

In Iraq, Christians say they are dwindling

Avak V. Asadourian, archbishop of the Armenian Church of Iraq, told Ecumenical News International that Christians are fleeing Iraq. Christians make up less than 3 percent of the country of 27.5 million.

Young people “are faced each day with death and destruction,” Asadourian said. “They are faced each day with being kidnapped or facing the agony of having a loved one who is kidnapped.”



Iraqi faith “is strong enough to face martyrdom,” Asadourian said. But, he added, unless something is done, “I am afraid that Christianity will face a slow demise not only in Iraq but in the entire region where Jesus Christ lived and worked.”

Asadourian asked for churches in the West to intercede with their governments about the plight of



Pope says Iraq’s constitution should protect Christians

January 7th, 2008

Vatican City - Pope Benedict XVI speaking Monday in the wake of overnight attacks targeting Iraqi Christians, urged Iraq to incorporate measures in its constitution to protect the country’s minorities. ‘In Iraq too, reconciliation is urgently needed,’ the pontiff said in an address to diplomats accredited to the Vatican City state. ‘At present, terrorist attacks, threats and violence continue, especially against the (Iraqi) Christian community, and the news which arrived yesterday confirms our concern,’ the pontiff said referring to the latest violence.

Some seven attacks involving mortar shells, explosive devices and car bombs hit churches and monasteries in Baghdad and Mosul overnight Monday as orthodox Christians in Iraq - who observe a traditional form of the Gregorian calendar - were celebrating New Year’s Eve. At least six people were wounded, including two guards, news reports said. ‘It is clear that certain difficult political issues remain unresolved. In this context, an appropriate constitutional reform will need to safeguard the rights of minorities’ in Iraq, Benedict told the diplomats.

Iraqis. He said the four years since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq were “the most difficult by far” of his 28-year ministry in Iraq.

Similarly, Canon Andrew White, an Anglican priest in Baghdad, told a CBS-TV crew for *60 Minutes* that “things [in Iraq] are the most difficult they have ever been for Christians, probably ever in history.”

White told reporter Scott Pelley that after being targeted by Islamic extremists, the majority of Iraqi Christians have fled or been killed. Many bodies have never been found, White said, calling the killings an example of “religion gone wrong.”

Baghdad neighborhoods that were once Christian strongholds are now virtually empty of Christians, according to the CBS report.

White said all of his parish leadership were “taken and killed. ... I regularly do funerals here, but it’s not easy to get the bodies.”

According to the Middle East Council of Churches, an ELCA partner, such experiences aren’t unusual. The MECC General Assembly said on Nov. 30, 2007, that its members report that Iraqi Christians “are forced to emigrate, their churches are assaulted and their clergy are killed.”...

http://www.thelutheran.org/article/article.cfm?article_id=6974&key=48636674

THE BLACK YEARS



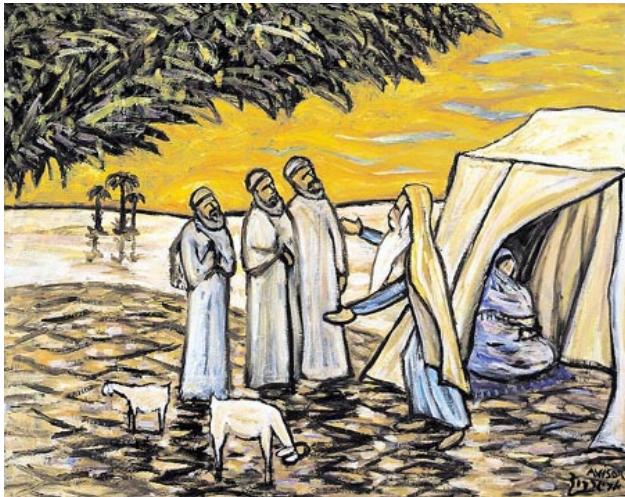
Tens of Iraqi Churches have been bombed and looted since the invention of the Coalition Forces in 2003:

