



# **THE LIVING STONES OF THE HOLY LAND TRUST**

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## **LIVING STONES YEARBOOK 2021**



# LIVING STONES YEARBOOK 2021

*Eastern Christianity, Theological Reflection on  
Religion, Culture, and Politics in the Holy  
Land and Christian Encounter with  
Islam and the Muslim World*



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## EDITORIAL

The ninth issue of the Living Stones *Yearbook*, which we have entitled ‘Eastern Christianity, Theological Reflection on Religion, Culture, and Politics in the Holy Land and Christian Encounter with Islam and the Muslim World’, is firstly in honour of Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo, who was abducted with his fellow bishop Paul (Boulos) Yazigi, the Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of Aleppo, Syria, of the Church of Antioch in 2013.

Aziz Abdul-Nour offers an overview of the life, scholarly work of one of the great figures in the modern history of the Syriac Orthodox Church, Patriarch Barsoum, during a difficult and challenging post-First World War period which found the Christian East badly wounded by genocide, massacre, displacement and cultural destruction.

Sebastian Brock studies the Syriac Orthodox Church in the twentieth century with a detailed and finely considered overview of its history and presence in the region.

The late John Watson, who commented upon nearly all aspects of the modern Coptic Christianity, reviews the Church’s presence in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.

Grace al-Zoughbi discusses as a wider aspect of Palestinian Theology and contemporary ecclesial concerns an exploration of the role of Protestant women today. Stephen Sizer discusses the origins and consequences of Evangelical Christian Zionism in the Holy Land.

Bianka Speidl presents a very timely and very valuable contribution based on original field-work with Iraqi and Syrian Christian refugees in Lebanon.

Máté Szaplanczay, evaluates the question of ‘Applied Solidarity’ towards Christians in Syria from the perspective of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

Isabel Olizar discusses the vital issue of religious freedom in the Muslim world from the ecclesial and theological perspective of Pope John Paul II and Bishop Pierre Claverie OP.

Ian Latham in a thoughtful and detailed study seeks to give a ‘mystical contour’ to Louis Massignon’s encounter with Iraq.

Hugues Didier offers a challenging account of the relationship between Louis Massignon and Charles de Foucauld allowing the reader to reflect upon its meaning from the perspective of history.

*Editors*  
*October 2021*

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Aziz Abdul-Nour.** Born in Mosul, Iraq, he studied in Mosul and University of London and taught in Basra University, Iraq. A Syrian Orthodox, he is a secretary of the Oriental Orthodox Churches Council and a Co-Secretary of the Anglican Orient Orthodox Forum, CMS Middle East Advisory Board, and Chair, Middle East Forum-CTBI. He is a founder of the Mor Gregorios Cultural Legacy Foundation, a think-tank campaign to free Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, the abducted Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Aleppo since 2013, promoting through his vision and mission for pluralism, dialogue of life, awareness and perception of the challenges of modern conflicts on Christians' interreligious relations and presence. Recent publications: *A Festschrift: Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim: Pluralism, Dialogue and Co-Existence*, *The Garden of Eden and its Living Stones: Christians in Iraq*, *The Syrian Orthodox Church in Britain: A Historical Perspective*, *Mosul the Mother of All Co-Existence: A Bibliographical Index*.

**Sebastian Brock,** Oriental Institute, University of Oxford: a leading expert on Syriac Christianity, he has written a series of important publications on the subject including *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*, 1984; *Studies in Syriac Christianity: History, Literature, Theology*, 1992; *From Ephrem to Romanos: Interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity*, 1999; *The Luminous Eye: the Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem*, 1992; *The Wisdom of Saint Isaac the Syrian*, 1997; 'The Syriac Churches in Ecumenical Dialogue on Christology,' in *Eastern Christianity: Studies in Modern History, Religion and Politics*, London, 2004, pp. 44-65; 'The Syriac Churches and Dialogue with

the Catholic Church', *The Heythrop Journal*, Vol. 45, 2004, pp. 466-476; 'The Syrian orthodox Church in the twentieth Century', in *Christianity in the Middle East: Studies in Modern History, Theology, and Politics*, London, Melisende, 2008; 'The Syrian orthodox Church in the modern Middle East', in *Eastern Christianity in the Modern Middle East*, London, Routledge, 2010; 'The Syriac Churches of the Middle East and Dialogue with the Catholic Church', in *The Catholic Church in The Contemporary Middle East Studies for the Synod for the Middle East*, London, Centre for Eastern Christianity, Heythrop College, University of London/Melisende, 2010.

**Hugues Didier 1942**, Docteur ès lettres (Paris-Sorbonne, 1974), Professor Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3 from 1989 until his retirement. Between 1974-1989 he was professor at the l'Université d'Oran (Algeria). He is one of the leading international scholars on relations between Europe, Christianity and Asia, especially relations between Christianity and Islam and with Asian religions. He has authored numerous books—*Les Portugais au Tibet: Les Premières Relations Jesuites, 1624-1635* (1996), *Raymond Lulle* (2001), *Fantômes d'Islam et de Chine. Le voyage en Asie centrale de Bento de Góis (1603-1607)* (2003), *Petite vie de saint François Xavier* (2003), *Découvertes de l'Inde—de Vasco de Gama à Lord Mountbatten, 1497-1947* (2005). A collection of studies in his honour and to celebrate his scholarly achievements is *Contrabandista entre mundos fronterizos, Hommage au Professeur Hugues Didier* (2010). Didier's classic work *Petite vie de Charles de Foucauld* has been updated and republished numerous times since it was first published in 1993, the latest being in 2018.

†**br Ian Latham**, Little brothers of Jesus (LbJ), studied in France where he became acquainted with the circle of Louis Massignon, including Brother Louis Gardet, and lived for many years in Asia and the Middle East. He made a number of studies on Catholic encounters with Islam, including 'Christian Prayer' in *Catholics and Shi'a in Dialogue: Studies in Theology and Spirituality*, London, 2004; 'Charles de Foucauld (1898-1916): Silent witness for Jesus in the face of Islam', in *Catholics in Interreligious Dialogue: Studies in Monasticism, Theology and Spirituality* (London, 2006). Brother Ian was living in a community of followers of Charles de Foucauld, London, before he died in January 2007. His contributions

to the Living Stones *Yearbook*: 'Mary in the Qur'an and Islamic Tradition' (2017-18), 'Christian encounters with Islam in history and modern times: some Theological reflections' (2015), 'Islamic Belief and Practice' (2020).

**Isabel Olizar**, gained her BA in Theology at the University of Edinburgh, MA at Heythrop College, University of London and doctorate at the School of Advanced Studies, University of London 2019: 'Witnessing to the Dignity of the Person: Pope John Paul II's Political and Religious Thought on Religious Freedom in the Context of the Catholic Church's Global Dialogue with Muslims in Conversation with French Catholic Thinkers Charles de Foucauld, Louis Massignon and Pierre Claverie, OP'. Based upon her research she published 'From the Margins to the Center: Exploring Nostra Aetate in the lives of Charles de Foucauld, Louis Massignon and Pierre Claverie', *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations*, (ed.) Kail Ellis OSA, London, Palgrave/Macmillan, 2020.

**The Revd Dr Stephen Sizer** is the founder and director of Peacemaker Trust, catalysts for peacemaking, especially where minorities are persecuted, where justice is denied, human rights are suppressed or reconciliation is needed. He previously served as an Anglican priest for 34 years, most recently in the parish of Virginia Water, Surrey. His PhD examined the history, theology and politics of Christian Zionism and he has written two books on the subject, both published by Wipf & Stock, *Christian Zionism: Roadmap to Armageddon?* and *Zion's Christian Soldiers? The Bible, Israel and the Church*. He is a trustee of Sabeel-Kairos UK, Southampton & Winchester Visitors Group (supporting asylum seekers), as well as Living Stones of the Holy land Trust.

**Bianka Speidl** is a senior lecturer and researcher at the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary. She gained her PhD from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter. She is the recent author of *Islam as Power: Shi'i Revivalism in the Oeuvre of Muhammad Husayn Fadlallah*, London, Routledge, 2020. Bianka is a Greek Catholic from Hungary who has extensive relations and contacts with the Melkite patriarchate and Church in Syria and Lebanon.

**Fr Máté Szaplanczay** is a Catholic priest of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church and a researcher at the Saint Athanasius Greek Catholic Theological College. He holds a degree in Catholic theology from the same institute and a licenciante in Eastern Canon Law from the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome. He wrote his MA dissertation on the 'Eucharistic peculiarities in the Assyrian Church of the East'; and his licenciante on 'The discipline of the Eucharistic fast in the Catholic East and West'. He translated a number of official Vatican documents to Hungarian. He has a research interest in the history of the Eastern Churches; the Christianity in the Middle East; as well as in the reform of the processes regarding the nullity of marriage in the Catholic Church, cf. m.p. 'Mitis Iudex' for the Roman Catholic Church and m.p. 'Mitis et misericors' for the Eastern Churches.

†**Fr. John Harold Watson**, a priest of the Church of England was ordained a priest at Canterbury Cathedral by the archbishop of Canterbury in 1967. He served as a chaplain with the British Army of the Rhine, and then served as a school chaplain and university chaplain for over three decades. He was a leading commentator on Coptic Church affairs, publishing numerous articles and studies in *Coptic Church Review*, *Coptologia*, *Le Monde Copte*, however, his principal reflection on his encounter with Egyptian Christianity came with his *Among the Copts*, Sussex Academic Press, 2001. He was also captivated by the idea of mysticism in the dialogue between religious traditions: *Listening to Islam with Thomas Merton, Sayyid Quth, Kenneth Cragg and Ziauddin Sardar: Praise, Reason and Reflection*, Sussex Academic Press, 2005.

**Grace Al-Zoughbi Arteen.** Grace is an Arab Palestinian Christian, born and raised in Bethlehem. Grace holds a BA in Biblical Studies from Bethlehem Bible College and an MA in Theology from the London School of Theology. Her thesis sought to explore the ways in which women can seek to defend and promote personal dignity, particularly within strongly patriarchal contexts. She served as a lecturer at Bethlehem Bible College 2011-2018 where she also led the BA Programme. Grace is currently studying for her PhD degree, also through the London School of Theology, with special focus on the



theological education of Arab women in the Middle East. In her day-to-day life, she participates in leading a variety of programmes through her church in Bethlehem and has been involved in various theological translation projects.



**EPISCOPAL DIPLOMACY: ORIENTAL CHRISTIANS  
OR THE SYRIAC ORIENT AT THE PARIS PEACE  
CONFERENCE 1919-1920.  
APHRAM I BARSOUM, A MAN OF VISION ON AN  
IMPOSSIBLE MISSION**

*Aziz Abdul-Nour*

‘Patriarch Aphram I Barsoum not only had the vision and power to think, but also the humility, passion, altruism, dedication and stamina to serve and act intelligently free of self-glorification’

*Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim<sup>1</sup>*

The misery of the Great War has impacted on the lives of virtually all the Middle Eastern communities. This article offers a fresh perspective on the critical significance of the leadership of the Oriental Churches in war and peacetime. It reflects on the effect of the Great War on the autochthonous Christian ‘subject peoples’ of the Ottoman Empire and the diverse diplomatic response and performance of Church leaders at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, their different understandings and the political stance of its treaties and the charter of the League of Nations and the mandate system. Their advocacy mission was to Paris and other Western capitals on behalf of their vulnerable communities, as they found themselves, together with their destitute and ethno-religiously cleansed and critically endangered community, unprepared and embroiled in understanding the political implications, pliability and complexity of the Wilsonian concept of national self-determination.

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1 This article in the Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust 2021 *Yearbook* is dedicated to the 71st birthday of Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, together with the 8th anniversary of the kidnapping of the Archbishops of Aleppo Mor Gregorios Ibrahim and Paul Yaziji. They were kidnapped on 22 April 2013 in the hinterland of Aleppo. They were abducted together and are still held against their will depriving their Churches and community of the desperately needed quality leadership and diplomacy at this time of reckoning for the Syrian crisis and the perilous juncture of the Oriental Christians in the Middle East. (Oez and Abdul-Nour, 2016; Kourieh, 2016)

The ensuing treaties had far-reaching implications on the peaceful integration and co-existence in the emerging new world order of the League of Nations mandate and evolution of independent nation states. This research especially focuses on the role, policy and endeavours of Aphram Barsoum, the Bishop of the Levant and the official plenipotentiary of Elias III, the Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, to the Paris Peace Conference. Specifically, it compares the policies and reactions of different patriarchs of the Churches of the Syriac tradition to the unfolding events pre- and post-Great War. This is a topic which still requires significant research work. Mindful of the *Zeitgeist* of that time, this article tries to navigate the difficulty of discussing ecumenism and religious freedom, as we understand it today.

## INTRODUCTION

Over a century on from the First World War, this paper endeavours to highlight the effects of the 1914-1918 Great War, namely the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, and its geopolitical aftermath on the autochthonous Eastern Christians who lived for almost four centuries in the Ottoman Empire. Specifically, it seeks to unveil the wide vistas of history of such an important era that culminated in lasting effects on the nations of four collapsing empires. This includes the German, Hapsburg Empire of Austria and Tzarist Russian Empire, with a particular focus on the Ottoman Empire and its indigenous Christians of Mesopotamia and the Levant.

This historical context underpins the central analysis, which seeks to examine the response of Church leadership to the unfolding geopolitical events at the time, and its effects on the future stability and welfare of the communities in the new reality of the Near East. I shall explore the various reactions of the Syriac Church leaders regarding the unfolding Great War and the spectrum displayed of patriarchal pragmatism towards the implementation of the mandate system in the region. The imposition of this mandate system undermined the demands of some religious and ethnic communities for the potential of self-determination and the degree of integration with the emerging geopolitical order of nation-states in the region where the majority of

their communities were, and still are, living. Rational policies were developed by different patriarchs in the genre of *entente cordiale* developed and maintained between Church-state relations in Syria and Iraq.

In particular, this paper seeks to understand, and draw lessons from, the leadership qualities, diplomatic dexterity, and cultural achievements of Mor Severus Aphram Barsoum (1918-1933) who became the pillar of the Church's revival and renaissance throughout the twentieth century and a guiding beacon for Church leadership today. (Dinno, 2017) In search of the narrative history regarding this topic are numerous unpublished primary sources, manuscripts, narrative accounts and private archives which have not been previously available to historians.<sup>2</sup> Research has included rare but pertinent documents which provide a new historiographical engagement that contextualises the perilous and complex multi-faceted mission of Barsoum: the ecclesiastical, the inter-Church, the inter-faith and the diplomatic performance exhibited by Severus Aphram Barsoum, the Syrian Orthodox Bishop of the Levant.

Considering the difficulties in consulting archives on such a complex topic at this time, no work could be definitive, nor could judgement be final until a wider study has been undertaken. This paper merely remains the 'tip of an iceberg' in its focus on these fateful years in the long history of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.

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2 Unfortunately, due to the current political situations in the Middle East, it has not been possible to document sufficiently a number of points, which ought to be matters of record. This is due to the difficulties accessing important documents in the private archive of Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim in Aleppo; it has been officially sealed since his abduction on 22 April 2013. This archive contains especially important and vital documents for this paper, among them the private papers and archive of Iskandar Mahama, Barsoum's private secretary and *témoin de l'époque*. Also, the current situation is an impediment to accessing archives in Mosul, Aleppo, Homs, Damascus and Deir al-Za'faran, some of which may have been lost forever during recent turmoil in the region.

The most important among the memories, diaries, reminiscences and private paper collections consulted in this study are the unpublished memories, diaries and other intellectual properties never previously consulted belonging to Mr Salim Daood Barsoum (d. 1970), a senior official at the treasury of the Province of Mosul and paternal first cousin and contemporary of Aphram Barsoum. They are very valuable primary sources for Aphram Barsoum's biography and the history of the Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese and community in Mosul. Restricted access to these primary sources was by generous courtesy of Mahir Mossa Barsoum and Makram Mossa Barsoum, the custodians of this private and valuable familial archive.

**2020, THE YEAR IN WHICH THERE WERE  
SEVERAL NOTABLE CENTENARIES.**

I consider that these ‘centenaries’ are useful starting points to carry out a systematic analysis of international relations and the imposed order at play in a given region. The world has commemorated the centenaries of many early twentieth-century historical milestones<sup>3</sup> and reflected on their lasting geopolitical influence and impact in the region. This includes the centennial of the 1918 Armistice of the Great War, ‘The War that End all Wars!’ (Wells, 1914), and thereafter the 1919-1920 Paris Peace Conference, the peace process that ‘ended all Peace’. (Fromkin, 2009) These ‘centenaries’ allow for a new perspective on the post-Great War peace process. In the context of this paper, centenaries help to investigate the quality and liminality of Church leadership policy to safeguard their vulnerable communities in a time of transition and strain over the intervening years of the past century and the start of the present one. To understand the current challenges of the present leadership of these various Christian communities, we must understand the historical events that have helped shape the time in which we live.

