Christians.

The European countries and the USA, who are not always obviously Christian countries at all, have a separation between State and religion. These countries, far from being Christian like in their behavior at times, have only interest in their own wealth and the rights of their own people. They do not look at us equally as Arabs and they do not help the Arab Christians. On the contrary, with their propaganda, they nourished divisions between Christians and Christians, and between Christians and Muslims.

Every single Arabic City or Village where Muslims and Christians have lived together for centuries have a common heritage, same food, same way of dressing, same folklore and same traditions. The Israelis, for example, who came from here and there, do not have any common heritage in the cities that they created in Palestine or the settlements that they built. The Christians and Muslims have a common history that we have to carry from generation to generation and for centuries to come, as our forefathers have done.

Harmony between Christians and Muslims could become an example to the Jews who are living now with us. It would help in the future to build trust and cooperation on the land that belonged to our common prophets.
2) What did Arab Christians give to Arabs?

I do not minimize the great merits that Islam gave to the Arabs. On the contrary, it requires volumes to address the subject. But as I represent the Arab Christian perspective, I need to write about the merits of the Arab Christian. Many times, these merits are ignored or forgotten by our beloved Muslim sisters and brothers.

History and scholars acknowledge the merits of the Arab Christians, especially on these issues, among many others:

a) Al-Mualakat: The Arab-Christian poets like Umru al Qais, Bin Yagoth, Yazid Ben Abdel Madan, Hthala Al Tai’, Hatem Al Tai’, Al Hareth Bin Abbad, Adi Ben Yazid, Zuhair Ben Abi Sulma, Al Nabiga Al Thoubiani, Antara Al Absi and many others, just to mention some were Christians and many had their poems between the Mualakat in Mecca. These Mualakat were important documents at that time that showed the greatness of the Arabic language before Islam. The Mualakat influenced a lot of Muslim scholars and still speak to them today.

b) The Holy Koran was written with the Arab characters which were created by the Arab Christians of Hira (See Arabiyya, C. Rabin, in Encyclopedie de l'Islam, 2nd Edition, Leyde et Paris, 1960, pp. 579a-622b), (See also The History of Arabs before Islam, Jawd Ali, Vol. 8, pp. 178-179; vol. 9, p. 689).

c) Many Arab Christians were scholars and served as ministers at the first Muslim Caliphates. "The Christian Arabs of Gassanids in Syria and Montherits in Iraq came from the largest Arab tribe of Qahtan, and are related to the Arab tribes of Aws and Kazraj. As ancient Semites, they were translators, men of medicine and sciences and great scholars, to whom Muawya Ibn Abu Suffian, builder of the Umayyad Empire, entrusted the administration of the state and enrichment of its culture and learning process. On the shoulder of those Christians, Muawyah, this king and Caliph and his successors, built the foundation of the Arab Golden Age which reached its zenith in the days of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma’moun 813-833." Jarir, and Al Akhtal, the famous poets with Al Farazdaq who enriched the Arabic Poetry during the Ummaiads era.

d) The Arab Christians were the first to translate into Arabic a lot of books of philosophy, geography, medicine and history from Aramaic-Syriac, Greek and Latin. On this they were the bridge between the East and the West at that time, which helped the Arabs to build their own culture that would become the Golden Arab Age at the time of Al Mamoun.

e) They worked the first Arabic Grammars

f) They fought with their blood brothers the Muslims against the Christian Byzantines as well against the Persians, the Crusaders. Issa Al Awam who was a brigade leader with
Sallaheddine against the Crusaders while some Muslim Kings were supporting them. The Arab Palestinian women of Al Jalil used to warn Salaheddine of the crusader troops by lighting candles at night from their windows.

g) They stood with their blood brothers and sisters, the Arab Muslims, against the Turks, (the Nationalist leaders that were hung by the Turks in 1916, were both Christians and Muslims) the French and the English. They built with them the national Arab countries. And they still stand with them to build the future of Palestine.

3) Our responsibility together

Brotherhood between Arab Christians and Arab Muslims is the most important investment in our future together.

Irrespective of the name you use for the Eternal One, be it God, Allah, Hashem, Adonai or other; we have been enjoined by that power to live together. There is a reason for this. It is to bear witness, to love each other and to show that religion is a way to meet, to share, to love and to cooperate, and NOT to hate and destroy each other.

Patriarch Michel Sabbah has commented, in one of his talks some years ago:

"We are called to love each other. We should educate ourselves to love. From the churches, mosques and synagogues, the same exhortation should be proclaimed: Christians, love your Muslim and Jewish brothers; Muslims love your Christian and Jewish brothers; Jews love your Muslim and Christian brothers..."

The blood of all our martyrs, Arab Christians and Arab Muslims, is mixed in the same soil. No one can separate the blood of those who died for a just cause: the Arab Cause.

Shall we institute this brotherhood as a prophetic sign for a better future, or shall we permit "outside fingers" to destroy our unity?

What will the future bring if we really love each other and build each other?

Why do we allow fanaticism or exclusivism to take hold when we all know from experience that this is not the way, this is not what God wants of us?