1/08	Rum Orthodox Church + St. George Chaldean Church in al-Ghadeer Section + Saint Paul Chaldean Church and the Chaldean Sisters Nunnery in Zafaraniya (all in Baghdad)
6/07	St. Jacob Church, (Hay Asya) in Dora, was attacked the church and was looted. St. John the Baptist Chaldean Church in Dora was also looted.
5/07	Occupying the Angel Raphael Chaldean Convent of the Scared Heart, in Dora, Baghdad and turned it into a base for military operations.
5/07	St. George Assyrian Church in the Dora / Baghdad was firebombed.
4/07	A group forcefully removed the Cross from the churches of St. John and St. George in Dora.
11/06	Bombing the entrance of the Dominican Church and a Catholic church in Mosul.
10/06	Two bombs exploded near the Church of Virgin Mary / Baghdad.
10/06	Opening fire on the Chaldean Church of the Holy Spirit in Mosul.
9/06	A rocket attack was launched against the Chaldean Catholic Church of the Holy Spirit in Mosul.
9/06	St. Mary's Cathedral, the home of His Holiness Mar Addai II, Patriarch of The Ancient Church of the East, Baghdad was bombed.
9/06	Two bombs exploded in front of the main gate of a church in Zafaraniya in Baghdad.
6/06	The Chaldean Church of Ascension in Baghdad was attacked by a rocket bomb.
2/06	The Baghdad Adventist Church was bombed
1/06	Car bombs exploded outside the Vatican Embassy / Baghdad and near four churches. In Kirkuk, the Church of the Virgin, and the Orthodox church. In Baghdad, St Joseph's Chaldean Church and an Anglican church.
11/05	A car bomb exploded near the Church of St George in the Assyrian quarter of Almas district in Kirkuk.
7/05	A small explosion rocked the Assyrian Church in Habbaniya, Ramadi in Iraq
12/04	The al-Tahira Chaldean Catholic Church and Armenian church that was under construction were bombed in Mosul.
11/04	St Bahnam's Catholic church in Dora, Baghdad was bombed
10/04	Five churches were bombed in Baghdad in a coordinated attack. The church of Saint Joseph in Dora, St. Paul's church were struck in the same area, the Roman Catholic St. George church, Saint Thomas church in al - Mansour.
9/04	A car bomb exploded outside the Virgin Mary Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the centre of Baghdad. A bomb exploded at the Assyrian Anglican Church at al-Andalus Street in Baghdad.
8/04	Five Churches were bombed in Baghdad and Mosul: Church (Our Lady of Salvation) – Baghdad, Church (Our Lady of the Flowers) – Baghdad, Sts. Peter & Paul, Dora, St. Paul Church – Mosul, St. Elia, Baghdad, St. Mary's Church - Baghdad
6/04	The Holy Spirit Church - Mosul.

Eastern Church theology (Part I)

Fr Habib JAJOU

What are the features of Eastern Church Theology across history, what are its resources, and where are the civil, social, and economical points for this theology?



ABRAHAM AND THE THREE VISITORS (P. from the Internet)

Eastern Church theology, which is considered as a biblical theology, has Semitic background and concentrates on the revelation that begun with the ancestors Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.

It's easy to find huge Mesopotamian civilization's symbols in the Iraqi Christian prayers as using number 3, 7, 8, 40 in the liturgy. Also there are adjectives and words such as: shepherd, king and kingdom, priest. Animals: snake, bird, sheep and goat. Nature: the sun, the moon, heaven, rock, grassland, farm, spring water, mountain, valley, temple and star, as well, plants, like: wheat, and thorn. Human feelings: tears, crying, appealing, weeping, patience.

Eastern theology is affected by the hierarchal or patriarchal Semitic idea which has controlled the Eastern mythology. Moreover it has been influenced by Syrian-speaking Christians, of Jewish origin (the design of Jerusalem liturgy).¹

Eastern theologians used the defensive attitude, towards other religions (Judaism and Paganisms). They depended on Greek philosophy. Fathers such as St. Ephraim, Aphrahate, Narsay, used logic,

philosophy, and their daily life experience to answer the Jews and Pagans. They concentrated on the spiritual goals, the relation with God that should be followed by pastoral actions with the people.