In 1918, the American President Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921) pledged to Congress to fight together with America’s allies for a ‘Peace without Victory’, under what is known as *Wilson’s Commandments*, or the *Fourteen Points*. (Wilson, 1918) These points established the benchmark for the ‘new world order’, which was to work towards ‘the world be made safe for democracy’ (Wilson, 1917), creating a land ‘fit for heroes’. (Lloyd George, 1918) These principles were similar to the seven *Pontifical Notes for Peace*, points promulgated by Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) in 1917, in which the pontiff defined war as ‘useless massacre’, which was rejected outright by the belligerent powers. It is believed that Wilson’s *Commandments* formed the pillar of that peace. (Woodward, 1971; Knock, 1995; Perlmutter, 2000) These papal injunctions alienated some of the delegations of the states, nations and political groups officially represented at the inauguration of the Paris Peace Conference 1919-1920,<sup>4</sup> whose bitterness at loss

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3 For example, the 1917 capture of Baghdad, the 1919 birth of the League of Nations and the 1923 Lausanne Conference.

4 The Paris Peace Conference also known as the ‘Versailles Peace Conference’ lasted



Fig. 1. Commemorative Medals. Mor Ignatius Aphram Barsoum's Centenary of Episcopal Consecration 1918-2018 (left)—Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, 40th Anniversary of Episcopal Consecration (right). (Photo courtesy of Abdul-Nour Collection)

and destruction was still too raw to challenge the Great Powers and thereafter the newly formed international body which became known as the League of Nations (LoN).<sup>5</sup>

The doctrine of self-determination<sup>6</sup> of people was as important as it was controversial and contentious among Wilson's *Commandments*.<sup>7</sup>

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from 1918-1919. The conference dealt with the legacies of the four collapsing empires and has as much to do with post-war politics, partitions and redefining international relations as perceptions of pre-war animosity and guilt. (Neiberg, 2017)

- 5 The idea of League of Nations was embodied by Wilson's point no. XIV: 'A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small States alike.' Wilson's idea came to fruition as the Covenant of LoN was enshrined in the text of the Treaty of Versailles 1919. This first international body became a political reality in 1920 with 63 states members. LoN was dissolved in 1946, to be replaced by the United Nations.
- 6 The concepts of 'autonomous development' or the 'right to self-determination' embodied in Wilson's point no. XII. 'The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule, [which post Great War became known as 'subject people'] should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development'
- 7 'He [Wilson] believed you could do everything by formulas and his fourteen points. God himself was content with Ten Commandments. Wilson modestly inflicted fourteen points on us ... the fourteen commandments of the emptiest theory!' (Macmillan, 2002, 75)



*Fig. 2. Patriarch Aphram Barsoum and specimens of his Syriac signature and the official title appeared on all his communications during the Paris Peace Conference 1919. (Photo courtesy of Abdul-Nour Collection)*

For a great part of the population of the emergent nation-states, this promise nourished strong hopes, albeit illusionary, of securing, autonomous development and political independence. The points were in essence an appeal for a ‘new diplomacy’, to remedy the failings of the political power approach of traditional European diplomacy. It was assumed that self-determination was the crux of Wilson’s new world order, taking special care and due account of the interests of ‘suffering peoples’. Rather than the national right of self-determination, Wilson promoted the civil right of self-determination and considered every state a nation-state. In a sense, the ideal nation-state should be both organic and civic; by which he meant participation by all constituents of a polity in determining its public affairs. The potential of utopian euphoria still reverberates in dreams, in the context of instability, and the ongoing flux of violence in the region.





Fig. 3. *Lamassu, human-headed winged bull, excavated from Nineveh, Iraq, on a raft down the Tigris on its way to London. Watercolour on pencil by Frederick Charles Cooper (c. 1850). (Photo courtesy of V&A Museum, London, The Searight Archive. Museum no. SD.257)*

#### **BARSOUM'S ERA: THE *TEMPÊTE DU SIÈCLE* IN THE ORIENT.**

The lasting 'heavenly' or external image of Mesopotamia which has been created in the Western mind is of a civilized, romantic and mysterious oasis of tranquillity. It is perceived as the 'cradle of civilization', the temptation of lushness and lavishness of the Garden of Eden with the abundance of milk and honey and watered by the great biblical rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates. Such idyllic images of the Orient were popularized through centuries of acquaintance with the Bible, and the intriguing travelogues of Orientalists with colourful paintings of artists' impressions. The diplomatic dispatches of those who were fortunate enough to enjoy postings in the 'Cinderella Services'<sup>8</sup> representing, safeguarding and upholding the interests of their countries in the riches of those Mesopotamian corridors and on the Levantine shores added to this romanticism.

<sup>8</sup> The British Consular Service and its *modus operandi* became known as 'The Cinderella Service' (Platt, 1971).

Fuelling this idealism is cuneiform script, which shows us how ancient thinkers observed and made sense of the world around them. (Robson, 2019) These images were fortified by amazing specimens from archaeological discoveries in the royal cities of Nineveh and Nimrud<sup>9</sup> which started to reach Western shores in the second half of the 1800s. They adorned museums in Western capitals such as the British Museum in London, the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, the Musée du Louvre in Paris, the Pergamon Museum in Berlin and others.

These iconic symbols had been out of view since the fall and destruction of Nineveh in 612 BC and were lamented by Nahum: 'Nineveh lay in ruins, who will pity you?' (Nahum 3:7) After their rediscovery they were loaded onto rafts and floated down the Tigris (Fig. 3). They were destined to be bequeathed to Britain and France. On arrival, they generated a wave of excitement among both scholars and the educated public that seldom equalled in the annals of archaeology. They highlighted the exciting abiding link between Nineveh and the Bible. (Russell, 1991; Larsen, 2009)

Thanks to the collective zeal of British diplomats and orientalists, both Syriac and Arabic manuscripts were the first peace ambassadors of Mesopotamia and its busy scriptoria. The imposing portrait of Claudius James Rich (c. 1786-1821) greets and welcomes you as you enter the Oriental Reading Room at the British Library, where you can inspect the rare collection of Syriac and Arabic manuscripts and other Mesopotamian artefacts collected by Rich during his extensive tour of duty as the first British East India Company Resident at Baghdad, Mesopotamia, fulfilling and enjoying to the limit his 'Cinderella' Foreign Service postings for the Company in ancient cities of the Orient such as Mosul-Nineveh, Baghdad and Babylon. (Rich, 1836, 1939)

However, Barsoum was aware from his previous visit of the presence and prominence of the *Lamassu* in the Louvre and the British Museum. Whilst in Paris he could feel that *Lamassu* was still generating the same excitement and immediate impact on

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9 The British archaeologist Austen Henry Layard, (1817-1894) is best known as 'the excavator of Nineveh and Nimrud'. Among what he discovered and transported to London was the *Lamassu*, a human-headed winged lion/bull made of gypsum alabaster known as Mosul's marble. The horned cap attests to its divinity, and the belt signifies its power. The sculptor gave it five legs so that they appear to be standing firmly when viewed from the front but striding forward when seen from the side. (Layard, 1849)



*Fig. 4. King Al-Hussain Bin Ali with specimen of his seal used during the Arab Revolt 1916 (left) and King Faisal I with specimen of his signature used during the Paris Peace Conference (right). (Photo courtesy of Abdul-Nour Collection)*

the delegations to the Paris Peace Conference during their ‘must’ promenades to the Louvre. Aware of the attentiveness to the more deliberative uses of history in diplomatic deliberations, Barsoum was successful in his endeavour to make use of the curiosity and interest in these Assyrian colossi by delegates of the Paris Peace Conference as a point of reference and conversation. He would undertake to discuss with those delegates highlighting the similarity of the toll of human suffering due to the culture of power politics in ancient civilization and now. The *Lamassu* as a visible metaphor and allegory presented a subtle positioning for Barsoum’s discourse and memoranda to illustrate past heritage as an important part in constructing new perceptions of the future. These were the main reasons for Barsoum being officially delegated by Patriarch Elias III in a peace mission to Paris and other major capitals. He communicated the plight of his people to the wider world while the future of Mesopotamia and the Levant was discussed and debated in the corridors of powers at the Paris Peace Conference 1919, in Paris and London.

**THE GREAT WAR: USHERING IN AN END OF AN ERA.**

This cultural romantic idyllic image of the Fertile Crescent would soon be tarnished once British troops set foot in Mesopotamia in 1914. (Townshend, 2011) In preparation for the Great War, Lord Balfour<sup>10</sup> ordered the advance of his troops in a northward campaign into the depths of Mesopotamia. Initially, rapid progress inland against weak Turkish resistance was made under the leadership of General Charles Townshend. In less than a month, they had occupied the towns of Basra, Kurna, and captured Turkish prisoners with negligible losses. Despite the unforgiving climate, British forces continued to march steadily up the River Tigris in 1915 and captured the town of Kut al-Amara. General John Nixon, Commander of the British Expeditionary Force in Iraq, Townshend, and his lieutenants envisaged an easy final march, dreaming of being in Baghdad for Christmas Day. The campaign met with unexpected patriotic Ottoman Turkish nationalist resistance nurtured between the Tigris and Euphrates, which was described as a ‘saga of fortitude and resilience’. (Erickson, 2001) The tide turned quickly at the Battle of Ctesiphon (22-26 November 1915). Under relentless Ottoman pressure, Townshend’s attacking forces were defeated and forced to retreat. Turkish troops—under the command of Colonel Yusef Nuredin—laid the famous and prolonged siege of Kut al-Amara which lasted 147 days and withstood heavy casualties. Eventually on 29 April 1916 it brought about the surrender of Townshend, commander of the Sixth Indian Division, the largest of the British forces. It was an event so unimaginable that a parliamentary commission was appointed to discover exactly why it happened. (McNeal, 1916; Gardner, 2014)

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10 Arthur James Balfour (1848-1930), Victorian and Edwardian aristocrat and a Conservative (Tory) politician, British Prime Minister 1902-1906, War Secretary in 1915, British chief delegate to the Paris Peace Conference. His biographer Adams stresses that Balfour’s knowledge of defence was essentially the knowledge of an armchair strategist with little grasp of the detail and no sense of the terrain. Adams indicated that Balfour knew ‘nothing whatever about the army’. ‘Nor did he ever learn much about the Middle East.’ As War Secretary of Asquith’s cabinet in 1915, Balfour pressed for the military advance from Basra to Baghdad that resulted in the surrender of the British army in Mesopotamia to the Turks at Kut al-Amara the bloodiest battle of the Mesopotamian campaign. For details, see Adams (2007) and Townshend (2011).



*Fig. 5. Prince Faisal with members of the Hijaz delegation: Prince Faisal (front), Left to right: Rustum Haidar, Nuri as-Said, Captain Pisani (rear), T E Lawrence, Captain Tahsin Qadri, and Faisal's aide (at rear, name unknown), at Versailles during the Paris Peace Conference 22 January 1919. (Wikimedia Commons, distributed under CC-BY 2.0 license)*

Soon the ‘idyllic romantic Garden of Eden’ became the most challenging battlefield of the Great War in the Near East, unfortunately named the ‘mess pot’. This neologism was coined and first used initially in internal memos and communications among officials at the British Colonial, War, Indian and Foreign Offices who were dealing with the unfolding events in Mesopotamia. As they say ‘mud sticks’, the image of a *mess pot* proved to be geopolitically permanent!

The Great War accelerated the Armistice of Mudros, which was concluded, ratified and declared on 30 October 1918. This was followed by signing of the Armistice of Compiègne<sup>11</sup> on 11 November 1918 which ushered in the end of hostilities, its indiscriminate distractions, the eventual demise of the Sick Man of Europe, the

<sup>11</sup> Only 22 years later, after the Allies’ defeat in effect officially ended the 70-year-old French Third Republic (1870 to 1940), France had to accept the terms imposed by the Germans in the Second Armistice at Compiègne. This was signed on 22 June 1940, in the same railway carriage in which the Germans had signed the armistice after their defeat in the First World War on 11 November 1918.

end of an era and the ramifications of a new geopolitical reality. (Çirakman, 2005)

With the end of the First World War, the whole Fertile Crescent that represents the geopolitical scope of this paper came under the control of the British army of occupation. Yet, while in Iraq direct British rule was installed, headed by a General Officer Commanding and a Civil Commissioner, in Syria the British army confined itself to its barracks and an independent Arab government was established, headed by Amir Faisal.

### THE PERILOUS PEACE PROCESS

The Paris peace conference of 1919 was the first attempt in world history to redraw the map of half the globe's continents, change the nationalities of millions of people, devise a formula to permanently abolish war and recast international economic relations—all at the stroke of a pen. (Kunz, 1998)

The 1919 Paris Peace Conference was the first time in human history that such a large gathering of diplomats had met in one location to chart a new course for humanity. US President Woodrow Wilson argued for open covenants as the secret diplomacy of the major European powers, which resulted in the 1914-18 conflagration, had to end.

Conceivably, dealing with an equitable inheritance became an extremely complex business. It was contentious and dissentious, divisive, most likely unfair and consequently unsettling. Dealing with the legacy of the Ottoman Empire,<sup>12</sup> one of the defeated Central Powers of the Great War<sup>13</sup> and its territorial partitions, especially the Ottoman Arab provinces, where a substantial proportion of Eastern Christians resided for centuries under the Ottoman *millet* system, proved to be a perilous process exercise (Abdul-Nour, 2016): the lasting questionable

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12 The Ottoman Empire ruled its Arabic provinces in the region in question without interruption for almost four centuries.

13 It was hoped that 'The Great War' would be 'The War to End All Wars' which lasted from 28 July 1914 to 11 November 1918. Twenty-three out of the then forty-eight recognized governments in 1914, were at war with Germany and her allies and seventeen had remained neutral.

and challenging outcomes of the combination of 'Diplomacy by Conference' at the Paris Peace conference 1919, the Versailles Treaty of 1919, 'Diplomacy by Retreats' at the Conference of San Remo 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres 1920, and Treaty of Lausanne 1923 and also the Anglo-Turkish agreement of 1926. (Beck, 1981; Wright, 1926) The way the newly established League of Nations maintained peace by the mandate system persisted as a cause of disagreement. After a series of signing and abrogating treaties, the Treaty of Lausanne 1923 was eventually accepted by the Turkish government as the peaceful settlement of the indigenous heritages.

Gentlemen, I don't think it is necessary any further to compare the principles underlying the Lausanne Peace Treaty with other proposals for peace. This treaty, is a document declaring that all efforts, prepared over centuries, and thought to have been accomplished through the Sèvres Treaty to crush the Turkish nation have been in vain. It is a diplomatic victory unheard of in the Ottoman history!' (Atatürk, 1927)<sup>14</sup>

The Treaty of Lausanne in reality left the evolving issues of the social dynamic and co-existence of such ethno-religiously diverse demographic spectrum as a point of challenge for the decades ahead. Its repercussions still haunt the stability of the modern nation-states which emerged within the Ottoman Arab provinces, in Mesopotamia and the Levant. Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, which were initially governed under the 'A' Mandate System of the League of Nations—a proviso of the Versailles Treaty 1919 and the Conference of San Remo 1920,<sup>15</sup> administered mainly by Britain and France (the

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14 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's *nutuk*, a famous thirty-six hour or six-day great speech delivered to the national assembly from 15 to 20 October 1927 at the second congress of *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*. 'The Great Speech' defining the official historical view of the foundation of the Turkish Republic. It covered the events between the start of the Turkish War of Independence on 19 May 1919, and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey after the conclusion the Treaty of Lausanne in June 1923. (Atatürk, 1963)

15 The San Remo Conference was held at Villa Devachan in San Remo, Italy, from 19-26 April 1920. It was a follow up of the international meeting of the Allied Supreme Council (ASC) of the Principal Allied Powers victors of the Great War, attended by the prime ministers of Britain, France, Italy and Japan's ambassador to

cosignatories of the secret Sykes-Picot Accord 1916),<sup>16</sup> officially known as the Asia Minor Agreement May 1916, under the auspices of the newly formed international body, the League of Nations.

Naturally, the victorious allies took on the administration of the Ottoman Empire's legacy. Predictably, the spectrum of potential legitimate heirs would be vast. Hopefuls among them were euphoric for the potential possibilities of the international law principle of *uti possidetis*, ('as you possess'). Expectedly, in the run up to and during the war, warring powers' attempts to reinforce expectations of smaller allies with tokens of promises subtly hinted at were made to different indigenous people across the region. On the drawing board, there were paradigms of cutting lines, mostly geodesic,<sup>17</sup> for a functional and logistical human geography of the new Near East. Such hypothetical lines could not be drawn without stepping on distinct spaces of ethno-religious identities, let alone be fully integrated, if the interests and aspirations for a nationhood state of every legitimate nation were to be completely addressed and satisfied. (Barr, 2012; Tabler, 2016) Evidently the making of the modern Middle East was neither a straightforward undertaking nor would have a happy ending. Consequently, the Alliance called a meeting under the maxim 'The Reconciliation or

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France. They convened a conference of their foreign ministers in order to settle the question of the partition of the Ottoman Empire. At San Remo they determined the allocation of Class 'A' League of Nations mandates for the administration of the territories of the former Ottoman regions.

16 The original provisions of the secret pre-emptive contingency agreement between Britain, France and Russia. The negotiation of the treaty, between Mark Sykes and Francois-Georges Picot with the assent of Russia, occurred between November 1915 and March 1916 (Figs 10, 11, 12). The agreement was concluded on 16 May 1916 (Fitzgerald, 1994; Sykes, 2009 and Sykes, 2016). The Bolsheviks blew the cover off this secret agreement and exposed its content in an article in *Pravda and Izvestia* on 23 November 1917 and in the British *Guardian* on 26 November 1917.