This exclusionist fanaticism is the will of only a small minority, and that "outside finger" is eager to help promote this, in order that it may tell the outside world that Christians are persecuted by the Muslim majority, and that therefore we, the government of the world, are the only power needed to bring harmony and to defend the human rights of others. We all know that this is a big lie. Others want only our resources and look to their own interests and do not care for a single innocent child among us.
4) The Responsibility of Muslims toward Christians

Arab Christians as a minority expect from their Arab Muslims as a majority a lot, just as Arab Muslims expect a lot from their blood brothers and sisters, the Arab Christians. Let us open a dialogue.

a) Arab Christians want to be recognized as blood brothers and sisters. In fact, a lot of Arab Christian family names are the same as the Arab Muslim ones, which means that we were brothers, sisters and cousins.

b) Arab Christians need to be recognized as contributors to the Arabic history, language, literature, grammar, nations etc.

c) The decrease of Christian presence in the Middle East and especially in the Holy Land should be stopped.

Several analysts predict that 25 years from now there will be no Christians living in the Holy Land.

What is the Holy Land without Christians? What is the Middle East without Christians?

Brothers and sisters should never leave each other. We were put together by God in the same land. We need to stay together so as to respect the will of Allah.

The Arab Christian presence should become an Arab and Muslim "RESPONSIBILITY."

Arabs and Muslims should help Arab Christians to stay in Middle East and the Holy Land. They should stand with them.

We do not need any protectorate. History has shown that protectorates do not help, but create divisions. We have the ability to protect ourselves, if we believe that we are in reality, brothers and sisters, equal in rights and in duties in our home countries.

Therefore, opportunities for serving any kind of government or civil administration should be based, not on religion, but on the ability of the person to serve his country. These opportunities should be equal and just, where everybody feels himself at home.

And Muslims should trust their Arab-Christian brothers and sisters. With them, they have lived a history of trust and harmony, where Arab Christians showed their great love to their land, heritage, tradition, history and people. This is where, together, they served with loyalty and were faithful to the principles of sharing, cooperating and sacrifice.
Chapter 23:
The American Middle East Christians Congress
Vision:
To bring together the diverse and unique Middle East Christians communities in the United States of America in the fields of Heritage, Government, Education, Culture, Medical and Humanity. Advance civic and public affairs and protect civil liberties. Advocate the Middle East Christian voice.

Mission Statement:
The American Middle East Christians Congress (AMECC) is a non-profit Michigan based American community organization.

Michigan is home to the largest concentration of the Middle Eastern communities in the world living outside of the Middle East and is home to well over five hundred thousand Middle Eastern Christians locally.

There are over six million Middle East Christians across the United States including Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Coptic, Marionettes, Syriacs and others. The Middle East Christian communities are spread across the Arabian Peninsula, Asia Minor, Northern Africa and across the Globe.

- **Community Organization:** AMECC is a congress of unity, between the various Middle Eastern Christian Communities and organizations, that shares the same vision and mission under one umbrella.

- **Nationally:** Establish a dialogue with other Middle Eastern and Non-Middle Eastern Christian Communities.

- **Internationally:** Support and strengthen the relationship between the American Middle East Christian communities and the Christian communities in the Middle East and abroad.

**AMECC Committees** are Government, Civic and Public Affairs; Medical and Humanitarian; Heritage; Education; Cultural; and Public Relations. AMECC will coordinate and affiliate with other American-based organizations to achieve its goals.

Visit our book *Middle East Christians: the Untold Story* at our new website www.amecc.us

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From May 22-31, 2015, Dr. Ramsay F. Dass, MD, President of the American Middle East Christians Congress, traveled to the Holy Land on a fact-finding mission, pilgrimage, and analysis of the political, social, and religious welfare of the Middle East Christians therein.

**Background of the Mission**

This mission was undertaken with an open-mind and without prejudice to the political and historical events that have taken place in this land for thousands of years and continue to occur. It took into consideration the historical and spiritual guidance of the Old and New Testament of the Bible, the building, destruction, and re-construction of Christian houses of worship that have been built over the past 2,000 years, and the word-of-mouth history of the native peoples regarding the sites of the birth, crucifixion, and post-crucifixion of Jesus Christ until He ascended to Heaven. The mission began in Bethlehem and ended in Jerusalem.

During this mission, I depended upon my guides, who were intellectually familiar with the contents of the Bible regarding the spiritual and historical importance of these holy places, as well as with members of different faiths--spiritual, political, and social--in the Holy Land.

I crisscrossed the Holy Land region beginning with Bethlehem and ending in Jerusalem. I studied the spiritual, historical, and political ramifications on the region's historical sites--churches or other places--and the effect on these places through several events in history: the Jewish and Roman authority at the time of Jesus Christ; invaders, such as the Babylonians, Persians, Byzantines, Muslims, and Crusaders; the Islamic re-taking of the Holy Land by Saladin and his army and the Mamluk and Ottoman Empires, and the British mandate leading to the creation of Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

**Findings**

Throughout all these events in history, a sizeable segment of the native Holy Land Christians have withstood the time and pressure either to emigrate and/or convert.

In the past, many villages and cities, the Christians constituted a high percentage of the population, but have now become negligible in numbers, constituting less than 2% in some areas. Cities such as Bethlehem, where Christians constituted 80% at one time, now has only less than
12% of the same. Such reductions in percentage is due to multiple factors: invasions of the land by outsiders, Christian families limiting their families to few children (two to three in many cases) while Jewish and Muslim families had multiple children; and voluntary or forced emigration due to political, economic, or social pressure. Many Christian families, especially in Bethlehem, now have been affected by the security wall that was built almost ten years ago.