Chanting liturgy to explain the faith doctrines, they used categories of symbols when planning for rites and writing prayers. They explained the text to be applied in people daily life. Liturgy is supposed to be a simple teaching to simple people, who are either farmers, shepherds, workers or monks.

Eastern teaching stresses on the economy of salvation, and concentrate on human beings, in particular. It confirms on following the path of Jesus Christ, seeks personal conversion from within, as well as, from outside.

Most of Eastern Church theologians were monks, so that, Eastern theology has been affected by mysticism.² As a result, theologians were far from politics, and the relation between the church and the states but near to liberal ideas, aiming to approach the New Man in Jesus Christ.

When concentrating on the human and spiritual side of the Divine economy, which sprung from the reality of the Easter life, they dealt with social and economical problems. Thinkers have not political ambitions; they concentrated on the life of the poor such as farmers, shepherds and their daily experiences. They cried to God because the continual persecution, so people, when pray, often remember the martyrs, widows and orphans.



Because they depended on the fruit of the earth, they were appealing for rain from God, and protection from locusts, mice, burglars and thieves. They were

¹ Spinks, B.D., Worship Prayers from The East, the pastoral Press, Washington, 1993, P.1.

² Habbi, J. 'Women in the canons of The Eastern Church', Bayn Al-Nahrayn Journal, 3 (1975), 46.

waiting for God's mercy associating their prayer with tears and weeping.

When and why theologians stopped adopting theology? Since 13th century as a result of the Mongolian invasion of Iraq in 1258, educational establishment, numerous churches and monasteries were destroyed. Theologians scattered all over Mesopotamia.³ Catholic missionary started with Franciscan and Dominican friars.⁴ Despite that, the regression began and continued until the 20th century, when few theologians continued referring to theology for liturgy and catechism especially after the second Vatican Council in 1965, but most of them have been depending on Western Theology.⁵ The Eastern Theology until Vatican II was either scholastic or a conservative that is closed emotionally.



(To be continued)

MEMORIES: July -1986, Basrah – al-Faw

By the Editor

'IF YOU LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOU, WHAT REWARD WILL YOU GET?'

There were five of us in total in this new place, between al-Mamlaha and Raseef al-Ma'amer. Two soldiers and I, were sent to this area, to be in charge of the watchtower, plus, two other soldiers we met there.

On our first day, we sat together to have lunch, except for one. I asked the boys, as he was not on duty, and they said, he was not hungry. I believed that.

At tea time, in the afternoon, he was not there as well. I said, had he eaten, and what was the real reason, for his absence...One of the soldiers, told me that, he said "I refuse to eat with this dirty Christian." This is because this soldier was Muslim.

I looked at this soldier, and thought to myself, Jesus taught me to love him. He sacrificed himself, for us, and we have to deliver his message, to the world.



This soldier had deep wounds, exactly, like Iraq today. And because God is love, Jesus wants us, to love all the time, as love does not die. This is our resurrection.

Mother Teresa said: 'The success of love is in the loving it is not in the result of loving. Of course it is natural in love to want the best for the other person, but whether it turns out that way or not does not determine the value of what we have done'. So we must carry on loving all people, until this soldier, and the likes of him, start believing in love... in Christ.

³ Rassam, S., Christianity in Iraq, Gracewing, London, 2005, p. 91.

⁴ Roberson, R.G., The Eastern Christian Churches, Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, Rome, 1990, p. 86.

⁵ Sako, L., Our Syriac Fathers, Altaef Company, Baghdad, 1998, p. 24.

The Syrian Catholic Church

Accessed from Dr Suha Rassam's book (Christianity in Iraq/Chap. 7)



The first bishop to be consecrated for this uniate church is Bishara al-Akhtal, who was given the name Qorlis Behnam and consecrated **'Bishop Of Mosul, Bakhdeda and Der Mar Behnam'** in 1790 . Presently, The Church is ruled by Patriarch Mar Ignatius Peter VIII, who resides in Beirut and carries the title **'The Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrian Catholics'**. He is assisted by one bishop who resides with him in Beirut and has fourteen other bishops under his jurisdiction.