17 Those geodesics were easily drawn along the Southern Turkish stretch of the Berlin-Baghdad Orient Express Railway to form the international borders between Turkey and Syria, roughly along the 37th parallel between the 37th and 42nd eastern meridians. They recently proved to be useful in building what became known as 'Great Wall of Turkey'. The modern wall, an 828-kilometre security wall and road for armoured military vehicles to patrol around-the-clock, was begun in 2014 using seven-tones of concrete slabs as barriers, punctuated with 120 towers in critical locations, with ponds and riverbeds located near the border. This modern boundary marker straddles and seals off the 911 kilometres-long Syrian-Turkish border. (*Daily Sabah*, 2017)





*Fig.6. Map of Tur Abdin-Turkey (contemporary Turkish names are shown in *Italic*).  
(Photo courtesy of Dr Khalid Dinno 2016)*

Peace Conference', to be held at Versailles and at 37 Quai d'Orsay, the French Foreign Ministry, close to the National Assembly, Paris, in 1919. Among the plethora of official invitees to attend the Paris Peace Conference were the heirs of the Ottoman Empire so that grievances could be aired, shared, and contained. Consequently, leaders of different indigenous nations were invited to attend or to send their official delegates to represent them and their interests at the Peace Conference. (Fig. 5)

Once the Treaty of Versailles was signed and the League of Nations was established, Winston Churchill was appointed as a post-war secretary of state for the colonies. He was empowered with the League of Nation's mandate and decided in early 1921 to create the 'Middle Eastern Department' to centralize decision-making in London. It was the first ever governmental department to use the new term 'Middle East' to cover the administrative remits of the newly acquired territories of Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Iraq, where Christianity was born and where the mass of Eastern Christians lives even today. The geographical remits of that department may have delineated the first official boundaries of the Middle East. Churchill swiftly called for a conference in Cairo on 12 March 1921 organised

by this department. Iraq was at the top of the agenda.<sup>18</sup> It emerged as the first ever nation-state to come out of the Cairo conference, the first ever geopolitical jigsaw of the concept and identity of the new term 'Middle East' as a post-war modern geopolitical reality. This conceptualization gradually gained currency and replaced the term Near East. Throughout the last hundred years, changes in geopolitical forces, social currents, cultural boundaries, and environmental concerns have brought attention to the region again and challenged its coherence.<sup>19</sup> (Fig: 7).

Eventually, these ex-Ottoman Arab provinces became part of the emerging nation-states in the Middle East under the tutelage of Britain

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18 Report on Middle East Conference held in Cairo and Jerusalem, concerning the British Government's involvement with Mesopotamia, Palestine, Aden and Somaliland and its Middle Eastern policy. Winston Churchill, Gertrude Bell and T E Lawrence were among those present. The National Archives CO 935/1/1-1921.

19 The 'Middle East' as a geopolitical term did not even feature in the text of the Sazonov-Sykes-Picot agreement 1916. This term did not gain circulation at the Paris Peace Conference 1919 or even featured in the text of all its ensuing treaties or the Covenant of the League of Nations and its Mandate System. Until the first quarter of the twentieth century, there was no mention of the term Middle East, in political literature, diplomatic dispatches or in the media due to the fact that neither the term nor the states in the region existed. As a neology, the term 'Middle East' may have originated in the 1850s in the British India Office. It may have punctuated private conversations or even speeches of Sir Mark Sykes as member of the de Bunsen Committee in 1915. (Johnson, 2018). Apparently, there is no trace of the term 'Middle East' in texts of parliamentary *Hansards*, attributed to Sir Mark Sykes, the British Member of Parliament for Central Hull in 1916 before his premature death in 1919, or to any other MPs. However, Middle East became more widely known when American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) used the term in the September 1902 issue of London's monthly *National Review* in an article entitled 'The Persian Gulf and International Relations'; he wrote: 'The Middle East, if I may adopt the term which I have not seen ...', which 'designates the area between Arabia and India.' (Mahan, 1902 and Koppes, 1976) The first official use of the term 'Middle East' by the United States government was in the Eisenhower Doctrine which was a policy enunciated by Dwight D Eisenhower on 5 January 1957, within a 'Special Message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East', pertaining to the Suez Crisis and establishing the Middle East as a Cold War battlefield. (Eisenhower, 1957; Fowler, 2018) Traditionally included within the Middle East are Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, the Levant, the Arabian Peninsula, Iran (Persia), and Egypt. In modern-day geography, the Middle East embraces 18 countries. However, scholars and government officials still reflect on how the Middle East relates to the Near East. There is as yet neither an accepted formula, nor even an accepted core for the Middle East and serious efforts to define and delineate the area vary. Meanwhile, both terms are, to a certain extent, still interchangeable.



Fig. 7. Map of the Near and Middle East. (Wikimedia Commons, distributed under CC-BY 2.0 license)

and France within the League of Nation's Mandate System. (Wright, 1930; Pedersen, 2015) For almost the last century on their political road to normative statehood these nation-states were embattled and impaired as sovereignties contested uprisings, consecutive *coups d'état*, successive revolutions, and more recently enforced regime change or imposed politics, possible decentralisation, autonomy, partial confederalisation and federalisations. All genres of turmoil, territorial fragmentation, division and potential independent movements were proposed and tried; thus, even after 72 years of independence a petition was in circulation demanding a re-mandate of Lebanon by France after the massive devastations to Beirut caused by the explosion in its port on 4 August 2020. Meanwhile, the diverse layers of the autochthonous population of these nation-states rendered sectors of its native people highly vulnerable to patterns of ruthless campaigns of ethno-religious cleansing, endangered in their own homelands and with no secure constitutional protection.



Fig. 8. Map of the Ottoman provinces up to 1918. Showing Arab provinces in Mesopotamia and the Levant. (Wikimedia Commons, distributed under CC-BY 2.0 license)

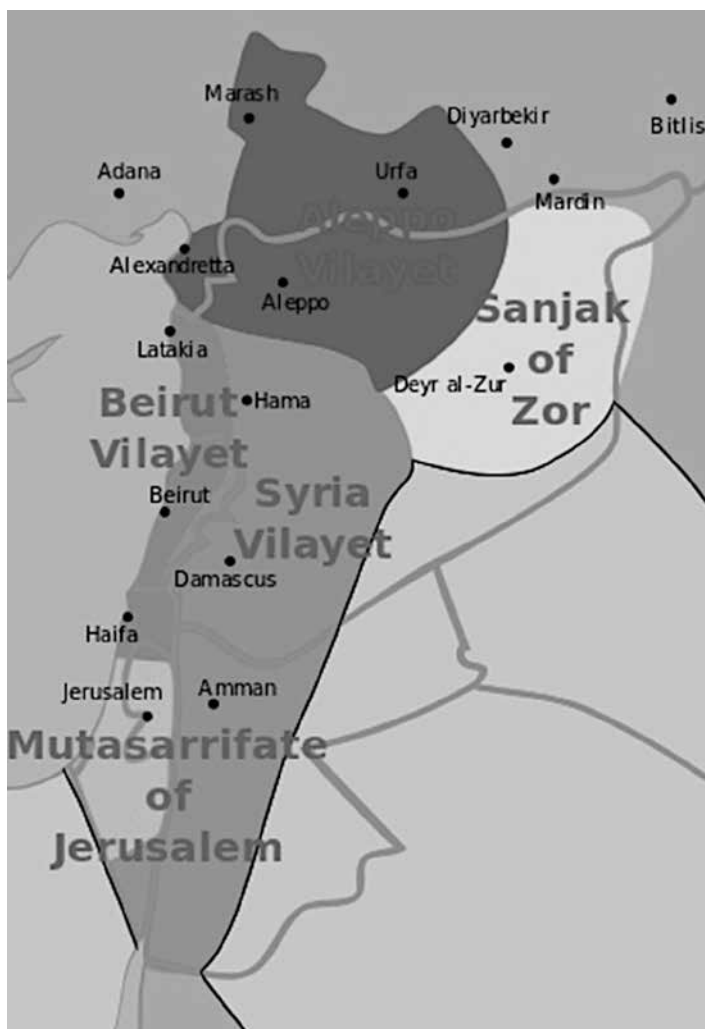
CHURCH LEADERSHIP AND SPIRITUAL SECURITY IN WAR AND PEACE TIME:  
FROM *MILLET* TO MANDATE.

Church leadership is as vital and pivotal for the welfare, survival and continuity of the Church and its ecclesial community in war as it is in peacetime. The key to leadership lay in how the patriarch as a spiritual leader, who under the Ottoman *millet* system was considered as the *millet bashi*, or temporal leader of a given religious community, responded to crisis. Successive patriarchs<sup>20</sup> succeeded in maintaining neutrality with different political authority and endeavoured to maintain the spiritual and dogmatic security of their community in an unsettling milieu of recurrent transitional periods of peace to war to peace.

Successive events at the turn of the century in the Ottoman Empire that preceded the Great War and its aftermath challenged the ecclesiastical and temporal jurisdiction of all patriarchs of Eastern Christianity. The situation challenged senior ecclesial authority, the functionality of the patriarchate as a religious institution and the temporal point of contact with Ottoman authorities.

It is interesting to look closely at the political and socially challenging factors facing the spiritual, dogmatic, social and political role of those

20 The Syrian Orthodox Church has 65 Patriarchs during the 1st millennium and 55 Patriarchs during the 2nd millennium.



*Fig. 9. Map of the proposed Arab Kingdom of Syria 1916-1920. Claimed by King Al-Hussain bin Ali, with modern borders superimposed. (Wikimedia Commons, distributed under CC-BY 2.0 license)*

spiritual leaders, in a pre-ecumenical era while Capitulations and their symmetrical effects on different Eastern Churches were still in force. After the Great War these communities were living in a different geopolitical reality under a mandate system administered by Britain and France which eventually produced a conglomerate of nation-states

within the geographical remit of the Ottoman Arab provinces, where the majority of Eastern Church patriarchal seats were located.

The responses of Eastern patriarchs to the post-war transitional period and policy formulation, whether individually or collectively to safeguard their communities living in an essentially complex and perilous geopolitical situation of international dimensions, is of interest to scholarship. However, despite this potentially crucial position, Christians in the Middle East have been curiously absent from Western and Middle Eastern scholarship. (McCallum, 2010, 2012)

After 1919 and the exploration of leadership performance in reduced circumstances, different concepts of leadership and ‘priority in time’, demonstrated different lessons from fourteen patriarchs<sup>21</sup> of the Eastern Churches contemporary to each other and to the same Great War circumstances. This paper provides a brief insight into the alien and politically charged milieu of the Paris Peace Conference, of

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21 List of Patriarchs of Eastern Churches in the Middle East, who were contemporary to the Great War and its immediate aftermath. Their leadership, spiritual security policies and role in safeguarding their communities during this transition period is still in need of serious study.

Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople: Germanus V (1913-1918) vacant (1918-1921) The last *millet bashi*, or ethnarch of *millet-i Râim* who was also in charge of Eastern Orthodox Churches under the Ottoman *millet* system.

Armenian Patriarch of Constantinople: Zaven I Der Yeghiayan (1913-1915), vacant (1915-1919), Zaven I Der Yeghiayan (1919-1922)

Pope of the Coptic Orthodox of Alexandria: Pope Cyril V (1874-1927).

Catholicos of all Armenians: George V (1911-1930).

Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem: Vacant (1910-1921) Yeghishe Tourian (1921-1929).

Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox of Antioch: Gregory IV Haddad (1906-1928).

Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox of Alexandria: Photius (1900-1925).

Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox of Jerusalem: Damian I (1897-1931).

Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox of Antioch: Ignatius Abdullah II (1906-1915), vacant (1915-1917), Ignatius Elias III (1917-1932), Ignatius Ephram I Barsoum (1933-1957).

Patriarchs of the Church of the East: Shimun XIX Benjamin (1903-1918), Shimun XX Paul (1918-1920), Shimun XXI Eshi (1920-1975).

Patriarch of the Maronite Church: Ignatius Elias Peter Hoyek (1898-1931).

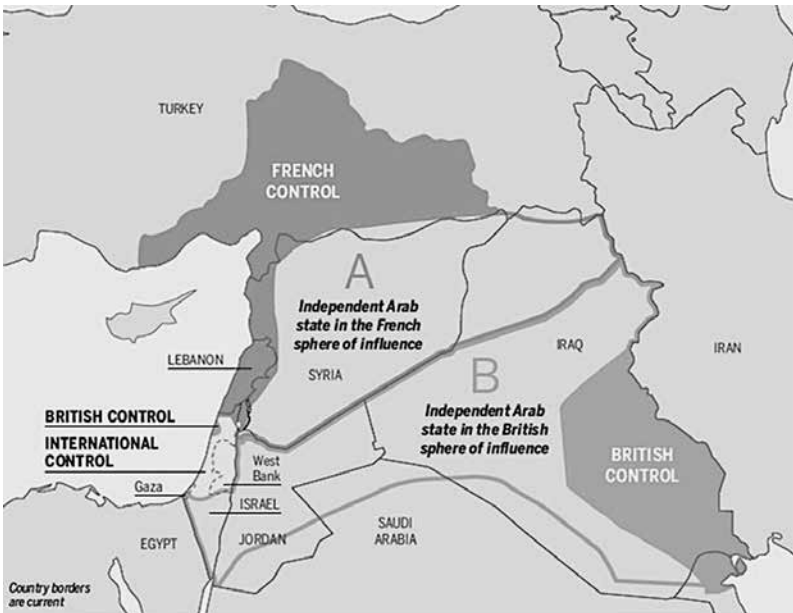
Patriarch of the Syrian Catholic: Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani (1898-1929).

Patriarch of the Chaldeans: Yousef VI Emmanuel II Thomas (1900-1946).

Patriarchs of Greek Catholic (Melkite) of Antioch: Cyril VIII Geha (1902-1916), vacant (1916-1919), Demetrius I Qadi (1919-1925).

Patriarch of Coptic Catholic of Alexandria: Maximos Sedfaoui (*locum tenens*) (1908-1927).

Catholicos of the Armenian Catholic Terzian (1910-1930).



*Fig. 10. Map of Sykes-Picot Agreement's proposed frontiers 1916, with modern borders superimposed. (Wikimedia Commons, distributed under CC-BY 2.0 license)*

the Patriarchs of three Churches of Syriac tradition, namely Ignatius Elias III Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox, Shimun XX Paul Patriarch of the Church of the East and Ignatius Elias Peter Hoyek Patriarch of the Maronite Church. (Forbes-Adam, Eric, 1919) They were officially invited and accepted to participate as heads of an ethno-religious autochthonous community or to appoint and send a delegate to represent them and the interest of their confessional communities at the Paris Peace Conference 1919. The following section will also discuss the absence of Patriarch Emmanuel II of the Chaldean Church and Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani of the Syrian Catholic Church together with the papal response to the exclusion and absence of the Vatican at the Paris Peace Conference.

**IGNATIUS ELIAS III AND BARSOUM:**

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN WAR AND PEACETIME**

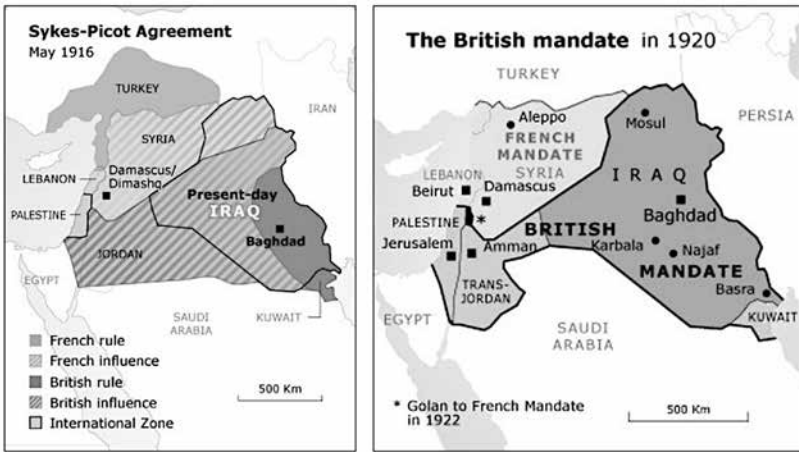
The war-time Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, Mor Ignatius<sup>22</sup> Elias III Shakir (1917-1932), was elected and installed as patriarch on 12 February 1917, to lead a war-torn and decimated ancient Church out of the shadows of the *Qtolamo* or the *Sayfo* 1915. He was a contemporary witness to the intensification of the domestic and international crises in the mid-1870s, the reforms of Midhat Pasha (1822-1883) and the unfolding politics of the years between the two constitutional eras 1876 to 1908. (Nielsen, 2012) Having witnessed the sequestrations of his altar as a monk and abbot in 1889 at Deir al-Za‘faran,<sup>23</sup> the patriarchal monastery in the province of Diyarbakir, then as the Metropolitan of Amida, then Mosul with additional responsibility of a locum tenens at the patriarchate from 1908 to 1917, then as patriarch, Elias observed first-hand the relentless effect of the unfolding political crisis in the Ottoman Empire during the last decade of the nineteenth century, the turn of the century and the first decade of twentieth century on his Church and community. He saw the consequences of the cataclysmic, repetition of events in Turkey in years 1895, 1898, 1908, 1909, 1915, its repercussions throughout the interwar years and the transition period that followed until the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). This era spans the patriarchates of Abdul-Masseh (1895-1904) and Abdullah (1906-1915) and then Elias III (1917-1932). These successive events and their impact almost totally destabilized the Church and its community. These calamities culminated after Lausanne with the expulsion of Patriarch Elias III by President Atatürk in 1924. (Barsoum, 1924; Dinno, 2017, Joseph, 1983 and Chaillot, 1998) These tragic events sent consecutive waves

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22 *Mor Ignatius* is the ecclesiastical name/sobriquet bestowed only on Patriarchs in the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East.