**Observations**

Throughout my visit and conversations with the native Holy Land Christians that have stood the test of time, I learned that their legal status has changed and continues to change because of the 1948 war, 1967 war, and the establishment of the wall that runs through many of their neighborhoods. I was very impressed with their pride and loyalty as Christians to the land. They have stayed to preserve Christians and Christianity. But at the same time, I could see their despair and frustration, especially in Bethlehem and surrounding areas and Jerusalem, where the wall has divided their families, affected their social structure, and deprived them economically. The political strife, especially in the Palestinian area, has reduced tourism, which is the Christians’ main source of their livelihood.

Some small villages with a Christian majority are suffering more with direct and indirect religious intolerance of other faith. They face encroachment of their villages by members of other faiths and culture who have forced them to sell their homes and land at deflated prices and to leave their village or town and for other areas outside the Holy Land, such as South America, North America, or Europe, where an estimated six million Palestinian Christians have now lived and done well for generations.

Historically, almost all the churches were destroyed by the Persians in 614 A.D. and later by Saladin and his troops in 1187 A.D. Many were converted into mosques or had mosques built adjacent to or on top of them. In the Post-Saladin era, the European church leadership came back to the Holy Land to re-build, re-vitalize, or improvise on the Christian holy sites. Today, most of the Holy Land Christian landmarks were built are well-preserved due to the efforts of the Byzantine authority, such as Queen Helena or Emperor Constantine, as well as the influx of the Crusaders and the support of European Christians, beginning with the Church of the Nativity, Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and others.

Today, many of these churches, especially the Church of the Nativity and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, are divided internally by major and minor Christian religious leaders and denominations, with significant political, and social strife among them. You can find spots where the Orthodox can worship, the Latin can worship, and to a lesser extent where smaller denominations, such as Coptic and Ethiopian denominations, can worship.

Jerusalem is the center of the hierarchy of the Christian leadership. Whether Latin, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, or Evangelical, these hierarchies for many decades and centuries have been disunited and disenfranchised and have quibbled with each other, even today but to a lesser degree. Even in a city such as Old Jerusalem, the Armenian and Latin Christians occupy two distinct quarters, while the other two quarters are occupied by the Arab Muslims and the Jews. This has upset the faithful and intellectual, as well as ordinary Christians in the Holy Land.
Some of these hierarchies have dealt negatively with the wealth of property they own. They have sold this property to members of other faiths or organizations for a high profit, but that profit has not matriculated to the welfare of their parishioners or communities. Such sales have affected the geography of the holy places, such as where mosques are built across from the Church of the Nativity or adjacent to the Church of Lazarus in Bethany. Until today, some of the Christian houses of worship are under the Muslim authority, such as the Chapel of the Ascension, where you must pay Muslim authorities to enter these areas. The gate to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is still in the hands of a Muslim family that opens and closes the church as was agreed during Saladin's time. This was one of the most puzzling and saddest observations of our visit.

We left the Holy Land with fear that the native Holy Land Christians will sooner or later be extinct, and their holy places run over by the Israeli, Palestinian, or European Christian organizations.

**Positive Developments**

Some Christian organizations, such as the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF), through the tireless efforts and sincere actions of its president, Sir Rateb Rabie, and its board of directors, are working diligently to reverse some of these events by building preservation centers, such as a mid-size Holy Land Inn in Bethlehem, where children and grand-children of Holy Land immigrants are brought and educated regarding their past and present culture in order to keep them familiar with their heritage and not to lose it. The HCEF has also been a site of visits by other non-Palestinian/Holy Land natives from Europe, America, and elsewhere to do the same. It has built a beautiful, up-to-date museum in Bethlehem that highlights past and present artifacts and the historical developments of the Holy Land and Palestinian Christians.

Many Christian ecumenical organizations, including The Vatican, have initiated programs to assist the Holy Land and Palestinian Christians through many ways, including through jobs, education, culture, and purchase of homemade Christian religious products that have been for thousands of years part of their culture. I hope these efforts are not too little, too late.

**Recommendations**

The Holy Land is rich with Christian holy places that are mentioned in the Bible and even places that are not mentioned in the Bible. These places include the birth, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. When we went through the process of touching the living stones that Jesus Christ and His followers took, we experienced the most the fulfilling aspect of my trip. You feel the pain and agony Jesus Christ felt the last few days of his ministry. I wish every Christian and non-Christian who is interested can experience such a mission and the teaching, pain, suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection, which can never be described in any poetic or simplistic way. One truly feels that the Holy Spirit is present there.

It is the political, spiritual, and social duty of the governments that govern the Holy Land and its holy sites to maintain and promote these Christian religious sites and the native Christians, who have no desire but to stay in the Holy Land to preserve the message of Christianity and be
custodians to the sites and its people. Such preservation is financially, politically, and socially advantageous to them, as evidenced by the thousands of pilgrims to the Holy Land and the new conscience of western countries regarding the preservations of Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land.

In this Twenty-First Century, the Holy Land leadership should understand that the world within Christianity and more so outside Christianity is changing with the rise of fanatics and religious zealots who reap havoc on the community, including by burning and desecration of churches as was the case with the Benedictine Monastery of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes on the Sea of Galilee (Tabgha) on June 18, 2015. They must develop the following:

1. A council that speaks with one voice and one action directly and indirectly with the Israeli and Palestinian governments and that interacts closely with the interfaith and non-governmental organizations within these two entities;

2. A permanent public relations office with local and western oriented public relations that communicates, informs, and educates every entity in the world instantly regarding any events, publications, or policies of the council in order to have better public relations and influence in the events in the Middle East; and

3. A committee that continues dialogue with (a) other Middle East church leaders, (b) global Christian leadership, and (c) other world faith organizations.