There are two bishops who reside in Rome, the first is Cardinal Mar Ignatius Musa Dawd I, who is the head of the council of Eastern Catholic Churches and is responsible for coordinating relationships between the different Catholic churches and Rome.

The second is Michael Jamil who is responsible for the Syrian Catholics of Europe, Canada and Australia. In addition there are ten bishops responsible for the bishoprics of Beirut, Baghdad, Mosul, Damascus, Aleppo, Nisibis & Hasaka, Hims & Hama, Cairo, New Jersey, and Venezuela.

There are also three patriarchal deputies for each of Basrah, Jerusalem & Jordan and Istanbul. In addition, there are missions represented by a priest in each of London, Paris, Amsterdam, Germany, Sweden, Greece, Detroit, Jackson Ville/Florida, Los Angeles, San Diego, Toronto, Montreal and Sydney.

It is estimated that the total number of Syrian Catholic Christians in Iraq is about 75,000 with the majority being in Mosul and its surrounding villages (40,000), to be followed by Baghdad number of Syrian Catholics live in Syria, Lebanon and various western countries⁶.



Bishop Matti
Mattoka/Baghdad

⁶ Information about the Syrian Catholic Church come partly from the priest that serve the community in London and partly from the website of the Syrian Catholic Church.



Bishop Gargees al-Kas Mosa/BAKHDEDA north east of Mosul.

Churches and monasteries

The Syrian Catholic Church has three functioning churches in Baghdad, three in the city of Mosul, five in Qaraqosh, one in each of the villages of Bahshiqa, Bartella, , and Zakho, and one in each of the cities of Basrah, Kirkuk, Imara.

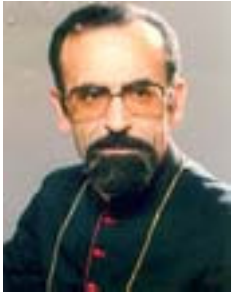
There is one monastic order that belong to the Syrian Catholic Church for men, the 'Monks of Jesus the redeemer' in Mosul, and one for nuns, 'The Ephramite nuns of mercy' in Lebanon. There are two ancient monasteries belonging to the Syrian Catholics in Mosul, Der Mar Behnam⁷ and Der Mar Qiryaaqos.

In addition, there are numerous monks and nuns who serve in various catholic orders, the largest number belong to the Dominican order in Syria, Lebanon.

Total number of nuns: 130 (Dominicans: 85, Franciscans:20, Little sisters of Jesus: 3, Ephramites: 16, Chaldeans: 4)

Total number of monks: 32 (Dominicans: 6, Franciscans: 8, Saliseans: 3, Ephramites: 7, Hormizd:2, Jesus the redeemer: 4)

⁷ The exact date of the building of this monastery is not known. The first definite evidence of the presence of an established monastery dates to the tenth or eleventh century which is evidently based on buildings before. Its origins go to the fourth century when the site of martyrdom of Mar Behnam and his sister Sarah became the place where cures started to be reported. Soon after that a small church was built called al-Jib. Hundreds of sick and mental patients arrived at the site looking for cure and one of those cured built a house which served as a residence or a hospital. This was the nucleus for the building of a monastery in later years.



Bishop Mikhael Jamel

Activities

1. The Priests of Jesus the King

A group of dedicated Syrian Catholic priests organised themselves in 1962 as **‘The Priests of Jesus the king’**. They stress the importance of community life amongst the priests and dedication to evangelisation and the spiritual life. Each serves as a pastor in the community assigned to him but they have a communal life together and meet to discuss their spiritual and pastoral problems amongst themselves. It is not exclusive for the Syrian Catholic community as it has members from the Chaldean priests. This group started to publish a progressive magazine in 1964 which they maintained for thirty one years after which they handed it to the Dominicans in 1995. The magazine served cultural

and religious educational purpose for the lay people as well as voicing progressive Christian thoughts and ideals. The Priests of Jesus the King also started a three years course in sacred scriptures in Mosul in 1989 which is still running.