23 The ancient Monastery of Deir al-Za‘faran, (the Saffron Monastery) or Mor Hananyo (Fig. 6). The monastery is affectionately known in Syriac as Dayro d Kurkmo, in Arabic Dayr al-Za‘faran and in Turkish Deyrülzafarân. This monastery became the headquarters and residence of successive Patriarchs of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch from the 1160s as church headquarters of choice after the accession of Michael I the Great (1166-1199), the 78th Patriarch to the see of Antioch. The Great War, its aftermath, political and security factors rendered it impossible for the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchal See to stay in Deir al-Za‘faran within the new, post-Lausanne, borders of Turkey.





*Fig. 11. Maps of Sykes-Picot Agreement's proposed zones of influence 1916 and the British and French Mandates under the auspices of the League of Nations in the Middle East 1920-1947. (Wikimedia Commons, distributed under CC-BY 2.0 license)*

of mass civilian exoduses down the Tigris and Euphrates initially to the bordering Ottoman provinces of the Arabic-speaking majority in Mosul, Deir az-Zor, Aleppo and then further afield in Mesopotamia and the Levant. (Fig. 6)

The Metropolitan seat of Mosul became vacant after the death of its longest serving bishop, Dionysius Behnam Samarji (1867-1911) on 8 March 1911. (Shamoon, 1984) Elias fulfilled the needed criterion for a demanding episcopal leadership in this era. Elias was elected and appointed a bishop of the archdiocese of Mosul, one of the principal sees of Syrian Orthodox archdioceses, with the jurisdiction of the important dioceses of the main urban centres in the three important Ottoman Mesopotamian Arab provinces of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra. Elias became 'the Bishop of Mesopotamia' and Barsoum informed Elias of the uniquely complex ethno-religious demography of these Mesopotamian provinces, yet functional interecclesial and interreligious situations in the ancient cities of Mosul and Baghdad. A very different but an essential addition to Elias' ecclesiastical experience, Elias was welcomed by the Syrian Orthodox notables and clergy of the archdiocese. The notables utilized their urban networking through different *Majlises* in the city to usher in and introduce their new bishop and eased Elias into interaction with the influential intelligentsia elite

and power circles of Mosul's notables and Ottoman bureaucrats in this influential Sunni-Christian stronghold of the empire. Elias was soon acclimatized to his new role and the responsibilities of his new, largely well-established urban archdioceses and their environs. This was at a juncture which was becoming increasingly challenging and complex due to the consecutive political upheaval of the Young Turk Revolution (July 1908) that ushered in the Second Constitutional Era (Turkish = *İkinci Meşrûtiyyet Devri*). It was followed by a counter coup in 1909, with Sultan Abdul Hamid II (1876-1909) being deposed on 24 April 1909. His brother, the 35th and penultimate Ottoman sultan, Mehmed V Reşâd (1909-1918), was installed and reigned as a figurehead while the real power was in the hands of the Unionists (İttihadçılar) triumvirate of pashas.<sup>24</sup> All the ensuing tumults of political changes were apparent in the major provinces of the Ottoman Empire as the Committee of Union and Progress endeavoured to tighten their grip and consolidate their power in the empire. This combined with the sweeping winds of intellectual debate blowing eastward from Istanbul with new political ideas and ideologies, constitutionalism, liberalism, decentralisation and secularism in which the intelligentsia were actively participating as the socio-political vanguard in these provincial centres. Many of the intelligentsia were Christians educated at different institutions in Istanbul and active members of Elias' archdioceses in Diyarbakir and then Mosul. The effect of that leavened, as Tripp eloquently puts it,

The game of provincial politics became more complicated than before because of uncertainties about

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24 Refers to the 'Three Pashas', Mehmed Talaat Pasha (1874-1921), Minister of the Interior and Grand Vizir, Ismail Enver Pasha (1881-1922), War Minister, and Ahmed Djemal Pasha (1872-1922), Navy Minister, the triumvirate of *İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti*, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), and were commonly known as the Young Turks. A pan-Turkish party in 1889-1918, they masterminded the first Ottoman coup d'état, 23 January 1913; it was also known the raid on the Sublime Porte paved a way for these three pashas to become the backbone of the CUP regime and ruled with an iron fist the final years of the Ottoman Empire. They became the de facto leaders of the secular Young Turks government from 1913 to 1918, who effectively ruled and were responsible for thrusting the Ottoman Empire into the Great War and all the ensuing atrocities. After the Armistice a domestic court-martial was ordered by Sultan Mehmed VI on 23 November 1918. The Committee of Union and Progress was dissolved in 1918 and courts-martial charged its leaders of the destruction of the empire through pushing it into the Great War.

the political convictions and connections of any given official or officer. (Tripp, 2007: 22)

Meanwhile, in Mosul Elias was preoccupied with containing the mass movement of his community towards the region due to the *Qtolamo* or *Sayfo* 1915 that was instigated by the Tehjir law from the provinces of Diyarbakir, Bitlis and Harpout (Fig. 6) into the relative safety of the bordering provinces of Mosul, Deir az-Zor and Aleppo. (Gaunt, 2006 and Abdul-Nour, 2016) These calamities of his Church and its people were intensified soon after British troops landed at Fao-Basra, Iraq, on 6 to 8 November 1914. (Tripp, 2007) Sultan Mehmed V declared war on Britain, France and Russia on 11 November 1914. The combined effects of declaration of war and the advance of the British Mesopotamia campaign and the blockade of the Mediterranean shores destabilized the empire putting acute pressure on its social and economic fabric. Soon at least two third of Elias' archdiocese became a battleground of the British Mesopotamian campaign, especially the province of Basra, the first ever Ottoman territory to be occupied by the advancing British army. (Townshend, 2011) This triggered yet another exodus from the parish of Basra to avoid the war. The people started to flee the provinces of Basra and then Baghdad toward the safety of Mosul. The city of Mosul became a safe refuge for refugees descending from upper Mesopotamia and ascending from lower Mesopotamia. Effectively, Elias becoming a bishop of an archdiocese split between two belligerent empires: the Ottoman and the British.

During this tumultuous juncture, the Syrian Orthodox Church lost its Patriarch Ignatius Abdulla II Sattof (1906-1915) on 17 July 1915. This was just 50 days after the simultaneous implementation of the Tehcir<sup>25</sup> Law 1915, the *Seferberlik* 1914<sup>26</sup> campaigns, the flare-up of

25 *Tehcir* a word of Arabic or Ottoman Turkish origin it means 'emigration/immigration' or 'collective deportation' or 'forced displacement'. However, the *Sevk ve İskân Kanunu* (Relocation and Resettlement Law) was a law passed by the Ottoman Parliament on 27 May 1915 authorizing the deportation of the Ottoman Empire's Christian population. The full text was published in the Ottoman official newspaper (*Takvim-i Vekayi*). The bill was officially enacted on 1 June 1915 and expired on 8 February 1916. However, other measures accompanying this law were implemented for much longer. (Gaunt, 2006) Depriving the people of their rights, liberty, possessions and livelihood, the *Tehcir* caused heavy casualties and deprivation.

26 *Seferberlik* or *Umumi Seferberlik* or *milli seferberlik* or *al-tajammu'*: Ottoman Turkish for 'national or public mobilization' or 'the general call to arms', it is a loaded term

the prevailing ongoing tragic and relentless campaign of *Qtolamo* or *Sayfo* 1915, the scarcity of foodstuffs and the overpricing of essential commodities during the first year of the Great War. Due to the war situation, difficulties in communication, lack of security and travel restrictions it proved impossible to convene a quorum synod to elect a new patriarch. Therefore, a pivotal Church leadership vacuum could not be filled, as a patriarch could not be elected for a year and a half, leaving the embattled Church without leadership. Customary in any patriarchal transition, an able bishop would be appointed by the Synod as a locum tenens to oversee ecclesiastical administration and leadership responsibilities. Bishop Elias was elected on 27 February 1916 to become the locum tenens. He was assisted by a mixed council of bishops, clergy and lay advisors which was already in place and appointed without precedent by the late Patriarch Abdulla II to oversee the running of the Church during wartime. In spite of the difficulties of communications Elias executed his new dual tasks and responsibilities from Mosul until it was possible to travel to the patriarchal headquarters on 17 October 1916.

Meanwhile, there were significant ideological and intellectual tensions in Mosul society and other major cities of Mesopotamia and the Levant with the Ottoman authorities. Later, Sharif Hussain bin Ali al-Hashemi (1853-1931), ‘the Grand Sharif and Emir of Mecca and King of the Hijaz’ (*Malik al-Hijaz* or *Malik al-Bilad al-Arab*) (1916-1924) (Fig. 8), declared his Great Arab Revolt<sup>27</sup> against the Ottoman Empire on 10 June 1916. (Murphy, 2008) He accused the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) of violating tenets of Islam, as resentment was smouldering in Arabia against the Young Turks who deposed the Ottoman sultan-caliph limiting the power of his successor. On 15 August 1916 the Emir of Mecca Al-Sharif Hussain issued the first pro-Sharifian Meccan newspaper *al-Qibla* (for a comprehensive

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also used as a synonymous for ‘collective deportation’. An edict (*firman*) issued by Sultan Muḥamad Raşad on 3 August 1914 to usher the state of emergency in the run up to the declaration of war. (al-Qattan, 2004)

27 The call to prayer from the minaret of the Great Mosque of Mecca at dawn on 10 June 1916, followed by a single shot rang out across the holy city of Mecca. Allegedly, it had been fired by the Sharif Hussain himself who, simultaneously hoisted the standard of the Arab Revolt over his residence in Mecca, declaring the start of the long-awaited popular uprising against 400 years of Ottoman Turkish rule had begun.



Fig. 12. Map of the Middle East 1914-1922, showing years of independence. (Photo courtesy of *Der Spiegel Weekly Magazine*, Hamburg)

index of *al-Qibla* see [Bin Talal, 2016]). During its relatively short life *al-Qibla* published 823 issues between 1916 to 1924 to propagate and document the discourse of the Arab renaissance and the justification of the Arab Revolt and its onward march. *Al-Qibla* excelled among other Arabic newspapers of the era in its excellent coverage of the Paris Peace Conference, its negotiations, treaties and peace settlements. (Abu al-Sahir, 2016) The Unionists (Ittihadists), were challenged in their endeavours to contain and restrain the spirit of renaissance fomenting in the communities in the Arab majority provinces of Mesopotamia and the Levant. Jamal Pasha, the Minister of the Navy, implemented all sorts of contingent security measures to affirm the Unionists' authority as they were increasingly challenged with internal unrest, resistance and dread, panic and resentment of the population provoked by the declaration of *Seferberlik*, or general conscription, in the summer of 1914 and its harsh implementation measures which accompanied the unsettling news of the advance of the British Mesopotamian campaign and other fronts.

Sharif Hussain's pan-Arab aspirations attracted many young men from the Ottoman Arab majority provinces among them those Maslawi (i.e., those from Mosul) intellectuals, Christians and Muslims, who left Mosul and joined the Great Arab Revolt, including members of the Syrian Orthodox community. These defections caused considerable

embarrassment and rendered Elias' leadership precarious with the Unionists. Elias as a bishop locum tenens, and as a Church and community leader, managed wisely to maintain a leadership of stringent political neutrality.

Naturally, the seven eventful years of Elias' episcopal experience at the archdiocese in Mosul honed, shaped and toughened his leadership and primed him for the task ahead. As a war-time locum tenens he had an action-packed, transitional period, with a plethora of consequences for the ecclesiastical leadership, pastoral care, spiritual security, livelihood and welfare of his community. It was not possible for the synod to meet at the Monastery of Deir al-Za'faran until the synod unanimously elected Elias as patriarch on 30 November 1916; however, he was not installed as Ignatius Elias III, the 118th Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, until 25 February 1917. (Dinno, 2017) Mor Gregorios the Bishop of Jerusalem could not attend the synod. He deputized Raban Barsoum to be his proxy in the patriarchal election.

The nerve-racking sequences of events of 1917, Elias III's first year of his patriarchate and the fourth year of the Great War, was pivotal for the outcome of the war and had an unsettling impact on his Church leadership. In addition to the ongoing decimating impact of the simultaneous implementations of the *Seferberlik* 1914 and Tehcir Law 1915, there were other major events with wider implications for the Ottoman Empire which reflected negatively on its subjects, for example: the consecutive occupation by the British army of two important capital and urban centres, Baghdad on 11 March 1917 and Jerusalem on 9 December 1917, the political upheaval of the Russian Revolution from 8 March 1917 to 7 November 1917 commencing with abdication of Tsar Nicholas II on 15 March 1917, the abolition of the monarchy and the termination of the Romanov dynasty as a consequence of the Russian Revolution. The Arab Army captured the strategic port city of Yanbu' on the Red Sea on 6 July 2017 and was advancing north. The US declared war on Germany on 6 April 1917. Greece entered the war on the side of the Allies 27 June 1917, the Balfour Declaration was made on 2 November 1917, and the Bolshevik Revolution began on 7 November 1917.

Overlooking the Mesopotamian plateau from his isolated patriarchal see at the ancient Deir al-Za'faran in Mardin within the Ottoman province of Diyarbakir, Ignatius Elias III as a patriarch was

obliged by the stipulations of the *millet* system of the Ottoman state with ecclesiastic and temporal responsibilities, basically an uncomfortable often thorny position of ecclesial authority. He was sandwiched between his commitment as a temporal leader of a community to the state under the *millet* system and a religious and spiritual leader of a community: an absolutely helpless situation. The patriarch had to monitor and lead his community, enduring fear, trauma, hopelessness, longing, disease, famine, poverty, and perishability. As his communities were being uprooted, ethno-religiously cleansed and displaced from Tur 'Abdin, the heartland and the ancestral home of the Syrian Orthodox, they flocked into south-east Turkey (Figs 6, 8). Now, many of these individuals are scattered. The lucky among them managed to reach make-shift refugee camps in cities, towns and villages in the Levant and along the 'Syriac Corridors' of Mesopotamia. This region represented a theatre for implementing the Tehcır Law deportations and the bloodiest of battles of the Great War fought between the advancing allied forces and the Ottoman as part of the Axis armies.

Elias III exhibited extraordinary leadership as he simultaneously faced the evolving effects of the *Seferberlik* 1914 and Tehcır Law 1915, the precursors of the *Qtolamo* or *Sayfo* 1915, the calamities of displacement and the demographic haemorrhage of his community. Meanwhile Jamal Pasha<sup>28</sup> was unleashing his draconian rule in Mesopotamia and the Levant as wartime exigencies were consistent with the measures he had taken in his previous emergency posts in Baghdad and Istanbul,

Peaceful noncombatant subjects of the Ottoman Empire in general, and the Syrian Orthodox in particular, were unfortunate to be trapped

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28 Ahmed Djemal Pasha (1872-1922), better known as Jamal Basha as-Saffah, 'the Blood Shedder', or the 'Bloodthirsty'. He joined the secret Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the conspiratorial nucleus of the Young Turk movement, while a staff officer. Jamal became one of the three Unionists Pasha (Jamal, Talat and Enver) who came to power since the Unionist (*Ittihadist*) coup d'état of January 1913. They formed a military administration triumvirate to rule the Ottoman Empire during World War I. Jamal made his military reputation in Iraq against the British Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force. He was appointed as the provincial Governor of Syria in 1915 and ruled with a provisional law that granted him emergency powers, Jamal saw religion as a bond between Arabs and Turks and believed that a religious war could strengthen those ties. (Rogan, 2016) However, his oppressive clamp down on Arab activists in the Levant alienated the population and led many of them to join the Arab Revolt. (Djemal, 1922)

in the battlefields of the Great War. They would have fitted well the fairly recently coined military terminology ‘Collateral Damage’.

**BISHOP BARSOUM: THE MAN OF ACTION ON THE SPOT.**

Historically, Syrian Orthodox communities lived for the last four hundred years as subjects of the Ottoman Empire concentrated in the province of Diyarbakir with considerable presence in Istanbul and the adjacent Ottoman Arab provinces in Mesopotamia and the wider Levant. In addition to the existing suffering, deportation, and immigration, the Syrian Orthodox communities in these provinces were destined to be located at the centre of the theatre of war as long as the war lasted in the region. It was envisaged that when the Great War ended the Ottoman Empire would either fall or lose parts of its territories. The Syrian Orthodox communities eventually fell in the spiral of an evolving geopolitical pattern. The future of Deir al-Za‘faran, the historical patriarchal headquarters<sup>29</sup> of the Church in the province of Diyarbakir, became increasingly uncertain. It was envisaged that it would remain under the new Turkish administration until a settlement could be negotiated by a treaty. Therefore, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchal See might no longer be accessible, or indeed function as the historic centre of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

Shrewd as he was, Patriarch Elias III Shakir (1867-1932) ‘saw the writing on the wall’ and realized the dawn of a new era. He needed to fortify his Church leadership with bishops of higher calibre, men of merit, education and convictions, able to face the consequences of the mass exodus of the faithful from Tur ‘Abdin and its hinterland in the province of Diyarbakir. He was competent in administering the logistics of their re-settlement, rehabilitation, and welfare in their new and safer environments, in the adjacent Ottoman Arabic provinces and the widely dispersed diaspora.