Business cannot be as usual. The time is not usual. The Holy Land Christians are not asking, but rather demanding a change in the thinking and modus operandi of the church leadership that should change politically, culturally, and socially. There should be a sincere and courageous dialogue within the Holy Land Christian community, with leadership that is accessible to the community and a community vice versa with the courage to bring their feelings, attitudes, and proposals to the leadership.

Conclusion

In final analysis, I feel it is paramount to preserve the over 2,000-year journey for the Holy Land Christians and not to allow the political, religious, and social changes that are occurring to diminish them.

The Holy Land Christians have stood the test of time. We should help them stay and preserve Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land by supporting them politically, financially, and socially, and by appealing to the political powers, their religious affiliations, and to their non-governmental organizations to do the same.

Most importantly, we must appeal to the Christian hierarchy in Jerusalem to have a sense of unity with political, spiritual, and financial programs that act as one and assist the native Christians in the Holy Land. Otherwise, there will be a day all of us will regret.

After all, what is the Middle East without Christianity and the Holy Land without Christians?
Dr. Ramsay Dass, President of the American Middle East Christian Congress, with a personal Honorarium Invitation from Mr. Toufic Baaklini, President of IN DEFENSE OF CHRISTIANS (IDC), attended the group's inaugural summit from September 9-11, 2014 in Washington, D. C, under the banner "Protecting and preserving Christianity Where It All Began."

This conference was the first of its kind, where prelates and representatives of all churches and rites attended, including, but not limited to, His Eminence Leonardo Cardinal Sandri, His Most Eminent Beatitude Patriarch Mar Bechara Boutros Cardinal Rai, His Beatitude Gregorios III Laham, His Beatitude, Ignatius Youssif III Younan, His Holiness Aram I Keshishian, His Eminence Archbishop Cardinal Wuerl, His Eminence the Most Reverend Metropolitan Joseph Zahlawi, His Grace Bishop Angaelos, His Excellency Bishop Ibrahim Ibrahim, along with over 1,200 attendees from over 14 countries, including priests, nuns, doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, community and human right activists, university faculty professors, and various American leaders and organizations in the fields of religion, faith, culture, politics, and humanitarianism.

Dr. Dass, along with summit attendees visited the Capitol and addressed and dialogued with more than 18 United States Senators, Congressmen and Congresswomen who pledged to support and assist the Middle East Christians with their immediate
problems and develop programs for their future presence in the Middle East and in Diaspora.

In Defense of Christians (IDC) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization committed to the preservation and protection of Christians in the Middle East. Christians are pillars of Middle Eastern civilization. The people of these ancient communities, numbering in the millions, play an essential role in efforts to promote peace, encourage pluralism, and build bridges between the East and West. They face many challenges today, including government discrimination, social and economic marginalization, targeted religious persecution, ethnic cleansing, and violent attacks.

IDC’s goals are to unite the Middle Eastern Christian Diaspora in its advocacy efforts, to make the general public more aware of the plight of Christians in the Middle East, and to stand in solidarity with the Christian communities in the region. Their survival is vital to Middle East stability, and their ability to flourish in their countries of origin is not merely a human rights issue, but also has national security implications for the United States.
Commentary on Fact-Find Mission to Lebanon

I went on a fact-finding mission from July 7-July 15, 2012 to Lebanon on behalf of the American Middle East Christians Congress organization to develop a dialogue of understanding, cooperation, and how to develop the outcome of this trip for a better understanding to assist our Middle East Christian communities to issues related to the Middle East Christians, whether in the Middle East or in diaspora, especially to the current political, geographical, and religious changes affecting the interfaith relationship and the well-being of the Middle East Christians and their existence now and in the coming crucial five years.

It has been my pleasure to meet and discuss issues with His Beatitude Mar Bechara Peter Rai, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Archbishop Paul Sayah, Vicar General of the Maronite Church; Simon Y. El Khoury, Administrative Coordinator of the Center for the Christians of the Orient and members of his organization; Mr. Habib E. Ephrem, President of the Syriac League in Lebanon and Secretary General of the Union of Lebanese Christian Leagues; Rev. Father Fadi Daou, Chairman & CEO of the Adyan Foundation; and Reverend Riad Jarjour, President of the Forum for Development, Culture & Dialogue, and countless other laypeople from Christian and other faiths.

Each one of the above persons in his capacity was very positive in my discussion. There was a frank dialogue about our success and failures in order to achieve our mission toward our community. Each one wanted to have a continuation of this dialogue. I came out with the impression that more can be done if we can come together collectively, irrespective of our differences or personalities, to give our community leadership, be it religious or laypeople, and a committee that is proactive and not reactive to the fast changes in the Middle East and abroad.

I was very, very impressed with the dedication and the hard work each individual and his organization, with their contribution to their faith, to interfaith, and to their community for the past many years, whether they have done local meetings, national meetings, or international meetings. My impression is that singularly, each group has done a marvelous job and much energy went into their organizations and achievements, but to my dismay, these organizations are not working together or meeting together under one umbrella or under one leadership where the outcome would have multi-fold in their success and also to avoid duplication of work or outcome.
I want to thank many people for assisting me to have a meeting with the above organizations and their executive officers or their religious leadership, but it would have been more positive if we had developed a large index for every organization, its president, board of directors, vision and mission, and their activities. This is a very important issue. I had been in the field of the Middle East Christian communities, and I must admit, many organizations, including some of the above, I was not aware of their activities or their existence, but talking to them, I did realize how much work they have put in for many years for the goodness of Christianity, Middle East Christians and humanity.