2. A theology course in Baghdad
3. The family magazine in Qaraqosh
4. The Siraj magazine in Mosul.
5. A newly published magazine ‘Shira’ al-Siryan.
6. A charity organisation for helping the poor ‘al-Gim’yya al- Khayriya’
7. A comprehensive website from the bishopric of Mosul.



In addition to the above activities, most parishes has their own local councils, religious educational classes for various ages, a fraternity for the youth, a choral group and a local newsletter.

Bomb attacks target four churches in Iraq

MOSUL, Iraq, Jan. 6 (Xinhua) — Insurgent groups attacked on Sunday four churches for Iraqi Christian minority in the city of Mosul, the capital of Nineveh province, a provincial police source said.

A car bomb parked near the Maryam al-Adhra’ Church northeastern of Mosul detonated, wounding four people and damaging parts of the building, the source told Xinhua on condition of anonymity.

Another booby-trapped car parked near the Mar Yousif Church in the Muhandiseen neighborhood in northern the city detonated and damaged outer fence and parts of the church, the source said.

In western Mosul, an explosive charge went off in a monastery in the Mosul al-Jadida neighborhood, damaging part of the deserted building without human casualty, he said.

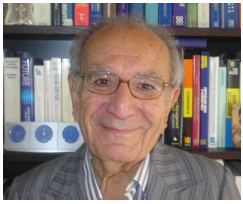
A fourth bomb attack took place in the Meskantah Church in the Khazraj neighborhood in central the city, causing damages in the building, added the source. The attacks against the Christian minority came as part of the religious and sectarian violence that ravaged the Iraqi cities, including Mosul, some 400 km north of Baghdad.



Early Christians in Mesopotamia

(The First Two Centuries)

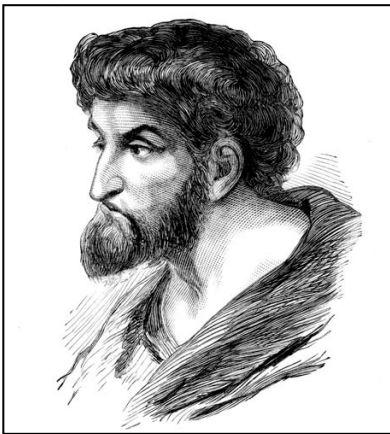
By Farid Oufi



While St Mark was evangelizing the Egyptians and establishing the Coptic Church in the 1st century AD, his fellow disciple, St Thomas, was in Mesopotamia, the land

of rival civilization, on his way to India, leaving behind St Addai and St Mari evangelizing its people and founding the Church of the East. This journey of faith into the East has special significance in the history of Christianity and provides us with background to the Church of our concern in this book.

St Thomas



Mesopotamia was under the Parthian dynasty when the evangelization work began. The Parthians were Persians from the area around the Caspian Sea. They displaced the Seleucids, an Hellenistic

dynasty which was established in Mesopotamia by Seleucus I Nicator who was a general of Alexander the Great and succeeded to conquer the land left by Alexander around 64 BC.

The Parthians formed an empire which would hold authority until around 224 AD when they were displaced by another Persian dynasty, the Sassanids. Under the power of the Parthians, the process of shrinking of the last era of the Babylonian civilization had actually begun. Babylon (or Babyl) became a provincial town with a dwindling



Pakoros II the Parthian (78-105 AD)

population and deserted and derelict city quarterⁱ. The process of shrinking continued while a new town Ctesiphon, on the Tigris river, not far from Babylon, was emerging as the capital of the Persian rule. When the Sassanid dynasty took over, Ctesiphon remained as their capital.

Semitic tribes, mostly nomadic, had begun to infiltrate Mesopotamia's fertile land; the effect was principally disruptive since the mobile and socially distinct newcomers fought for land and pasture at the expense of the settled population. Gradually, the newcomers learned to adapt and some sort of equilibrium evolved. The Chaldeans, who lived along the southern Euphrates around Ur, acknowledged a common ancestral background and swiftly accepted the newcomers. The acculturation of the newcomers in the north proceeded more swiftly as the Assyrians welcomed themⁱⁱ.