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29 After the settlement of the Treaty of Lausanne which fell short of protecting the rights of indigenous Christians, the only two main Patriarchal sees remained within modern Turkey. The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate was based in Istanbul. The Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate was located in the province of Diyarbakir, Southeast Turkey.



Rabban<sup>30</sup> Aphram Stephan Barsoum of Mosul was one among the cohort of Syrian Orthodox monk-priests who exhibited appropriate leadership qualities. He had been nurtured and developed among the intelligentsia of Mosul and later in monastic and patriarchal culture at Deir al-Za‘faran. He demonstrated the patience and endurance needed to live up to his Biblical Christian name Ayoub.<sup>31</sup> The experienced Patriarch Elias III felt the need for an instrumental ‘man on the spot’ in the Levant and Mesopotamia which, due to the demographic haemorrhage that eroded the Tur ‘Abdin plateau, had become a conglomeration of refugee camps inhabited by the faithful who suffered deportation with Tehcir and trauma and were nursing *Sayfophobia* in an unsettling milieu. (Abdul-Nour, 2016) Aphram was ‘separated for the service’ and consecrated during the fourth and final year of Great War. (Ibrahim, 1973) On Sunday 20 May 1918, in a dramatic and moving ceremony, as Patriarch Elias III placed his hand on Aphram’s shoulder, he was fully aware of the meaning of the thrice repeated word *Aksinis* (Greek for ‘well-deserved’, the vocation of a bishop, used in the Syriac liturgy for episcopal consecration) and the task

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30 Rabban is the Syriac nomenclature for the ecclesiastical rank of monk-priest.

31 Ayuob, Arabic for Job, was Barsoum’s Christian name at birth on 15 June 1887 in Mosul. At the age of 20, he fulfilled his vow and became a monk on 31 March 1907. At the consecration, Patriarch Ignatius Abdullah II (1906-1915) gave Ayuob the Ecclesiastical name Aphram. At the Episcopal consecration, Patriarch Ignatius Elias III bestowed on him the Episcopal name Mor Severus Aphram. Barsoum was far too occupied with his multiple tasks to write his *mémoire* or autobiography on the first eighteen years of his life in Mosul. The milestone years of his character-building are rarely covered and still in need of serious research. Barsoum’s biographers were Gregorios Paulos Behnam (1952-1960), the Metropolitan of Mosul (Behnam, 1957) and Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, the Metropolitan of Aleppo (1979-to date). Ibrahim wrote three biographical monographs on Patriarch Barsoum and was preparing the draft of another comprehensive biography. He realized that the biographical data currently available were mere scratches on the surface of an iceberg. Consequently, we are missing a comprehensive biography of a giant patriarch and historiographer of the Syrian Orthodox Church who served the church at an eventful time! See Ibrahim, 1973, 1987a and 1996. Unfortunately, Barsoum’s authorised biography seemed to have been collated if not already written by his personal secretary and lawyer, Mr Iskander Mahama. Alas the manuscript has not surfaced yet. Mor Gregorios mentioned the table of its contents which comprised 91 chapters distributed across ten sections that cover the entire life span and work of Patriarch Barsoum. (Ibrahim, 1997, pp. 80-88) I was informed, courtesy of Suliman and Bashar Abdul-Nour, who had recent personal conversation with Mahama’s family the custodian of Mahama’s private papers, that they mentioned that the archive of Mr Mahama was donated to Mor Gregorios shortly before he was kidnapped, and it is currently red waxed sealed and inaccessible.

ahead on that very young man's shoulders, while in the background the incense mixed with the stench of burning flesh, blood, tears and artillery roaring still across the hills and plains of Mesopotamia and the Levant. Barsoum created another mark in history as one of the last bishops to be consecrated in the ancient cathedral of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste in Mardin close to Deir al-Za'faran.

Barsoum was given the episcopal name of Mor Severus the Bishop of [the Levant] Syria and Lebanon. He was destined to be 'the Bishop of war and peace and the Patriarch of renaissances'. (Ibrahim, 1987a, 1997 and Dinno, 2017) He proved to be the right man for the difficult and challenging task ahead. He was a staunch advocate of the Syrian nation. Mosul, his birthplace, was Barsoum's first port of call as bishop. Jews, Muslims and Christians friends and well-wishers flocked to the Archbishopric of Mosul to congratulate and express their pride in the pious son of Mosul. Barsoum's first ever eucharist as a bishop in the packed Cathedral of Mosul was very emotional and moving in spite of the great anxiety of the *Sayfophobia* still fresh in people's mind together with uncertainty of the potential consequences of the war, regardless of the fact that Mosul, as a capital of an important Ottoman province was still largely intact and unaffected by the war.<sup>32</sup> In his sermon, Barsoum thanked the community in Mosul for providing hospitable welfare for consecutive waves of masses of Christians during the disturbance of the *Qtolamo* or *Sayfo* 1915. They left their homes in Syrian Orthodox townlets in the countryside of Tur 'Abdin, the province of Diyarbakir (Fig. 6). They were still arriving to settle in Mosul which provided a safe haven for a considerable number of deportees. Mosul had on the whole enjoyed exemplary relations between the various religions and ethnic groups. This unique religious tolerance and co-existence phenomenon impressed Henry C Hony, the British Vice-Consul (1911-1913), who observed and affirmed it earlier in a pre-war dispatch from Mosul.

Mosul is unique in Turkey the fact that Muslims and Christians live on terms of absolute equality ... All the great

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32 Although the steamroller of the British campaign in Mesopotamia was slowly but surely advancing upstream, Mosul was still far away from the advancing British forces and was under the full control of the XII Corps, with the 35th and 36th Infantry Divisions of the Ottoman Fourth Army commanded by Jemal Pasha, until the signing of the Armistice. (Erickson, 2001)

families are really of the same stock. These great nobles were partly turned Muslim partly remained Christian, either Nestorian [Church of the East] or Jacobite [Syrian Orthodox] and partly turned Roman Catholic. They are very proud of their lineage. One of them has hung up in his house his genealogical tree going back to Adam himself. They are regular feudal lords and own villages with serfs. They live in terms of great friendship and, as long as their family is 'all right' they don't mind about being Christian or Muslim. (Gandy, 1987)

It is known that, in an honourable and courageous stand of solidarity with fellow Christians living in the Vilayet of Mosul, the influential local *a'yan*, or urban notables of Mosul, ignored a telegraph wired from Istanbul ordering implementing of the Tehcir Law and the deportations of Christians from Mosul. They prevented a potential *Qtolamo* or *Sayfo* campaign in the city of Mosul and saved the lives of their fellow Christians. During Barsoum's short visit to Mosul after his episcopal consecration he made a special effort to arrange for a return visit to as many of the local *a'yan*, tribal sheikhs and well-wishers as possible. He could thank them in person, although in a subtle way, and convey the gratitude of the Patriarch Elias III for their pivotal role in preventing violence against the Christians in Mosul.

After a short stay in Mosul, Bishop Aphram arrived at his bishopric in Homs on 14 August 1918 to resume his pastoral and humanitarian responsibilities toward the deportees—in today's terminology internally displaced people (IDPs) or protected internally displaced people (PIDPs) who were filling refugee camps all over the Levant. Notwithstanding, in the absence of the international community the Churches did not have access to humanitarian foreign aid which challenged the Church leadership to enable them to support their communities.

This history today is echoed by the drastically reduced conditions experienced by Christians 100 years later, during the ongoing Syrian crisis which commenced in March 2011 and after the fall of Mosul on 9 June 2014. Many still remain as PIDPs in a politically disputed region enduring the lowest human conditions under the UN's Human Rights Charter. Church leadership today is being challenged in the

way that Barsoum had confronted during the First World War and its aftermath.

**ARAB SECRET SOCIETIES, THE ARAB FLAG, AND THE ARAB REVOLT:  
MEASURED RESPONSES TO THE UNIONISTS.**

From his spiritual enclave, Barsoum kept watching the evolving political scene under the emerging Young Turks since their *coup d'état* on 23 July 1908, keeping in regular contact with his relatives, those whom he had known from his time at the Dominican school, and contacts from Mosul's intelligentsia circles, many of whom went to Istanbul to further their education. They often visited Barsoum, then abbot of Deir al-Za'faran, a haven on their way back and forth between Istanbul, Mosul, Aleppo, Damascus and Beirut. Those from Mosul together with Levantine youths became active in student political life in the Ottoman capital. They were involved in the planning of Arab secret political societies, which began to be formed after the Young Turk *coup d'état* in 1908 in Paris, Istanbul and later in Damascus, Aleppo, Mosul and Baghdad. Such was the Paris-based *Jam'iyyat al-Umma al-'Arabiyya al-Fatat*, 'Society of the Young Arab Nation', better known as *al-Fatat*. The first Arab clandestine society formed during the Young Turk period, *al-Fatat* strived to protect the 'natural rights' of the Arab nation within the Ottoman Empire and counter the tide of the Turkification policies of the Unionists. Ideologically, the preamble of *al-Fatat's* constitution stated:

... the Arab nation is behind the other socially, economically and politically. Its youth are therefore obliged to dedicate their lives to awakening it from this backwardness, and they must consider what will lead to its progress, so that it will attain the meaning of life and preserve its natural rights. (Tauber, 2013)

The Istanbul-based *Al-Muntada al-Adabi*, 'Literary forum or club', was a pro-Arab society founded in Istanbul in 1909 to promote Arab culture and to act as a meeting place for Arab visitors and residents in the capital of the Ottoman Empire. The membership of *Al-Muntada al-Adabi* consisted of students, scholars and professionals; most had



*Fig. 13. Students and military cadets from Mosul studying at Istanbul University and the Military College in Istanbul in 1914 and founding members of the pre-war al-Muntada al-Adabi ('The Literary Forum') and Al-'Abid Society.*

*Seated, L to R: Yassin Al-Oraibi, Muhammad Ali Mustafa, Dr Zaki Abdel-Baqi Al-Jarrah. Standing, L to R: Taber Al-Feel, Thabit Abdul-Nour and Mahmoud Al-Shahwany. (Photo courtesy of Abdul-Nour Collection )*

advanced education and were politically active. Its stated aims were non-political but it evolved to become a pivotal incubator for the growing Arab nationalist movements in Mesopotamia and the Levant. The Istanbul- and then Damascus-based *Al-'Abid*, Arabic for 'the Covenant', was founded in Istanbul on 28 October 1913. The founder and membership of this underground society mainly consisted of Arab Ottoman army officers, who were enthusiastic in their quest for the Arab national cause. Since the Iraqi element was the most numerous in the Ottoman army, it naturally made up the majority of *Al-'Abid* membership. A good many Syrian, Palestinians and other Arab officers also joined *Al-'Abid*. Later the majority of *Al-'Abid* members joined the Arab Revolt.

Collectively and co-operatively, the memberships of these clandestine or underground societies endeavoured to raise the awareness of the popular movements which sought a political solution to the

plight of Arabs and other ethnicities indigenous to the Mesopotamian and Levantine provinces of the Ottoman Empire. (al-Jamil, 1999, Gelvin, 1999 and Tauber, 1993)

The executive of *Al-Fatat* organized the first ever 'Congress of Arab Societies' which met 18-23 June 1913 in a hall of the French Geographical Society (*Société de Géographie*) in the safety of Paris beyond the confines of the empire, to co-ordinate work, and promote the aims and impact on the political culture of Arab secret societies. The congress coincided with the Unionists issuing on 5 May 1913 a new reform programme with more stringent centralization measures to empower the grip of Istanbul on the Arab provinces. The resolutions of the Arab Congress in Paris centred on the administrative autonomy of the Arab provinces, Arabic's adoption as an official language in the empire and the institution of democracy to save the Ottoman Empire from 'decay'. (Tauber, 2013)

It was only from 1917, as the situation in the Near East started to tilt in favour of the Entente powers, that Lebanese emigrant communities abroad started to organize. On 16 June a group of Lebanese and Syrians exiles in Paris decided to form a *Comité Central Syrien* (CCS),<sup>33</sup> in order to centralize the efforts of the Syrian communities abroad, contribute to the liberation of Syria, and devise the form of its future government in agreement with France. Meanwhile in New York, the League for the Liberation of Syria and Lebanon<sup>34</sup> was established, co-presided over by Amin Rihani as its vice president and Jibran Khalil Jibran as its secretary. These two committees called for the independence of a unified Greater Syria, including Lebanon, under the aegis of France and urged Syrians and Lebanese around the world to rally around this claim. The *Comité Central Syrien* had often been dismissed by Prince Faisal and by its opponents as a mere tool of the French government, who admittedly backed its formation and provided it with generous financial support. (Hakim, 2013)

The return of those activists from Istanbul to their provinces enlivened the intellectual circles in their provinces by their cultural and energetic political activities. The first ever political society in the Ottoman

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33 Correspondance d'Orient, revue économique, politique et littéraire, no. 167 (10 June 1917).

34 Correspondance d'Orient, revue économique, politique et littéraire, no. 172 (25 August 1917).

Arab provinces was *Al-'Alam*<sup>35</sup> founded in Mosul in 1914 by Nicholas Abdul-Nour (Fig. 13), an Istanbul educated lawyer, member of *Al-Muntada al-Adabi* in Istanbul and member of the Syrian Orthodox community in Mosul, a maternal cousin and schoolmate of Barsoum. (al-Allaf, 1979; Sakai, 1994; Jassim, 2015) The political developments and the social impact of *Al-'Alam* in Mosul society were apparent and coincided with the havoc that the synchronized Ottoman campaigns of *Seferberlik* and Tehcir Law caused in all Ottoman Arab provinces and counteracted the heavy-handed implementation and campaign of execution of activists in major cities in the Levant and Mesopotamia orchestrated by Jamal Pasha on behalf of the Unionists. This political unrest and unionist counter-unrest in Mosul took place during the episcopate of Bishop Elias in Mosul (1912-1917). It caused the Church leadership great embarrassment and challenged relations with the Unionists, which Elias could do without, as he was far too preoccupied in endeavouring to contain and embrace the waves of the mass civilian exodus that the Tehcir Law and the ensuing *Sayfo* 1915 relentlessly caused.

Eventually, Sharif Hussain bin Ali al-Hashemi (1853-1931), the Hashemite Grand Sharif and Emir of Mecca and King of the Hijaz (1916-1924), declared his Great Arab Revolt<sup>36</sup> against the Ottoman Empire on 10 June 1916. (Al-Ghusein, 1939; Teitelbaum, 1998) A plucky band of these Ottoman educated young activists joined the Sharifian Army in Hijaz, the military force behind the Great Arab Revolt, which became an effective force of the Near Eastern theatre of the Great War. Some of those young officers were Faisal's aides-de-camp and, according to Lawrence (1888-1935), were 'fire-eating Mesopotamian cavalrymen' who proved to be 'hard-driven martinets'. (Lawrence, 1935) They were instrumental in the Great Arab Revolt led by the Grand Sharif and his sons, Emir Faisal (Fig. 5) and Emir Abdullah. Many, including

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35 *Al-'Alam*, an Arabic homograph for 'flag' (*'alam*)/'science' (*'ilm*), is a clever choice of an Arabic name by the founder of this first pan-Arab secret political society in Mosul, for its meaning could easily be read as 'the flag' or 'science' (or 'knowledge'). Its founder was Nicholas Thabit Abdul-Nour, a Syrian Orthodox, Istanbul-educated lawyer and cousin of Barsoum. (al-Allaf, 1979) For a biography of Nicholas Thabit Abdul-Nour, see al-Rihani, 1987, al-Talib, 2009, Jassim, 2015. *Al-'Alam* Society of Mosul: this political society was the first ever political entity to officially propagate the newly emerging Arabic flag which had been for some time on the drawing board of *al-Muntada al-Adabi* in Istanbul for discussion and adoption.

36 The Arab Revolt is also known in some sources as the Hashemite Revolt or the Hijaz Revolt. (Çiçek, 2012)

Nicholas Thabit Abdul-Nour, later became members of Faisal's first cabinet in Syria and then in Iraq. (Atiyya, 1973, Al-Hakim, 1966)

### THE ARAB FLAG: HISTORY OF ITS SYMBOLISM AND EVOLVEMENT

The national flag, anthem and emblem are the three symbols through which an independent country proclaims its identity and sovereignty. Flag design is a delicate process in identity formulation. What is more interesting is the ability of the elite to brave the invention of national symbols to be adopted as a collective identity of the multi-ethno-religious masses yet to be merged into nation-states in the Ottoman Arab provinces where the majority of autochthonous Eastern Christians were and are still living.

The idea of having an Arab national flag emerged from a series of brainstorming sessions, dating back to the early days of *Al-Muntada al-Adabi* in Istanbul, in the years 1909-1911, even though members of the Literary Forum were not then thinking seriously about seceding from the Ottoman Empire. The founders of *Al-Muntada al-Adabi*, which was a literary society working secretly towards political ends, were students from different Ottoman Arab provinces studying in Istanbul (al-Jamil, 1999, 2009); many were friends of Barsoum from Mosul. They felt the need for a national emblem, crest, coat of arm or a flag, basically, a national icon that could embrace and homogenize their ethno-religious diversity and to which the people could affiliate happily and proudly.