At present time, a dialogue must develop between the religious leadership and the community leadership that is more sincere than just to be diplomatic because we cannot underestimate the importance of the religious leadership in our community but also the religious communities have to understand because of their limitations that the non-religious organizations also can play a very major and positive role. They must go hand-in-hand. Otherwise, both will be losers, irrespective of their success or their position in the community.

The Middle East Christian communities at large, whether in the Middle East or abroad, should never see even a thin line of division or competition between the two institutions. This is more important also for other communities and governments in the Middle East and abroad. Even though our numbers or power is dwindling in the Middle East, we are still a force to be reckoned with, where our community organizations still command respect and power, whether in the Middle East or abroad.

These divisions that I found in the Middle East are reflected also in the Middle East Christians abroad. For that reason, the American Middle East Christians Congress, which was created in the United States, is trying to bring the religious and non-religious organizations together as much as possible with one voice to be proactive to the events that are taking place around the globe.

In addition to these problems, we must encounter other problems our people are facing, from dwindling numbers in the Middle East as well as their power, rise of religious intolerance and extremism, increased numbers of emigration and immigration within the Middle East countries and abroad, and weak religious and community leadership in some of the Middle East countries.

In Europe as well as in America in the past few years, with the help of organizations such as The Vatican and other religious organizations, these issues related to the Middle East Christians are being brought into the open, either by having meetings, conventions, conferences, etc. These meetings must be coordinated for a larger outcome than having a few individuals meeting with other individual organizations in Europe and in America. An umbrella organization must be established to direct such meetings and with better results.

In the United States of America, the Middle East Christians (as per Zogby International Census and others) constitute 78% of the total Middle East immigrants to the United States, for which there is an estimated half a million in Michigan and about six million in the United States.
Governors, members of Congress, politicians, business people, and well known people in the fields of science, art and humanity. In spite of all this, we are known by other faiths or by other heritage. The time has come that we, the Middle East Christians, have to be counted politically, publicly, heritage, and faith in order to reap the American public system of politics and civic and religious affairs. In doing this, will help us to assist the Middle East Christians in the Middle East and abroad. Much has to be done to educate our fellow Americans regarding our issues, which have been ignored or neglected partially by us, partially by our faults, and partially of the influence of non-Middle East Christian governments and organizations. The Middle East Christian Congress is trying to do exactly this in collaborating with interfaith, political, cultural, and other like-minded American organizations.

In order to achieve this, our initial goals are:

1. To continue the dialogue with each and every religious and community organization in the Middle East and cooperate with all aspects that are legally permitted to interact, learn, and exchange ideas to benefit the Middle East Christians at large;

2. To create a public relations entity/ council in order to inform, react, and cooperate at sudden and non-sudden events in the Middle East and in the United States;

3. To create a lobby in Washington to represent our interests;

4. To create a series of public events utilizing media, lectures, chairs in universities for Christian Middle East studies, and interlink with other educational and non-educational institutes for dissemination of information about our heritage, culture, faith, and our contribution to humanity since the dawn of civilization.

The community at large in the United States shares the vision and mission of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East and diaspora. This positive feeling will bring us together.

I want to thank sincerely the efforts of Most Rev. Paul Sayah, Vicar General Maronite Patriarchate, Most Rev. Bishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk, Iraq, Rev. Raafat Girgis, Rev. Raafat Zaki, Rev. Faded Abu-Akel, Julie Lebnan, Pamela Abi Nader, and others for their assistance to make my trip to Beirut successful and fruitful.

Sincerely,

Dr. Ramsay F. Dass, MD
President, American Middle East Christians Congress
www.middleeastchristian.org or www.amecc.us
"What is the Middle East without Christians and the Holy Land without Christianity?"

ABSTRACT
This document will discuss the background of the American Middle East Christians Congress and the mission of the one-year program entitled "What is the Middle East without Christians and the Holy Land without Christianity?," with the topics, findings, and highlight of the three-day inaugural conference that took place from September 28-30, 2012 in Warren, Michigan, USA.

BACKGROUND
The American Middle East Christians Congress was founded post-September 11, 2001 to bring together the diverse and unique Middle East Christians communities in the United States of America in the fields of Heritage, Government, Education, Commerce, Culture, Medical and Humanity. Advance civic and public affairs and protect civil liberties.

The American Middle East Christians Congress for the past one year has been working diligently with international, national, and local community organizations, ecumenical and clergy leadership, and American political, religious, and community organizations to prepare for the upcoming one-year program, included a fact-finding mission to Beirut, Lebanon, which is considered a base for the majority of Middle East Christian organizations.

MISSION
In order to respond to the challenges the Middle East Christians are encountering, whether in the United States or in the Middle East, the American Middle East Christians Congress, in collaboration with the American Middle East Council of Clergy and the American Middle East Christian community organizations, launched a one-year program that began with a three-day conference at various sites in tri-county, Michigan on September 28-30, 2012 with a Gala Event at St. Sharbel Banquet Hall in Warren, Michigan on September 28, 2012.

This conference was successful with a full house, and we were forced to reduce the number of delegates to each group in order to accommodate everybody. We apologize for those we were not able to accommodate. This event was attended by American political leadership, both Republican and Democrat, members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives of their representatives, members of the state, county, and city officials, as well as religious, faith-based community organizations from every walk of life in American society, including all sections of the American Middle East Christian communities, such as Arab Christians, Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Coptics, Maronites, Syriacs, while other faith-based and community organizations, including Muslim, Jewish, Mendian, Hindus, Buddhists, Baptists,
Protestants, Presbyterians, and secular leadership. Communal-wise, leadership and communities from the African-American, Polish, Macedonian, Italian, Indian, Chinese and other components of American society.