TRAJAN

The most remarkable feature of the environment was the tendency of people to live in cities. The idea of the city as a heterogeneous, complex, messy, constantly

changing but ultimately viable concept for human society was a Mesopotamian inventionⁱⁱⁱ. Not surprisingly then to find early evangelists more at ease in their work in rural than in urban areas. Urban living before the destruction of many towns in lower Mesopotamia was characterized by joyful activities, the abundance of food offerings, the "bellowing of the temples" – a reference to the sounds of drums and other instruments - the smell of roasting meat; with an ordered social life, a functioning of judiciary and elaborate rites performed by specialists^{iv}. This sort of social life was witnessed by St Mari who started his evangelistic work in that part of Mesopotamia probably some centuries later.

As the Christian evangelists were finding their way into Mesopotamia, the pagan Roman Emperor Trajan landed at Antioch in 114 AD and marched through Asia Minor, north of Mesopotamia, into Armenia. From this stronghold, he sent his legions in 115 to

Mesopotamia, seizing most of it. The following year he took Ctesiphon on the Tigris and Seleucia on the Euphrates, and then marched towards the Persian Gulf to the south. The Parthian king Chosroes had fled, so Trajan thought that by selecting a successor he had won the war. But hardly had he left the area than a revolt flared up almost everywhere. Only the Greek population, small in number, had welcomed the Roman invader; the Iranians were indifferent and the Jews and Arabs were violently opposed to Rome. Chosroes reappeared near Ctesiphon. Discouraged, Trajan turned for home as his expedition had ended in failure^v.

The early evangelists entered into Mesopotamia in the course of a stormy history. Situated at the

meeting point of every route, Mesopotamia was necessarily more open to the outside world, more dynamic than any other region of the ancient world. But it was less unified than Egypt, far more varied in composition. Any attempt to construct a single political unit had always ended in failure. In every age, there had been a revolutionary force behind the scene^{vi}. Mesopotamia played host to paganism and a whole range of sects and cults in a sea of religious uncertainty. No religion or faith could give the Mesopotamians spiritual commonality. The corrupt priesthood or those who held a religion of a sort increased the numbers adopting a variety of faiths until Christianity appeared to give the true way in worshiping.

(To be continued)

Concluding Prayer according to the Eastern Liturgy

ܘܚܝܘܒܝܬ ܝܗܘܘܐ

Translation from Aramaic Lang. Fr H. JAJOU

When the sun rises, we glorify You O Lord, saviour of all creatures, give us, you merciful God, a new day fill of peace, content, and forgive our sins.

We have hope and pray to you not to close your door and deprive us of Your providence, and treat us the way we deserve to be treated, because You are the only one who knows our real weakness.

O Lord, plant your seeds of love, peace, and harmony peace and agreement, protect priests, kings and rulers, set Your peace among great people, heal the sick and preserve the healthy, and forgive sins of all mankind.



O God, let your grace protect us as You protect Your son David from Saul, lead us with your kindness, to reach our goals in life, as You wish, peacefully.

Save us Lord from evil by the grace that protected the Prophet Moses in the sea, lift the prophet Daniel out of the lion's den, and encountered the three men⁸ in the furnace.

In the morning, we kneel to the Father, glorify the Son, and thank the Holy Spirit.

May the grace of the Father, kindness of the Son, and pity of the Holy Spirit protect us, we rely on the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

O our helper and real healer, pour Your merciful ointment and console our depression lest we perish.

O Jesus Christ, without Your help, we shall not be able to fulfil Your commandments, O the supporter of those who complement Your will; save Your worshippers.

We beg you our lord humbly, we invoke for your mercy, and we seek your forgiveness through Your compassionate door, that is open for all repentances.

I promise You every day to repent all the time, my days go by and my sins remain to be forgiven have pity and mercy on me O Christ. Amen.

⁸ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Latest Iraqi Martyrs

(part 5)



Khalid gorges sako, was killed in
Mosul 30/10/07



Hadel Roksi Mansour, was killed in
Baghdad- al-Gadeer 26/10/07



Nael Toma Hanna, was killed in Baghdad
01/01/08



Hani Solaiman Behnam, was killed in Baghdad
14/01/08



Jenevia Jalal Intranik, was killed in
Baghdad - 09/10/07



Amir & Basima Aziz Hashko, were killed in
Baghdad - 5/12/ 2007

Commentary of Saint Isaac the Syrian

John 3,16-21.For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because

he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the verdict, that the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come toward the light, so that his works might not be exposed. But whoever lives the truth comes to the light, so that his works may be clearly seen as done in God.