They agreed in principle the main leitmotif of the future Arab national flag should be composed of a colour quadrangle: white, black, green and red, motivated by the symbolic colours which were originally mentioned in a famous poem of the Iraq poet/mystic Safi al-Din al-Hilli (1267-1349).

بيض صنائعنا سود وقائعنا    خضر مرابعنا، حمر مواضينا

White are our deeds, Black are our battles / Green are  
our lands, Red are our swords.

These colours have political dimensions too as each colour, according to Arab history, served as a mono-colour flag in a certain



period of Arab historical independence: the Umayyad empire of Damascus (white), the 'Abbasid empire of Baghdad (black) and the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt (green) and red for Mudhar heredity. (Leslie, 1923)

Furthermore, the educationist, the humanist and literary scholar from Iraq, Ma'ruf al-Rusafi, who due to his advocacy of freedom became known as a poet of freedom, visited Istanbul in 1908 and then 1912-1914 after he was elected as delegate to the *Meclis-i Mebusan* (Ottoman Chamber of Deputies). Al-Rusafi frequented the Literary Forum to meet his friends, joined the discussion, to elate and enthuse them with his poems which depicted the reformation of the Ottoman Empire. Al-Rusafi often encouraged the endeavours of those promising young men of the Literary Forum who were debating, designing, and deciding to establish an Arab national flag that would connect their education with their inspiration for freedom.

Poetically, he deployed the interchangeably of the Arabic word for 'flag' and 'science' or 'knowledge' in the following line.

اِنَّ الْحَقِيْقَةَ قَالَتْ لِي وَقد صَدَقْتُ / لَا يَنْفَعُ الْعِلْمُ اِلَّا فَوْقَةَ عَلَمٍ

'Truth spoke to me, you believed knowledge was of no use unless beneath the flag'

Emphasizing that science and knowledge will be better deployed if it operates under the flag of a sovereign country. (Khulusi, 1950)

The Literary Forum clandestinely adopted the four-colour flag as their emblem in 1909. (Al-Jamil, 2009) The idea of adopting a national flag occupied the minds of young Arabs and kept enlivening and fomenting the intellectual circles in different parts of the Levant and Mesopotamia. Later the idea of using a tricolour flag, white which represent the Umayyad, black the 'Abbasid and green the Fatimid, came from *Jam'iyya al-'Arabiyya al-Fatat* (The Young Arab Society), Beirut in March 1914. Furthermore, *Hizb al-lamarkaziyya al-idariyya al-'Uthmani* (The Ottoman Party for Administrative Decentralization [OPAD]) in Cairo adopted these colours considering the black also to represent the night, white conscience and green hope.

However, the first ever official registration of the use of the four-colour Arab flag was as an emblem and insignia of *Jama'at al-'Alam* (The Society of the Flag), a new political society party which was

founded in Mosul in 1914, benefiting from the fact that ‘flag’ is a homograph of the written Arabic nouns *al-‘Alam/al-‘Ilm* meaning ‘flag/knowledge’. Its aims, mission statements and the descriptions of its symbolic emblem were formally registered with the authority of the province of Mosul in the name of its founder Nicholas Thabit Abdul-Nour in Mosul. It was an extremely daring and challenging move, which would never be without consequences at the time of the inimical Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) rule of Mosul. (al-Allaf, 1979, al-Jamil, 1999, 2009)

At the declaration of the Arab Revolt by Sharif Hussain in Mecca on 10 June 1916, the traditional dark red insignia of the Sharifians were initially raised as an emblem and flag of the Arab Revolt. Soon the Grand Sharif Hussain, the leader of the Arab Revolt, officially informed General Reginald Wingate the British High Commissioner in Egypt that: ‘all our vehicles will temporarily carry the Sharifian red insignia in the Red Sea until we adopt an official flag.’ Grand Sharif Hussain requested General Reginald Wingate to alert the British navy and Allied ships in the Red Sea. (Hussain, 1916) The request of Sharif Hussain was telegraphed from the Arab Bureau to General Gilbert Clayton on 7 July 1916. (Arab Bureau, 1916)

However, the founder and members of *Jama‘at al-‘Alam* of Mosul, members of *Al-Muntada al-Adabi*, *al-Fatat* and *Al-‘Abid* were among the first to answer the call of Sharif Hussain to join the Arab revolt in 1916. The red insignia or flag which symbolizes the Ashrafs of the Hijaz and the Hashemites was still the official flag of the Arab Revolt, while the discussion and the design of a new Arab national flag was on the drawing board. Eventually, the identical flag which was first adopted and raised by the *Jama‘at al-‘Alam* and officially raised in Mosul, deriving from the four-colour flag originally designed and adopted by the youths of the Literary Forum, was agreed upon with the executives of the Arab societies and endorsed by Sharif Hussain. The specifications of the adopted four-colour flag were officially announced and laid down in a royal decree. The royal communiqué later published in the Sharifian official gazette (*al-Qibla*) no. 82 on 28 June 1917. The first official raising of the new Arab flag was on 10 June 1917 to mark the first anniversary of the Arab Revolt. (Bin Talal, 2016)

Under this very flag the Arab Revolt and its army fought all its battles. The Arab flag was first raised in Palestine as the flag of the

Arab national movement in 1917, then raised when the Arab Army entered Damascus in 1918, all over the liberated provinces of Syria and then in Beirut. The Arab Club of Damascus presented King Faisal with the Arab flag with captions written of each colour of the flag on his coronation as king in Damascus on 8 March 1920. (al-Khatib, 1920) Under the same flag the Arab Army fought the four-hour battle of Maysalun.

It is interesting to note that some authors subscribed to the opinion that Sir Mark Sykes was the first to design the Arab flag and suggest its colours to Sharif Hussain. (Leslie, 1923, Kedourie, 1956) This opinion was probably based on a letter dated 22 February 1917 sent by Sir Mark Sykes to Reginald Wingate in Cairo, in which Sir Mark Sykes suggested that the Sharifian insignia which was used during the first year of the Arab revolt should be replaced with a new Arab flag with the same four colours mentioned above. Adding to that, Sykes enclosed four different designs for the flag to choose from. (Sykes, 1917) Eventually, the Arab flag of the Arab Revolt, which was first raised by the Hashemites, was then enthusiastically and passionately adopted by Arabs.

A specimen of this flag can be seen too hastily folded by a French artist's impression (Fig. 16) capturing the victory of General Mariano Goybet who led the French Army of the Levant at the Battle of Maysalun against the Arab Army, their Great War allies which together with the British army liberated the Levant (Syria and Lebanon) on behalf of the Entente.

A century later today, no less than ten independent Arab countries (out of twenty-two) have chosen to adhere to the four colours with different configurations and designs of the original Arab flag to proclaim their identity and sovereignty. Half of these countries lie at the core of the Arab world (Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine)—apart from Lebanon, the only Arab country whose national flag accentuates distinctiveness by an emblem with unambiguous territorial significance: the Lebanese cedar which has a biblical reference at its centre.

As a symbol this flag offers uniqueness, unity and commonality at the same time and is capable of conveying several identities simultaneously for the ethno-religious diverse spectrum of the Near East. A century later the majority of the autochthonous Christians in the Middle East now lives and co-exists under this flag.

**BARSOUM AND THE HASHEMITE KING'S HUMANITARIAN DECREE  
TO SAVE AND PROTECT CHRISTIANS**

The Hashemite king was unsettled by the escalated heavy handedness and increasing violent enforcement of the *Seferberlik* 1914 and the Tehcir Law 1915 and the ensuing deportation, suffering and destabilizing of the already vulnerable Christian communities in Turkey and their subjection to the relentless campaign of ethno-religious cleansing known as *Sayfo* 1915. (al-Ghusein, 1917; Gaunt, 2006) These draconian measures set in motion waves of mass civilian exoduses into the relative safety of the Ottoman Arab provinces, where al-Sharif al-Hussain bin Ali's Sharifian Army was fighting along with the Entente to claim territories for the Arab Kingdom, the Hashemite vision of the post-Ottoman order. (Fig. 9) In a humanitarian endeavour to protect those Christians on the march the Hashemite King al-Hussain bin Ali issued a royal decree to Sheikhs Faisal and Abdul-Aziz al-Jarba, the then Chiefs of Shammar,<sup>37</sup> the main Arab tribe in the region. (Williamson, 1999) It instructed them to protect and provide comfort for the Jacobites [Syrian Orthodox] and the Armenians passing through their domain. Below is the English translation of this important Royal Hashemite Decree,<sup>38</sup> *Irada*, and a

37 Faisal and Abdul Aziz al-Jarba, the sons of Farhan Pasha al-Jarba Sheikh of Sheikhs of Shammar tribe. They had 15 siblings who after the death of their father Sheikh Farhan Pasha rotated on the leadership of the Shammar tribe between (1890-1914). Faisal and Aziz were the leaders of Shammar at the time of the Great War. (Williamson, 1999) Sheikh Faisal al-Jarba went to the Hijaz in 1917 to offer the Oath of Allegiance of Shammar, the largest Arab tribe, to al-Sharif al-Hussain bin 'Ali and to the mission of the Great Arab Revolt. Al-Sharif al-Hussain bin 'Ali accepted Shammar's allegiances and issued an official endorsement of their alliance.

38 The author is much indebted to His Royal Highness Prince al-Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, for HRH's ceaseless peaceful humanitarian endeavours to bring about a safe release of the Archbishop of Aleppo Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim. Also, for HRH's kind and pivotal help and the assistance of HRH's office (Majalis El-Hassan) in tracing the original copy of this rare and important Hashemite humanitarian document in the archive of the Royal Hashemite Court in Jordan. Dr Hind Abu al-Shaer the curator of Royal Hashemite Court Archive in Amman, Jordan, kindly confirmed that they do not have the original of this rare document in the Royal Hashemite Court Archive in Amman. The collection preserved in the Royal Court Archive dates back to 1921. This is an older document, issued by the Court of The Hashemite Kingdom of Hijaz and a copy may have survived in the collection of the Hijaz archive. However, very few if any original copies of this unique and rare Hashemite Decree survived. The copy, which is published here for the first time, was



Fig. 14. Fig. A rare copy of a compassionate Hashemite Royal [Irada] decree dated 1918, issued by H.R.H. Al-Husayn Bin 'Ali, the Hashemite King of Hijaz and the Sharif of Mecca, commanding the Sheikh of the Shammar to provide assistance and protection to Syrian Orthodox and Armenian Christians in exodus. For English translation see herein. (Photo courtesy of 'Abdul-Nour' Collection and Sheikh of the Shammar Muhsin Ajeel Al-Yawar)

rare humanitarian document. (For a copy of the original Hashemite Decree, see Fig. 14.)

found among the collection of the Abdul-Nour Archive in Mosul. This document might have been originally obtained by a member of the Abdul-Nour family who served as an officer in the Arab Army.

***The text of the Hashemite Humanitarian Decree***

The Hashemite Diwan [The Hashemite Royal Court]  
In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful.  
Praise be to Him alone.

From Al-Husayn bin ‘Ali, King of the Arab Countries  
and Sharif of Mecca and its Prince.

To the honourable and glorious Princes, Prince Faisal  
and Prince Abdul‘Aziz al-Jarba

Peace, mercy, and blessings of God.

These letters were issued from Umm Al-Qura [Mecca],  
on the 18th Rajab 1336, [April 28, 1918].

We praise Him and no God except Him. We pray and  
salute His Prophet, his family and his companions. We  
inform you that in our gratitude to Him the Most High  
we are in good health, and His blessings are in copious  
bounty. The Grace of God is granted thereof for ourselves  
and for you.

The objective of this letter is to protect and take good  
care of all members of the Jacobite [Syrian Orthodox] and  
Armenian communities who have reached your frontiers,  
stayed in your abodes, or amongst your tribes; to help  
them with all their affairs and protect them as you would  
protect yourselves, your property and children, and provide  
everything they might need, whether they are settled or  
moving from place to place, because they are the people  
protected by Muslims ‘Ahl Dhimmat al-Muslimin’—God’s  
blessings and peace be upon him [the Prophet], he said:  
‘He who takes a camel’s tether from them shall find me  
as his adversary on the Day of Judgment.’

This is the utmost we require of you and expect you  
to accomplish, in view of your noble character, ethical  
comportment and magnanimity. May God grant us His  
reconciliation. Peace be upon you and God’s mercy and  
blessings.’

Signed and sealed by

Al-Husayn Bin ‘Ali

As the Bishop of the Levant with the pastoral responsibility of the welfare of his community in Syria and Lebanon, especially those in refugee camps with the ethno-religiously cleansed, those critically endangered and on the move as a result of the implementation of the Tehcir Law 1915, Barsoum actively liaised and co-operated directly with the sheikhs of the Shammar and their men in Syria and Iraq. Barsoum witnessed first-hand Shammar families efficiently and successfully implementing the commandments of the Royal Hashemite Humanitarian Decree. Barsoum may have also seen the original copy of the Hashemite Decree in Shammar possession. Barsoum felt first-hand its significance, magnitude and effectiveness and highly appreciated al-Sharif al-Hussain bin Ali's humanitarian initiative. It was a personal, compassionate and humanitarian gesture that preceded by decades the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights. This Hashemite humanitarian initiative saved the lives and the repatriated thousands of Christians, whether Syrian Orthodox [Jacobite] or Armenian Christians who were specifically mentioned in the text of al-Sharif al-Hussain bin Ali's decree and other Christians who were rescued and protected by the Shammar tribes. Sheikhs of the Shammar were actively co-operating with the Churches leadership to facilitate the return of their Christians guests and their families whom the Shammar had rescued to the churches and refugee camps that punctuated the landscape of Mesopotamia and the Levant. There are a significant number of Syrian Orthodox and Armenian families who live in Mosul, as well as in Syrian cities, who attribute their salvation and safe return to their families to the Hashemite humanitarian initiative and the co-operation and good will of the elders of the Shammar al-Jarba families, whose men camped and provided security along the road to Mosul and cities in Syria.

The wise choice of al-Sharif al-Hussain bin Ali of the chiefs of the Shammar to implement this unique and vital humanitarian initiative did not come out of a vacuum. The Shammar is one of the largest and most influential Arab tribal confederations in the region. The tribe spread in a vast geographical area in Mesopotamia and the Levant, especially in al-Jazira region on the Iraqi-Syrian frontier. The Shammar is known for its hospitality and integrity.<sup>39</sup> They could

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<sup>39</sup> Hatim al-Ta'i: died 578, the legendary figure of the Shammar tribe was renowned for generosity and hospitality and appears in *The Arabian Nights*. British and German Orientalists, the like of Gertrude Bell and Max von Oppenheim, often spoke

provide the manpower for the mammoth task of implementing the recommendations of the Hashemite Royal Decree to relieve the suffering of Christians. Shammar men were instructed by their leaders to search, rescue and take good care of, protect, assist and provide comfort to and repatriate Christians, not only the Jacobites (Syrian Orthodox) and Armenians who are mentioned in the Hashemite Decree, but all who were suffering the endurance of mass exodus from Turkey and passing through the territories of the Shammar tribe along the corridors to Mesopotamia and the Levant.