TOPICS DISCUSSED AT THE CONFERENCE
The topics that were discussed throughout the conference were:

1. Creating a political action committee
2. Creating a public relations committee
3. Creating projects and opportunities to assist the Middle East Christians in the Middle East to stay in the Middle East, such as creating scholarships, clinics, collaboration with commercial enterprises to create favorable conditions to earn means of living
4. Collaborating with Middle East Christian-based organizations all over the world in order to continue cooperation of understanding, assisting vice versa with projects, and updating them with the activities that are occurring here in the United States
5. Creating Chairs at universities for Middle East Christian studies
6. Establishing a special office in the United States Department of State dedicated fully to the Middle East Christians

FINDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE
Throughout the first three days of this program in Michigan, there were meetings between various leaders and their organizations discussing the past, present, and future of the Middle East Christians, especially for the past decade and the events that led to increase of their emigration to other parts of the world. These were the findings of the conference:

- There was a frank discussion regarding the western countries' and the United States' efforts and involvements in changing of governments, whether in Iraq in 2003 or during the so-called "Arab Spring," through covert or overt support movements that led to governments led by radicals or by Islamist movements, such as in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, a continuous political military strife in Syria and the presence of zealous and extremism in Syria. In some other parts of the Arab world's, many Muslim religious leadership, many who are appointed by governments in the Arabian peninsula, have openly advocated the disappearance of all religions or their symbols except Islam.

- Some Middle East governments have been trying to protect the ethnics and other faith-based communities, but they have been weakened by the emergence of religious extremism, political radicalization, sectarian divisions, and economical difficulties, all of which have added to their nations but more so affected the ethnics and the minorities.

- The western governments and the United States have adopted policies whose byproduct was detrimental to the presence of the Middle East Christians in the Middle East by trying to facilitate the immigration of the Middle East Christians to protect the Middle East Christians and other minorities or have undergone policies that are positively working in the hands of the radical governments or the radical religious groups in the Middle East by facilitating a process of immigration that in essence uproots people with
thousands of years of ancestry, culture, and heritage in the Middle East to countries that sooner or later will lose their culture and heritage.

- On the other hand, many western and American organizations and many Middle East ecumenical and non-ecumenical organizations, including The Vatican, are trying to reverse the immigration process, concluding with the latest trip by Pope Benedict XVI's trip to Lebanon by signing the famous documents related to the Middle East Christians, by realizing that there is a problem of the Middle East Christians’ exodus by holding national, international, and other conferences to halt the process of immigration, help the Middle East Christians to stay in their homelands by working with the Middle East governments and building commercial projects to help the economically striven Middle East Christians to stay in their homeland. This process has started in the Holy Land, and hopefully it will spread to the other parts of the Middle East.

- The historic facts that the so-called Middle East Christians now have been present throughout the Middle East even prior to the emergence of Christianity and have cohabited the land with the other religions and under various occupations.

**HIGHLIGHTS OF CONFERENCE**
The highlights of the first three days was the Gala Evening on September 28, 2012 that lasted over four hours, including main speeches by Dr. Ramsay F. Dass, M.D., President of the American Middle East Christians Congress, Hon. Mayor James R. Fouts, Mayor of Warren, Mr. Habib Afram, President of the Syriac League in Lebanon and Secretary General of the Federation of Christian Associations in Lebanon, Dr. Nahida H. Gordon, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor at Case Western University and Moderator of the National Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus of the Presbyterian Church of USA, and Keynote Speaker: His Excellency Gebran Bassil, MBA in Engineering, Minister of Energy and Water of Government of Lebanon.

All the speakers emphasized that the Middle East Christians are facing hostile environments with a negative impact on their presence in the Middle East. Each speaker was eloquent, each from his and her point of view, and they were very well received by the audience. The contents of the topics were informative, courageous, and educational. Many members of the audience were not aware of these facts.

Throughout the Gala Evening, we had read to the audience letters of support from the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI and various religious, political, and community organizations throughout the Middle East and from the United States, while representatives from the American Muslim community, Kurdistan Regional Government, councilmembers from Telkaif, Iraq, and representatives of various senators and congressional people.

At the conclusion of the event, there were six awards presented:

1. **Mar Bechara Peter Rai Award** for a person or organization that promotes communion and love in the Middle East awarded to Mr. Gebran Bassil.
2. **The Late Pope Shenouda III Award** for a person or organization that promotes a better understanding of Christianity and Christians in the Middle East awarded to Mr. Habib Afram.

3. **Bishop Louis Sako Award** for a person or organization that promotes international understanding of the Middle East Christians, their heritage, aspirations, and survival awarded to Dr. Nahida Gordon.

4. **Archbishop Paul Sayah Award** for a person or organization that promotes bridges and harmony between the churches and community at large awarded to Rev. Rani Abdulmasih.

5. **Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho Award** for bravery and exemplary leadership awarded to the Syriac community at large.

6. **President's Awards** for persons who have contributed to this function and to the community at large awarded to various community and religious leaders.

On September 30, 2012, there was a day of prayer and solidarity to the Middle East Christians throughout churches and other houses of worship. It was also moved to be an annual day dedicated to the Middle East Christians.