“The light came into the world”



Saint Isaac the Syrian (7th Century), monk at Nineveh, near Mossoul (Iraq) Chapters on Knowledge, IV, 77-78 **“The light came into the world”**

The man who easily blows up and catches fire because of truth does not have a real knowledge of truth yet. When he will have really gotten to know it, he will stop catching fire for it. The gift of God or the knowledge given by this gift can never be grounds to become flustered or to raise one's voice, for the place where the Spirit lives, with love and humility, is a place of peace...

If zeal would have been useful to save men, why would God have chosen to come in a human body and use meekness and humble ways to bring back the people to his Father? And why would have he laid on a cross for the sinners and hand over his holy body to suffer for the world? I believe that if God did this it was only for one reason: to make the world know his love for us. So that our capacity to love enlarged by such an acquaintance, may be seized by his love. In this way, the great power of the Kingdom of Heaven that consists in love, found

the way to express itself through the death of his Son...so that the world may feel the love of God for his creation. If this wonderful gesture had had no other reason than the forgiveness of sins, this could have been accomplished by other means. Who would have refused it if he had accomplished it through a simple death, nothing more? But he did not want a simple death, so that you may understand mystery behind it...

What was the need of the insults and the spits?...O life-giving wisdom! You now understood and experienced what has been the reason of the coming of the Lord and all that followed, even before he explained it clearly to us through his own words. It is written, in fact, “God so loved the world that he gave his only son”.

The Chaldean Church of Iraq: a brief introduction

by Dr. Joseph Seferta



Over the last few decades, Iraq has been at the forefront of world news, though usually for the wrong reasons, first in connection with Saddam Hussein, between 1979 and 2003, and then with the aftermath of the American invasion since 2003. But, whenever reports about Iraq appear in the secular media, there is usually no mention of Iraq's Christians. Their tragic situation is completely ignored, perhaps because they constitute such a small proportion of the population, which is similar to the situation of Christians in most Middle Eastern and other Muslim-majority countries.

Many people here in the West either do not know that there are Christians in Iraq or think that they must be recent converts from Islam. In fact, Christians have existed in Iraq or Mesopotamia (the "cradle of civilisation") since the beginnings of Christianity, and they constitute one of the oldest Christian communities in the Middle East, comprising mainly the descendants of the ancient Chaldeans, Assyrians and Arabs. At present, they are undergoing one of the most difficult periods of persecution in their long history, for they are being systematically harassed, kidnapped and killed on a daily basis, with many of their churches destroyed and their homes taken away from them by Muslim extremists who are bent on turning Iraq into an Islamic theocracy. Hence many tens of thousands of Christians have been fleeing, either heading to the relative safety of the Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq or leaving the country altogether to live as refugees. Meanwhile, the American and British troops and their governments are looking on and doing nothing to help these Christians who, at the time of Saddam Hussein made up 5% of the population, but now are barely 2%. Will Christianity, one must wonder, disappear from Iraq after a generation or two?

The reason I am singling out the Chaldean Church in particular is because it is the community to which at least 75% of the Christian population in Iraq belongs, and also because I am a Chaldean myself. But another reason is the fascination of many scholars with it, regarding its liturgy, for example, as being perhaps the oldest liturgy in the universal church. This liturgy uses the language of Jesus himself (called variously Aramaic, Syriac or Chaldean) more than any other liturgies in the Syriac-family of churches (including the Syrian and the Maronite). In fact, the majority of Chaldeans today still speak a colloquial form of Aramaic, called "Sureth", mainly

in the northern villages of Iraq and among the diaspora, particularly in the United States.