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affectionately of their encounter with the Shammar tribe. Gertrude Bell (1868-1926) knew and collaborated successfully with Barsoum during her early archaeological research in 1909 and 1911 on the Churches and Monasteries of Tur 'Abdin—the research that affirmed her credentials as a celebrated archaeologist. (Bell, 1910, 1913, 1982) During the war she was in charge of the Arab Bureau in Iraq. (Bell, 1920) She must have been well aware of the mass exodus from Turkey and knew about the Hashemite humanitarian initiative and its successful implementations. (Collins and Tripp, 2017) She was known as 'Gertrude of Arabia and Kings' Maker'. Often in her diaries and letters she shared with her family her fond experience of the desert and its people. She was known to have said: 'To wake in that desert dawn was like waking in the heart of an opal. ... See the desert on a fine morning and die—if you can!' She has relations with sheikhs of the Shammar tribes and intimated that 'It is important to maintain good relations with Arab Sheikhs.' In one of her letters Bell described the impressive 'Sheikk Ajeal al-Yawir' (1882-1940), the son of Abdul Aziz Farhan al-Jarba (Bell and Bell, 1927). Sheikk Ajeal al-Yawir was the able public relations man of Shammar. He was instrumental in the implementation of the Hashemite decree and co-operated effectively with Barsoum, whom he knew from Mosul, in the repatriation of the Syrian Orthodox families that reached Shammar camps. He became the Chief of Shammar in 1921 and member of Iraqi Constituent Assembly. He was given the red-carpet treatment when he visited London. (Williamson, 1999)

Max Freiherr von Oppenheim (1860-1946) said he was known and respected by his Arab friends as a German aristocrat. Hence the pride and pleasure with which he described, in 1900, how, before witnesses, he was 'ceremoniously made a "brother" of Faris Pasha al-Jarba [Brother of Frahan Pasha], the chief of the Shammari Bedouins, the tribe Oppenheim most admired.' (Von Oppenheim, 1900) He added: 'In Northern Arabia, Syria, and Mesopotamia I often lived with the Bedouins, those free sons of the desert, sharing their tents with them,' recalling his sojourns in the Middle East both before and during his years of service as attaché at the German Consulate-General in Cairo. 'I had a very good understanding of their soul, their language, and their mores. I had grown fond of these people and they welcomed me everywhere with open arms.' (Von Oppenheim, 1939; Gossman, 2013)



*LA ROUTE DE DAMAS*

Almost a month before the declaration of the Armistice of Mudros (Turkish: *Mondros Mütarekesi*) that ended the war on 30 October 1918 in the Middle Eastern theatre, the final stages of the Arab Revolt and the campaign of Faisal's Arab Sharifa Forces, assisting the British Empire's Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) against the Ottomans, were concluded. Having fought and won consecutive battles along the route from Hijaz to Jordan to Syria, the Hashemite Prince Faisal (Fig. 9), the Commander-in-Chief, and his Arab Army fighting on his right flank across the River Jordan, rendezvoused with the British Egyptian Expeditionary Forces (EEF) under the command of General Edmund Allenby (1861-1936).<sup>40</sup> The Allenby-Faisal alliance maximized the military and political importance of the Arab Revolt, which Allenby entrusted to T E Lawrence (1888-1935) a junior officer, who had no formal officer's training prior to receiving in 1914 a direct commission as an acting second lieutenant. Due to his understanding of Middle Eastern cultures, depth of history and Arabic language, Lawrence was assigned to intelligence duties at the Arab Bureau in Cairo. (Johnson, 1982) He was a brilliant intelligence officer but considered as an amateur apprentice among professionals, with a rebellious personality who maintained a dismissive attitude toward higher authority and had uncomfortable encounters with military bureaucracy and various doctrinaire senior officers. Lawrence formulated such a stance through his first-hand early experience at the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915-16. (Prior, 2009) Then, when Lawrence was called to help Major General Charles Townshend in the specific task of negotiating with the Turks during the siege of Kut al-Amara, 1915-1916, he saw the fruits of poor planning, superciliousness and lofty British disdain for the enemy. (Gardner, 2014) Lawrence viewed such a British military moment in the Middle East as a 'despicable mess' and portrayed it as 'staggering incompetence'. These close encounters made Lawrence sceptical about the outcome of the war. Yet some leaders, including Brigadier General Clayton of the intelligence service at Arab Bureau in Cairo and especially General Edmond Allenby commanded Lawrence's deep respect and loyal service. General Allenby and Lawrence maintained an

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40 General Allenby's nickname was 'the Bull or Bloody Bull' but he was known as an intelligent and moral soldier.

especially strong relationship based on mutual trust. Lawrence made significant promises to Allenby and then endured tremendous hardship to keep them to the extent he could do so. Lawrence was always attentive to the danger of disappointing Allenby and on occasions took very serious personal risks to avoid letting his commander down. (Walker, 2018) Allenby in turn 'rode Lawrence on the loosest of reins'. Allenby continued to view Lawrence as indispensable. He provided him with goals and objectives and allowed the young commander to reach them in his own way. (Korda, 2011) Allenby-Lawrence mutual respect was the most important relational factor that enhanced Lawrence's performance as a British liaison officer with the Arab Army.

Lawrence's own subtlety of mind and good judgement when considering intersecting political and cultural/religious problems came out during the war. Lawrence had Hashemite political aspirations at heart and genuinely served as their strongest advocate in British circles especially when initially vying for British military resources and later for political understanding. (Faulkner, 2016) Lawrence gained the trust of the Arab Revolt's leaders. He passionately identified with Arab aspirations and became more loyal to Arab independence than anything else in the war. (Anderson, 2014) Moreover, British leadership knew of Lawrence's commitment to Arab freedom, and always saw it as an asset but not a guide for policy. In spite of his special loyalty to the Arab cause he never forgot that he was a British officer first and foremost, 'No man ever like Lawrence tried harder to serve two masters than Lawrence' and he was not unsuccessful. (Korda, 2011 and Anderson, 2014)

Lawrence was well aware of the progress of the work of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which basically concerned and interconnected the geopolitical status of post-war Arab lands (Fig. 11). It coincided, contradicted, and conflicted with his own integrity and moral responsibility and commitments towards the principles of the Arab Revolt campaign.

Interestingly, the ongoing special deliberations of the Sykes-Picot Agreement took place on board the battleship *Northbrook* as it was cruising the warm water at Suez. On board were Sir Mark Sykes, Colonel Wilson, Georges Picot and Louis Massignon, Picot's political advisor on Arab and Islamic affairs and a delegate on the Anglo-French committee of the Sykes-Picot agreement. Sir Mark

Sykes designated Massignon to be in charge of editing the records of the historic sessions of Sykes-Picot meeting held on board of the battleship in the days 16-20 May 1917. King Hussain and his son Faisal joined the party on board of the *Northbrook* for official talks one year after the endorsement of Sykes-Picot secret accord! It was the first ever meeting of a long liaison between Faisal and Massignon. (Waardenburg, 2005)

It was not clear to what extent King Hussain and Prince Faisal were briefed or made aware of the effects of the already one-year old secret accord of Sykes Picot on the future of their campaign. However, Lawrence seems to have felt morally obliged to confide to Prince Faisal and the mutually trusted close circle of lieutenants an unauthorized revelation of the secret Sykes-Picot agreement for British and French domination of post-war Arab lands while it was still a classified state secret! However, General Allenby was of the same mind and later made it clear that Faisal should have been told about the Sykes-Picot Agreement at some point. (Korda, 2014 and Anderson, 2014)

General Allenby's troops advanced and captured Jerusalem as planned for Christmas on 9 December 1917. Unlike Kaiser Wilhelm II's entry into Jerusalem on horseback in 1898, General Allenby dismounted and headed a solemn procession of representatives of British and Dominion forces and on 11 December 1917 entered Jerusalem through the Jaffa Gate on foot out of respect for the Holy City venerated by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This reflected his desire to avoid having his campaign being presented as a religious war. (Ulrichsen, 2010)

In his official proclamation of martial law in Jerusalem Allenby stated:<sup>41</sup>

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41 Upon entering, Allenby reportedly made the remark 'only now have the crusades ended!' Although, the Press Bureau, Department of Information in London, immediately issued a D-Notice to the British press dated 15 November 1917, officially instructing news editors not to publish or broadcast items on specified subjects for reasons of national security: 'the undesirability of publishing any article, paragraph or picture suggesting that military operations against Turkey in any sense as a Holy War, a modern Crusade, or anything whatever to do with religious questions' (National Archive Kew. Notice D.607 to the Press. FO/395/152, 15 December 1917).

Soon after the London *Punch*, a British weekly magazine of humour and satire, published a memorable cartoon to mark Allenby's achievements with the caption 'The Last Crusade'. Allenby's 'Khaki Crusade' and statement introducing a critical

Since your city is regarded with affection by the adherents of three of the great religions of mankind and its soil has been consecrated by the prayers and pilgrimages of multitudes of devout people of these three religions for many centuries. Therefore, do I make it known to you that every sacred building, monument, holy spot, shrine, traditional site, endowment, pious bequest, or customary place of prayer of whatsoever form of the three religions will be maintained and protected according to the existing customs and beliefs of those to whose faith they are sacred ... The hereditary custodians at the gates of the Holy Sepulchre have been requested to take up their accustomed duties in remembrance of the magnanimous act of the Caliph Omar, who protected that Church. (Gilbert, 1924)

Therefore, Lawrence and Allenby hoped to enable Faisal and the Sharifian forces to enter Damascus first to consolidate their position and to invalidate and nullify the Sykes-Picot Agreement. Due to the understanding of the political and historical significance of capturing Damascus in this war (Wheeler, 1935), Allenby ordered advancing British-led troops to skirt around Damascus. Damascus was finally captured on 30 September 1918 and facilitated Prince Faisal's victorious entry into Damascus on 1 October 1918 as a liberator and established Arab Hashemite-British political control and influence in the region. (Ulrichsen, 2010) Having captured Damascus Faisal and Allenby commanded Lawrence to assist the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in advancing into northern Syria and capturing more Ottoman territory in Syria. Finally, they fought the Battle of Aleppo, five days before the Armistice of Mudros. (Faulkner, 2016 and Walker, 2018)

### **BARSOUM-FAISAL'S FIRST ENCOUNTER IN DAMASCUS**

Soon after the victorious entry of Damascus by Prince Faisal and his Arab Army on 1 October 1918, Barsoum took the opportunity of the

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epistemic connection with Richard Coeur de Lion (1157-1199) and a continuation and 'successful' conclusion to the Crusades of the eleventh and fourteenth centuries (*Punch*, 19 December 1917, p. 415).



*Fig. 15. Sir Herbert Samuel, head of the British administration, seated centre, with Jerusalem Church leaders and British officials, 1922.*

*Seated, L to R: Superior of the Coptic Convent; Aphram Barsoum, Metropolitan of the Syrian Orthodox Church; Damian I, Greek Orthodox Patriarch; Sir Herbert Samuel, High Commissioner; Yeghishe Tourian, Armenian Orthodox Patriarch; Abbot of the Abyssinian Convent.*

*Standing, L to R: qanwas (patriarchal aide), Captain R F C Monkton, ADC; S S Davis, Treasurer; Sir Gilbert Clayton; Archdeacon Stacy Waddy; Dr Rennie Macinnes, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem; Norman Bentwich, Attorney-General; Ronald Storrs, Governor of Jerusalem; Harry Lake, Assistant Governor of Jerusalem; qanwas (Patriarchal aide); qanwas (patriarchal aide). (Courtesy of Viscount Herbert Samuel, Memoirs, Cresset Press[1945]).*

presence of his friends and relatives who were within the entrusted circle of Faisal's lieutenants in the Sharifian army to liaise and arrange for an early meeting with Faisal to congratulate the young prince on his victories. Especially, he sought to tender and convey in person and on behalf of his patriarch and the Syrian Orthodox community due thanks and appreciation to Faisal and his father, Al-Sharif al-Hussain bin Ali, for their unprecedented, honourable, humanitarian, concern, compassion and conciliatory gestures toward Christians, especially Syrian Orthodox and the Armenian Christians in their hours of need.<sup>42</sup> Correspondences reflecting such humanitarian initiatives and

<sup>42</sup> Sharif al-Hussain bin 'Ali offered to personally finance a major contingency relief program to relocate the destitute Christians to the safety of Egypt, and (Personal communication liaised with the courtesy of the office of prince El-Hassan bin Talal in Amman with the Dr Hind Abu al-Shaer the curator of the

gestures between Al-Sharif al-Hussain bin Ali and his son Faisal the Commander-in-Chief of the Arab Army can be found in various issues of *Al-Qibla*.

A formal but amicable meeting was soon arranged for Barsoum the Syrian Orthodox Bishop of the Levant with Prince Faisal, the Commander-in-Chief of Arab Army. Nicholas Thabit Abdul-Nour, Barsoum's cousin and Faisal's lieutenant and aide-de-camp, liaised and made this very important bishop-prince encounter possible which was probably the first ever meeting between Faisal and a Church leader in the region. 'The Royal Hashemite Humanitarian Decree' (Fig. 14) was at the top of the agenda. Barsoum tendered his formal gratitude and that of his Patriarch Ignatius Elias III to the prince and through him to his father the Grand Sharif of Mecca. Bishop Barsoum was an eyewitness and reflected on the importance and effectiveness of such unprecedented, timely Hashemite humanitarian patronage and philanthropy which proved vital to the survival and well-being of countless destitute Christians who were on the move since the implementation of the Tehcir Law 1915 and lucky enough to survive their ordeal and reach the Shammar tribes' encampments. Barsoum shared with Faisal his experience of the smooth co-operation with the chiefs of the Shammar to effect a safe repatriation process.

The bishop and the prince went on to talk about the situation of the deportees in different refugee camps and their dire humanitarian situation, trauma, urgent needs, safety, and the uncertainty of their future. They also spoke about the direction and outline of policies of the Hashemite for the future of the region (Fig. 9 and 10). They discussed the potentialities of the region that embraced a wide swathe of the Arabic-speaking Ottoman provinces in Mesopotamia and the Levant where Christians of different denominations lived and co-existed for centuries in addition to the deportees that were still filling refugee camps in the region. The bishop and the prince were well aware that the situation was fluid and it was too early and unwise to forecast. They concluded their meeting with a mutual promise of future co-operation. Barsoum kept his usual contacts with his associates among Faisal's lieutenants and was well informed of the developments of the war and the political scene as it was unfolding. Although this

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Royal Hashemite Court Archive. Amman). This humanitarian initiative was announced in *Al-Qibla* (Bin Talal, 2016).

encounter was the first of long lasting Barsoum-Faisal relations, it seems to have left a fine impression on Faisal and formed a strong bond, thanks to the vital introduction and liaison role of Nicholas Thabit Abdul-Nour (Fig. 13) who was a close confidant to both Barsoum and Faisal. Some information trickled down through oral histories based on private conversations with Barsoum and Nicholas Thabit Abdul-Nour but no minutes or record of this official, amicable, and bonding meeting between Barsoum-Abdul-Nour-Faisal were found in any archive. However, considering the fact that Faisal only spent a couple of months in Damascus before departing to attend the Paris Peace conference, it is clear from the dispatches of French diplomats in the Levant, Istanbul and Rome informing the French authority of the arrival of Barsoum to Paris, that there pre-existed close and strong connection and liaison between Barsoum and Emir Faisal in Damascus (De Courtois, and Dinno, 2017).

#### **THE OPENING OF THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE 1919: THE VIEW FROM THE SALLE DE L'HORLOGE**

Paris, for so long the capital of the war and the virulent Spanish flu<sup>43</sup> epidemic (Spinney, 2017), was prepared to become the peace headquarters. There is no season of the year when Paris looked more

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43 Ironically, Sir Mark Sykes, the engineer of the Sykes-Picot secret accord 1916, which was drawn, concluded and signed during the War in May 1916 in good time for the Armistices in 1918, the Paris Peace Conference 1919 as a member of the British delegation, where he caught the Spanish Flu which did not leave him long to see his agreement which was at the core of peace negotiations in Paris being vibrantly implemented in peace time in the form of 'A Mandate System' of the League of Nations. Sir Mark Sykes died prematurely on 16 February 1919 at the age of 39. This was towards the end of the Spanish flu outbreak which killed more than 50 million people when it took hold at the end of the Great War. The Sykes-Picot accord was not the only living legacy of Sir Mark Sykes (Sykes, 2009). Almost 90 years after his death his body which was buried in a lead-lined coffin in the churchyard of St Mary's Church, Sledmere, Yorkshire, was exhumed in September 2008. Scientists believe his remains may have helped preserve the rare Spanish flu virus that will help piece together the DNA of Spanish flu, which could have a similar genetic structure to modern bird flu and for that matter COVID-19. Indeed, Sykes' virus could help prevent and combat a modern pandemic through the development of new drugs (*Podcast Pandemic: The Story of the 1918 Flu. How the flu pandemic of 100 years ago affected every corner of the world.* BBC World Service, first broadcast: Saturday 13 January 2018).

dismal; the scenery and the stage setting were not very impressive in those rainy days of January; it was a picture without colour. However, in the busy interiors of the impressive but war damaged great buildings that were devoted to the preparations for peace, there was an almost feverish activity. In short, the supreme moment had arrived when the most immense consultation of powers and of peoples that the world has ever seen was about to begin. However, it was a conference representing only one party to the war. So complete had been the defeat of the Central Powers that they were given no voice in deciding the terms of peace. (Horne and Austin 1923)

Two long months lapsed since the armistice before the Paris Peace Conference formally opened on Saturday 18 January, in the Salle de l'Horloge at the Quai d'Orsay, the French Foreign Ministry. The sombre scene as the seventy delegates were ushered in to meet for the first time was an impressive one. Noticeable among them was the picturesque figure of the head of Al-Hijaz delegation the Hashemite Emir Faisal, son of Al-Sharif al-Hussain bin Ali, the King of the Hijaz (Dahlan, 2018), with his flowing headdress falling on his shoulders, reminding one of the tremendous differences of opinion, ethnicity and of interests in the Near East. (Darby, 1919a, b)

The Allies permitted two months to drift before they even proceeded to consider the peace, which the armistice pledged. If there was a single moment in the twentieth century when it all might have been different this was the Paris 1919 moment. The Great War changed everything and finished in favour of the Allies. Now these statesmen were remaking the world in their own image. The 'Big Three' muddled on, for Clémenceau wanted one sort of peace, Lloyd George another, and Woodrow Wilson a third. The contradiction between their points of view became evident. One could not avoid a feeling of awe at the terrible responsibilities of the arduous task entrusted and shouldered by those statesmen. However, for the sake of their responsibility for the peace the gentlemen remained courteous but there was certainly no friendly feeling among them. (Andelman, 2008)

Monsieur Raymond Poincaré (1860-1934), the French conservative president of the Third Republic (1870-1940), who attempted to give that office some real power rather than an empty ceremonial role, took France to war and came out victorious to become the host of the Paris



Peace Conference. He opened the conference with a lengthy welcoming inaugural speech. Here are some extracts:

There is no need of further information or for special inquiries into the origin of the drama which has just shaken the world. The truth, bathed in blood, ... If, after long vicissitudes, those who wished to reign by the sword have perished by the sword, they have but themselves to blame; they have been destroyed by their own blindness. ... But justice is not inert, it does not submit to injustice. What it demands first, when it has been violated, are restitutions and reparations for the peoples and individuals who have been despoiled or maltreated ... after the frightful convulsions of these bloodstained years, ardently wishes to feel itself protected by a union of free peoples against the ever-possible revivals of primitive savagery (Horne and Austin 1923).