Throughout the conference, many clergy and community leaders have invited non-Middle East Christian communities through educational and informative meetings regarding the Middle East Christians.

Throughout the year, there will be similar conferences in different parts of the United States in order to inform, educate, and develop collaborative chapters.

**CONCLUSION**

There is no doubt that the events taking place in the Middle East have awakened the conscience of many countries and has brought the plight, the dilemma, and the presence of the Middle East Christians in the Middle East to the forefront, where numerous conferences of inter- and intra-faith have taken place around the world. Many governments and major organizations are looking positively at this problem and assessing the needs of the Middle East Christians in order to preserve their presence in the Middle East, including many Arab and Muslim countries.

In addition to all what the Middle East Christians in diaspora, including in the United States of America, can do to assist in this endeavor, the following actions are recommended:

1. Continue bringing these issues to the forefront by creating a political action committee and a public relations committee, a liaison committee with the other inter- and intra-faith, heritage, and public organizations.
2. Assist the Middle East Christians in their homelands with programs that will support them economically, culturally, in heritage, and politically in order to assist those who wish to stay in the Middle East and not to emigrate.
3. Work closely with governmental and non-governmental organizations to create programs in the Middle East, specifically meant for the Middle East Christians and provide and environment that is hospitable to their continued stay in their respective countries.

4. Plan similar conferences in other states in America in order to continue the vision, mission, and progress of this project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
The President of the American Middle East Christians Congress, its Board of Directors, and the preparatory committee of this conference and all those who made it possible, as well as His Excellency Mr. Gebran Bassil, Dr. Nahida Gordon, with a very special thank you to Mr. Habib Afram, who flew from Lebanon to Michigan especially for this occasion and whose presence, advice, and discussion with the sessions that were met with leadership of the American Middle East Christian organizations was instrumental in fulfilling the conference's mission due to his longstanding role as a Middle East Christian and community advocate.

Ramsay F. Dass, MD, President

Dr. Dass presents award to His Excellency Gebran Bassil, MBA in Engineering, Minister of Energy and Water of Government of Lebanon, as keynote speaker at the September 28-30, 2012 AMECC conference in Warren, Michigan.
The Arab American News

Conference warns violence against Christians worldwide on the rise
By Natasha Dado
Friday, 10.05.2012, 05:01am

WARREN — The attacks surfacing against Christians worldwide particularly in parts of the Arab World are on the rise, according to concerns raised at the American Middle East Christians Congress conference Sep. 28 at the St. Sharbel Church here.

Speaking Gebran Bassil, Lebanon’s Minister of Energy and Water who’s a Christian said in recent years the population of Christians has diminished drastically in parts of the world and continues to as more face persecution and exile. “This is not the result of a bad economy, earthquake or a drought, no…rather this is the result of the policies being implemented in our region, with the consent of the Western world,” Bassil said.

Dr. Ramsey Dass, M.D., President of the American Middle East Christians Congress

Dr. Ramsey Dass, M.D., President of the American Middle East Christians Congress (Photo: The Arab American News)

Dr. Ramsey Dass, M.D., President of the AMECC says in recent months Coptic Christians have left Egypt in the wake of violence against them, and the future of Christians in Arab countries where the popular Arab Spring uprisings have occurred such as Syria is uncertain. “There is a Christian exodus taking place,” Dr. Dass said.

Since the start of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the country’s Christian population has decreased by more than half. To date, there’s an estimated 400,000 Christians in Iraq, as opposed to the more than one million before the start of the war.

“They think Christians are an easy target. They kill them, they rape them. They destroy their churches,” Dr. Dass said. He plans on starting a political action committee to address the concerns of Middle Eastern Christians in the United States. There are an estimated six million of them in the country according to the AMECC. Dr. Dass says the group will be similar to the Council on American Islamic Relations, which has been a powerful force for Muslim Americans nationwide, by making their voices heard among politicians. “The so called Arab Spring has proven to be no more than a cold stormy winter where dictatorship has been replaced by hard line Islamic governments,” Bassil said.
He indicated that movements started by Al-Qaeda that threaten the existence of Christians have “boosted” throughout the Middle East, and Christians in the region are dumbfounded by the U.S. support for extremist movements.

“If the rise of those movements is not stopped in the Middle East it will reach Europe in no time and the shores of America, and the U.S. will have to deal with it at home,” he said.

Bassil says recent polls suggest more than 50 percent of U.S. citizens are concerned about the economy while 26 percent are worried about terrorism. “Those numbers could change…if the waves of hatred reach your shores,” he said.

He says Arabs share the same values of freedom and human rights as Americans and object to the policies that are threatening their existence. He said it was once predicted that when the Middle East has no Christians “evil will prevail in the world and the universe will fall in an unprecedented massacre.”

Dr. Dass outlined some of the challenges facing Christians in Arab countries including governments that aren’t willing to admit there isn’t adequate representation of Christians in political positions, or that minorities are being attacked because of their religious affiliation.

Dr. Dass says Christians in the Arab World should not succumb to the pressures of intimidation and threats that push them out of their homelands.

He says one of Iraq’s leading bishops was killed because he refused to leave. Dr. Dass believes Christians shouldn’t flee their homelands despite the threats being cast on their rights or lives. During a recent trip to Lebanon, Dass met with Patriarch Mar Bechara Peter Rai, who told him to pass along the message of communion, love and friendship among people of different faiths.

Several Muslim Americans attended the conference to support the cause. Public officials including Warren Mayor James Fouts, Republican Congressman Kerry Bentivolio of the 11th Congressional District and Oakland County Sheriff Mike Bouchard also addressed the crowd.