The other Christian communities that exist alongside the Chaldeans in Iraq are:

1. the Assyrians, who have common roots with the Chaldeans, both originating in the "Church of the East"
2. the Syrians, both Orthodox and Catholic (or Uniate)
3. the Armenians, both Orthodox and Catholic
4. the Melkites (i.e., Arabic-speaking Byzantines), both Catholic and Orthodox
5. smaller communities of Latins, Copts, Anglicans and various Protestant sects.

The fate of all these groups is intertwined with that of the Chaldean Church. The Chaldean Patriarch, who resides in Baghdad, is not only the head of his flock everywhere in the world (although under the authority of the pope, since he is a Catholic patriarch) but is also the official representative of all the Christians in



Iraq. Hence, whenever I speak about the Chaldeans (particularly concerning their present situation and future predicament), I shall be implying other Iraqi Christians as well.

In this booklet, I will first trace the history of the Chaldean Church in Iraq, beginning with its origins and how it developed up to the end of the 20th century. Then I shall explain the traditions of the Chaldean Church, including its patriarchal system, liturgical and monastic life, as well as its arts and literature. In the third and final section, I shall describe the tragic situation in which the Chaldean Church finds itself at present and offer some reflections regarding its future prospects. One thing is clear, however: if the church in Iraq is decimated, it will have serious repercussions throughout the rest of the Middle East. It will mean not only the end of one ancient and peace-loving Christian community, with all its rich linguistic, liturgical and cultural heritage, but will also be a warning signal to the other ancient and struggling Christian communities of Iran, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Egypt and even Lebanon.

(This Introduction will appear in the author's forthcoming booklet, entitled "The Chaldean Church of Iraq: A Matter of Survival")

Batnaya: a Christian Village from Iraq

By: Dr Nadhim Hermiz



Batnaya is located about 22 kilometres north of Nineveh (Mosul) and around 5 kilometres north of Tel Keppe. The name Batnaya is of Aramaic origin derived from either "Beth Tnyay" meaning "The House of Mud" or "Beth Tnaya" meaning "The House of Assiduity". It is 100% Christian large village from the Catholic Chaldean Church (more than 1000 families).

In the past *Batnaya* used to be famous for making matting from the reeds its people used to cultivate in the valley of *al-Khoser* river. During the summer time, groups of 3-5 men will travel in a long journey to the south of the country where the marshes to bring a higher quality reeds. Currently, some of its inhabitants are cultivating different kinds of crops while others are involved in non-agricultural trades. *Batnaya* used to be called "*Beth Madaye*" meaning the "House of the Medes" where it's believed that a group of the Medes who followed the Median monk *Oraham* (Abraham) settled there around the seventh century. It's also believed that Christianity reached *Batnaya* around that time.



Catholic Bishop
Shlaimon Wardony
from *Batnaya*

As all the other currently Chaldean villages, *Batnaya* used to follow the Rite of the Church of the East, till the sixteenth century when finally the efforts of the Catholic

church gained fruit. However, again as is the case with all the other villages of the plain of Nineveh, Catholicism did not gain ground till around mid 18th century. *Batnaya* was attacked by the army of Nader Shah in 1743, a Persian leader, who destroyed the village extensively and is believed to have killed half of its inhabitants.

In 1944 the *Mar Qeryaqos* Church was built on the ruins of a monastery by the same name believed to have been built early 15th century. A second but smaller church *Mart Maryam* (the was built in 1866, while the church of *Mar Gewargis* (St. George) was mentioned in an inscription dating 1745.



In *Batnaya* are several inscriptions, one dating to 1545 by *Darweesh bin Yohanan* from the village of *Aqreen* is entitled "Prayers for the Dead", another one is a complete bible inscribed in Syriac by the priest *Ataya bin Faraj bin Marqos* of *Alqosh* dating

Presently, people are afraid of going to *Mosul* because of terrors. The fanatic Muslims try to kidnap or kill every Christian since they refuse converting to Islam. Many of the people in the village were kidnapped and murdered between 2004 and 2007 in *Baghdad, Mosul*.

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ⁱ G. Leick's "Mesopotamia: the Invention of the City" - p 274

ⁱⁱ Ibid - p 256

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid - p 17

^{iv} Ibid - p 139

^v Fernand Braudel – p 333

^{vi} Ibid – p 82