Additional speakers included Habib Afram, President of the Syriac League in Lebanon and Secretary General of the Federation of Christian Associations in Lebanon, and Nahida Gordon, Ph.D., Emeritus Professor at Case Western University and Moderator of the National Middle East Eastern Presbyterian Caucus of the Presbyterian Church.
Dr. Dass says Middle Eastern Christians are powerful enough to have their voices heard through the democratic process by voting, and removing elected officials who do not address their concerns. As for elected officials who don't cater to the needs of the community, Dass said, “We will remember them come November.”

Christians around the world must protect each other, something Dr. Dass says former President George W. Bush failed to do when he invaded Iraq and toppled Saddam Hussein’s regime.

Dr. Dass said when Bush invaded Iraq he didn’t pay attention to what was happening to Christians although he identifies as one. “A Christian should know you should take care of your brothers and sisters, and not just Christians, all of humanity,” he said. Dr. Dass read a letter sent to the AMECC by the Pope, who he sent a letter to regarding the conference. When Dr. Dass visited the Middle East and met with different organizations he was encouraged not to forget his homeland and roots, despite having established a new life in America. They said “You have forgotten about your brothers and sisters.” I told them I would take the message back,” he said.

The Board of Directors of the AMECC honored people with six awards including the Mar Bechara Peter Rai Award for a person or organization that promotes communion and love in the Middle East; The Late Pope Shenouda III Award for a person or organization that promotes a better understanding of Christianity or Christians in the Middle East; Bishop Louis Sako Award for a person or organization that promotes international understanding of Middle East Christians, their heritage aspirations and survival; Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho Award for bravery and exemplary leadership and President’s Awards for people who have contributed to the function and to the community at large.

Dr. Dass warned that something must be done immediately to stop atrocities against Christians before their existence becomes history in parts of the world such as Bethlehem. “Now one day, when you’re going to go see the holy land in Bethlehem, these places of worship are going to be museums, and tourist guides will not be from your faith or your community,” he said.

A portion of the proceeds from the event went to orphanages in the Middle East.
Guest commentary: Arab Spring puts religious freedom at risk

Dec. 27, 2011

As American Middle East Christian communities celebrate the Christmas season, they are doing so with anxiety and apprehension about the future of the countries from which many were forced to emigrate, and about the future of Christians and their religion in the Middle East.

By Ramsay F. Dass

Detroit Free Press guest writer

Ramsay Dass
It may have been fashionable to call the latest uprising and revolts in the Middle East as an "Arab Spring," but Islamic groups have emerged as powerful, political forces. And the future is unclear as to the shape of the governments that will rule in the Middle East as well as the implications they will have on non-Muslims.

Western-friendly governments that have been toppled have suppressed religious extremists for a long time, and in doing so have managed to protect various levels of the freedom of religion and worship. Now it seems many governments, directly or indirectly, will be run by Islamist groups, some with the intention to implement Sharia law, which would have negative consequences to the others. Was it the intention of the U.S. to replace previous regimes with Islamic zealots?

Sharia law stands to restrict the civil rights of non-Muslims and could include rules regarding the building of churches. In October, Egyptian Coptic Christians protested a string of attacks on churches and Christian properties. Members of the Egyptian military fired into the protest and plowed through it in vehicles. At least 24 people died.

Christian Coptics make up over 10% of Egypt's population. They were part of the Arab Spring uprising and should be treated equally post-Mubarak with their fellow Muslim Egyptians.

Egypt is not the only country where Christians are vulnerable. As a consequence of the invasion of Iraq, religious and tribal interference from neighboring countries has forced half of Iraq's Christian population to leave the country. It has led to the destruction of Christian schools, churches and the killing of priests.

Lebanon's civil war changed the balance among Christians and Shi'i and Sunni Muslims. Nevertheless, the church hierarchy and the Christian political groups have, to a degree, kept the status quo, despite the fact that many Christians were forced to emigrate. The future there is not yet clear.

In Syria, there is stability among various religious sects, and many Christians feel their religious freedom and their civic and civil rights are equal to their fellow Muslims. Because many of the opposition's revolting leaders include Muslim zealots, Christian leaders fear the rights of minorities may be threatened as they are in Iraq.

A history of persecution has made it difficult to come up with an exact count of the number of Middle East Christians in the U.S. It is estimated that there are more than six million in America and more than half a million alone in Michigan. We have prospered economically, culturally and politically. They have been integrated into all aspects of American society. They are gradually raising these issues locally, nationally and internationally regarding their fellow Middle East Christians in the Arab world.

American Middle East Christians are bewildered and confused with the Obama administration's policy toward the Middle East and toward the Middle East Christians. On one hand, it claims it is deeply concerned regarding these events and occasionally condemns the perpetrators. But on the other, it has not produced a policy or an action
similar to the action taken by the U.S. government in former Yugoslavia when Muslim minorities were subjected to persecution.

American interests in the Middle East are complex, where oil, the Israel-Palestinian conflict and powerful Islamic lobby are influential. But American Middle East communities have the numbers to influence the future.

As we pray for peace and harmony with all the other religious rites, we hope the U.S. will continue to be the champion of the freedom of religion, worship and human rights, as a signer of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Otherwise, the Arab Spring democratization movement will turn into an Arab Winter of destruction of the values important to the U.S. What is the Middle East without Christianity and the Holy Land without Christians?

Ramsay Dass is president of the American Middle East Christians Congress