President Poincaré made sure not to conclude his address before highlighting the significance of 18 January in the French national calendar and collective psyche. The French insistence on the choice of such indignant French nostalgia for the opening day of the peace process may have contributed to its delay. With a sigh of relief Raymond Poincaré pointed out:

This very day forty-eight years ago, on January 18, 1871, the German empire was proclaimed by an army of invasion in the Château at Versailles. M. Poincaré said, ... was thus vitiated from its origin by the fault of its founders. Born in injustice, it ended in opprobrium. You are assembled in order to repair the evil that it has done and to prevent a recurrence of it. You hold in your hands the future of the world.

It is important to recall the salient passage of M. Poincaré's speech.

'You will,' he said, 'seek nothing but justice—justice that has no favorites—justice in territorial problems, justice

in financial problems, justice in economic problems.’  
... The time is no more when diplomatists could meet to redraw with authority the map of the empires on the corner of a table. If you are to remake the map of the world it is in the name of the peoples and on condition that you shall faithfully interpret their thoughts and respect the right of nations, small and great, to dispose of themselves, provided that they observe the rights equally sacred of ethical and religious minorities. ... While thus introducing into the world as much harmony as possible, you will, in conformity with the fourteenth of the propositions unanimously adopted by the Great Allied Powers, establish a general League of Nations which will be a supreme guarantee against any fresh assaults upon the right of peoples.

Then President Poincaré concluded with a final remark:

You are assembled in order to repair the evil that it has done and to prevent a recurrence of it. You hold in your hands the future of the world. I leave you, gentlemen, to your grave deliberations, and I declare the Conference of Paris open.

President Wilson followed with his speech, during which the nomination of a permanent president was announced as the first order of business. President Wilson proposed Monsignor Georges Clémenceau as President of the Paris Peace Conference. Wilson said:

I have the great honor to propose as definitive president of this conference the French Premier, M. Clémenceau. I do so in conformity with usage. I should do it even if it were only a question of paying homage to the French Republic, but I do it also because I desire, and you certainly desire with me, to pay homage to the man himself.<sup>44</sup>

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44 In his war speech to French Chamber of Deputies on 8 March 1918 Georges Clémenceau stated his conviction as a war premier by saying: ‘My home policy:

The motion, which proposed the nomination of Clémenceau for president, was seconded by Lloyd George of Britain and Baron Sonnino of Italy and accepted unanimously.

Having been nominated and endorsed as a president of the Conference, M. Georges Clémenceau stood to the applause of the plenipotentiaries to deliver his opening address:

We must hope that success will crown our efforts. This can only be if we have our ideas clear-cut and well defined. I said in the Chamber of Deputies some days ago, and I make a point of repeating the statement here, that success is possible only if we remain firmly united. We have come here as friends. We must pass through that door as brothers.

Let us try, gentlemen, to do our work speedily and well. I am handing to the Bureau the rules of procedure of the Conference, and these will be distributed to you all. I come now to the order of the day. The first question is as follows:

'The responsibility of the authors of the war.' The second is thus expressed: 'Penalties for crimes committed during the war.' The third is: 'International legislation in regard to labor'. The Powers whose interests are only in part involved are also invited to send in memoranda in regard to matters of all kinds-territorial, financial, or economic-which affect them particularly. These memoranda should be addressed to the general secretariat of the Conference. This system is somewhat novel. Our desire in asking you to proceed thus is to save time. All the nations represented here are free to present their claims. You will kindly send in these memoranda as speedily as possible, as we shall then get on with the work which we shall submit for your consideration.

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I wage war; my foreign policy: I wage war. All the time I wage war.' This earned him the reputation of being 'the grim Tiger', 'Père de la Victoire' and framer of the post-war Treaty of Versailles (Clémenceau, 1968, 1973).

Soon after the opening ceremonies the big four, their advisers and staff followed the pre-agreed agenda for the proceedings with special priority and concentration on Germany and the settlement the various and complex of European affairs.

Many unexpected difficulties faced the conference. One month after the opening day Clémenceau was shot by an anarchist ‘assassin’ on 19 February 1919. Seven shots were fired through the back panel of his car—one striking him in the chest. This kept Clémenceau out of the conference until 1 March. (Clémenceau, 1973)

Until 24 March 1919 the Chamber of Deputies or the Council of Ten (heads of government and their foreign ministers) were running the conference; the Council of Four (le Conseil des Quatre) which President Wilson called into being, resumed the leadership of the Conference to speed up matters.

Diplomacy and statecraft were the order of the day during the first four months of the conference. With his experience of war and peace conferences Georges Clémenceau became convinced by diplomacy and statecraft; he added that: ‘War is too important a matter to be left to the military.’<sup>45</sup> (Clémenceau, 1968 and 1973)

The big four concentrated on finalizing the treaty of Versailles the first and most significant of the five Parisian treaties and establishing the League of Nations. There was symbolic importance in bringing the defeated Germany to the Palace of Versailles, where the German Emperor had first been installed. It was a painful French national episode President Poincaré highlighted in his opening address, stating that:

This very day forty-eight years ago, on January 18,  
1871, the German Emperor [Wilhelm II (1871-1918)]

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45 One day before the finale of the Paris Peace Conference Clémenceau ‘threw in the towel’. His successors, Alexandre Millerand (1859-1943) who obviously, empowered with the resolution of San Remo reversed, abrogated and turned the French Middle Eastern Policy under Clémenceau, disrespected the Faisal-Clémenceau agreement and re-handed the affairs in the Levant to military administration. General Gourand and his successors thereafter were given *carte blanche*, to implement and maintain the League of Nations ‘mandate system by force. This immediately culminated in fighting their Great War’ allies the Arab Army of King Faisal I, who together with the British were instrumental in liberating the Levant and capturing Damascus. To capture and control Damascus the French had to ignore Clémenceau-Faisal agreement and defeat Faisal at the battle of Maysalun and force his exile from Syria (Al-Husri, Sati’, 1964, 1966).

was proclaimed by an army of invasion in the Château at Versailles.

By signing the treaty of Versailles, the Paris Conference achieved its main priority after which the big four handed on the chairmanship to their foreign ministers to deal with the proceedings. With respect to the end date of the peace conference it was noted:

Although the senior statesmen stopped working personally on the conference [after the signing of Versailles Treaty] on June 28, 1919, the formal peace process did not really end until July 1923, when the Treaty of Lausanne was signed. (Neiberg, 2017)

#### **BARSOUM AT THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE**

Essentially, Barsoum was fully convinced that ‘my kingdom is not of this world’ (John 18:36). Therefore, he took no real interest in any earthly kingdom (Matt. 6:12-15, Rev. 11:15). He believed the Syrian Orthodox Church’s leadership had neither the intention nor design to create an earthly kingdom on a piece of land just carved out of the estate of ‘the sick man’ of Europe, as such a term might not necessarily reflect sound historical reality. (Worringer, 2004) Nor thought Barsoum, one could feasibly or realistically be possible, let alone sustainable. Nor, given the history, could he wholeheartedly rely on any earthly power for full, permanent, and meaningful protection. Obviously, the French historically, under the Capitulations, protected the emerging indigenous Catholic Churches and sustained a considerable presence of French religious orders and sponsored schools in Mesopotamia and the Levant. (See dispatches by Wilkie Young, the British Vice-Council in Mosul 1909; Young, 1909.) Even the Church of the East may have benefited from the presence of Archbishop Benson of Canterbury’s Mission to Mesopotamia which had more than 25 clergy, with 5 to 6 at one time, mostly Oxbridge graduates, to look after their affairs. (Coakley, 1992) At the turn of the twentieth century the Church of the East may have tilted their reliance from the British sphere to the Russian Orthodox Church. (Gandy, 1987)

Obviously, the Syrian Orthodox Church and all its communities in the Middle East were under the Ottoman Empire for centuries, which consequently determined over time a limited range of allies. Despite their well-maintained neutrality in the war, they came out relatively worse among the diverse tapestry of communities who collectively formed the collateral damage of the Great War.

The Syrian Orthodox earthly home was on fire and its flock on the run. The problems at hand for the Churches' leadership were entirely based on the ability to maintain a peaceful regional co-existence and could only be settled satisfactorily and long term if considered and agreed on a regional basis. A concern was that any foreign or international concocted formula would be short lived temporary measures. However, in the complexities of the post-war transition period, the magnitude of the status of deportees, collateral damage, and the enormity of the Ottoman legacy, matters could not have been resolved regionally. The Syrian Orthodox leadership understood they had to think regionally and act internationally. Consequently, Patriarch Elias III decided to accept the invitation to participate at the Paris Peace Conference. The Patriarch confirmed that he would be represented by Mor Severus Barsoum, the metropolitan of Syria. After a visit to the Patriarch Elias III in Istanbul on ecclesial and temporal business, during which Patriarch Elias III had an audience with Sultan Mehmed VI Wahideddin (1918-1922) on 26 September 1919 and received his patriarchal *firman* (Dinno, 2017), Barsoum departed to France in good time to attend his scheduled presentation at the Paris Peace Conference.

To facilitate his travel to France, Barsoum visited the French High Commissions in Beirut, Constantinople, and Rome. At the French Embassy in Rome on 6 November 1919 Barsoum was received by Monsignor Charles Roux who help facilitate his trip to Paris and supplied him with an introduction letter to the Quai d'Orsay. In a telegram dated 7 November marked confidential, Roux announced Barsoum's arrival in Paris and recommended to take care not to offend Barsoum. Roux confirmed that Barsoum was close to Emir Faisal and that this was clear from his public speeches in Syria. Other confidential dispatches from officials at the French High Commission in Beirut and Constantinople to the Foreign Ministry in France all highlight the fact of amicable Barsoum-Faisal relations and recommended special

and friendly care of Barsoum. (For some of these documents and dispatches, see De Courtois, 2004, pp. 318-326)

Paris provided a unique experience and vital learning curve for Barsoum. It was an important opportunity to liaise and discuss with different statesmen, their advisers and members of different delegations. Minutes of their meetings are available in the relevant archives.

On 18 January 1919 Barsoum met the French President Raymond Poincaré; officers of the Foreign Office were in attendance. Again, in all the encounters of Barsoum with French officials the axis of Barsoum-Faisal relations was their dominant concern not the dire situation or political religious concerns of Barsoum's vulnerable community or Barsoum's mission.

Among the statesmen that Barsoum also met at Paris Peace Conference was the Greek premier, Eleftherios Venizelos<sup>46</sup> (1864-1936), the most colourful of statesmen. Barsoum was aware of the stand of Venizelos, who presented the Greek case and territorial claims before the Council of Ten earlier on 3 and 4 February 1919. Venizelos-Barsoum shared the same concerns regarding the indigenous autochthonous communities living in Asia Minor, under Turkish rule. In his presentation Venizelos cited Article 12 of Woodrow Wilson's 14 points and emphasized that:

The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are under Turkish rule should be assured undoubted security of life and absolute unmolested opportunity for autonomous development.

They discussed essential liaison at the Conference to highlight the plight and the future of Ottoman Christian communities, their assured security and resettlement. (Kitromilides, 2008)

Barsoum's second encounter with Prince Faisal at Paris, provided another welcome opportunity for both Barsoum and Prince Faisal to consolidate their relations and co-operative action.

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<sup>46</sup> Venizelos, eight times Prime Minister of Greece, serving from 1910 to 1920 and from 1928 to 1933. Venizelos had such profound influence on the internal and external affairs of Greece that he is credited with being 'the maker of modern Greece' and is still widely known as the 'Ethnarch' (Kitromilides, 2008).

The Hijaz delegations to the Peace Conference were headed by Prince Faisal and consisted of his lieutenants/advisors. Those who appeared in the picture (Fig. 5) were Rustim Haidar (1889-1940) Lebanese, one of the founders of al-Fatat. He was the only member of the Hijaz delegation to attend with Faisal the opening section of the Paris Conference on 15 January 1919. Later Haidar held various key cabinet positions in Iraq (Safwat, 1988), Nuri al-Sa'id (1888-1958) Iraqi member of *Al-'Abid* and 14 times Prime Minister of Iraq, Tahsin Qadri (1892-1986), Syrian, of al-Fatat, and lifelong private secretary of Faisal I (al-Jamil, 2018) and Lawrence of Arabia (1888-1935). The delegation was later joined in Paris by al-Ghusein, Fâ'iz (1883-1968) (al-Ghusein, 1939), Awni Abd al-Hadi (Qasimia, 2002), Jamel Mardan (1895-1960) and Ahmad Qadri founders of al-Fatat. (Qadri, 1956)

The presence of Faisal and the apparent backing of Britain, as he departed Beirut to Marseille on board HMS *Gloucester*, the British Royal Navy cruiser, raised an unsettling concern and objections by French Minister of Foreign Affairs Stephen Jean-Marie Pichon. (Darby, 1919a) Lawrence of Arabia was a member of the British delegation who lived in the hotel wing of Faisal and his delegation. He was often seen with Faisal, Barsoum and, at times, Louis Massignon. In their flowing gowns in and out of Quai d'Orsay, or along the Champs Elysées accompanying members of the Hijaz delegation, they attracted the attention of participants at the conference and became familiar figures during the Paris Peace Conference. Especially, at the time of the protracted negotiations between Faisal with Georges Clémenceau.

Faisal's presence in Paris sent chills down the spine of French politicians who thought France's loss in the Middle East would be comparable to that of India. The grave concern and worries of French public opinion were reflected clearly in reams of editorials and columns in a plethora of French newspapers such as *Echo de Paris*, *Démocratie nouvelle*, *Gaulois*, *Matin*, *Petit Parisien*, *Pays*, *Temps* ... etc. (Darby, 1919b)

Faisal and his Hijaz delegation were very impressed and appreciated Barsoum's genuineness, judiciousness, and deep understanding of the art of realpolitik at play. They saw in his rational patriotic stands on behalf of his people a consolidating champion and ardent supporter for their cause too and the future for co-existence in the region. They



rallied behind him and delegated Barsoum to deliver joint speeches on their behalf. Faisal and his Hijaz delegation were affectionately impressed with his oratory at the Conference and called Barsoum ‘the Bishop of the Arabism indeed you are Priest of Time’ (*Matran al-‘Aruba wa-Qiss al-Zaman*).<sup>47</sup> The cause of his grimly repressed people, many of whom were refugees, meant Barsoum was not flirting with any political entity at the Paris Conference for a narrow interest of his own. Barsoum seems to have gained adequate insight on what was politically fomenting and intended to forecast or offer a few words of warning. For the scholar Barsoum it was essential to utilize his time in consulting the Syriac and Arabic manuscripts collections at Paris libraries, and also visiting Parisian bookshops to acquaint himself with recent publications and purchase books. (Soumi, 2020)

**THE COMPOSITION AND DISCOURSE OF BARSOUM’S MEMORANDUM:  
A CAREFULLY CRAFTED, COMPREHENSIVE, AND PRAGMATIC TEXT.**

In his opening address of Paris Conference, Clémenceau invited and encouraged all participants to submit memoranda:

The Powers whose interests are only in part involved are also invited to send in memoranda in regard to matters of all kinds-territorial, financial, or economic-which affect them particularly. These memoranda should be addressed to the general secretariat of the Conference. This system is somewhat novel. (Horne, 1923)

These written memoranda and attached documentation were considered the most important vehicles of advocacy expected to be presented by delegations at the Conference. In theory almost all were given an equal opportunity to an official interview with the relevant committees of officials, meet high level and influential politicians, deliver a speech or two on different occasions, to present their case, grievances, and to submit a dossier including a written memorandum and supporting appendices. The secretariat of the conference was inundated

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47 See Behnam, 1959; Ibrahim, 1973, 1996; Saka, 1985a, 2006; Beth-Shmuel, 2008 and Dinno, 2017.

with the sheer volume of submitted memoranda due to the number of official plenipotentiaries who attended sessions of the conference and members of the walking delegations who picketed the railings and besieged the Quai d'Orsay throughout the conference in Paris.

Expectedly, the memoranda and their appendices are succinct evaluations of the situation: desire for self-determination, the losses sustained, and list of damages, demands of rights, war reparations and compensation. (For an example of such documents, see Barsoum, 1920 a, b) Memoranda were the main and only lasting documentary evidence which informed and summarised each case, making them accessible to officials for consideration and potential implementation, and important tools for informed analysis by future historians. (Almond and Lutz, 1935)

Barsoum was very lucky with the timing of his arrival at the conference in Paris in November at a vital stage when the Near East was at the forefront of the agenda and the Faisal-Clémenceau protracted negotiations were underway in earnest. Nothing was lost in translation for Barsoum. He read the Treaty of Versailles thoroughly and concentrated on understanding the clauses of the covenant of the League of Nations. Barsoum became convinced that, in effect, the agreed concept of the Mandate System and its specific provisions concerning the Near East (article 22 of the League Covenant) rendered the Wilsonian notion of 'self-determination' dead in the water, together with the dreams of many ethno-religious communities in the Near East. Barsoum realised that an unspecified era under the Mandate System was the only way forward for the Near East under the auspices of Britain and France. Bearing in mind the news of the negative reception of the League in America, the 'godfather' of both the League of Nations and self-determination, and the demise of Russia's political role, Barsoum endeavoured to understand the detail of the operational mechanisms of the Mandate System and the *valeurs et vannes de sécurité et de liberté* that governed the implementations of this untested alien system in a volatile region. He was particularly interested in the protection of indigenous communities under the League of Nations, such as the right for inhabitants of any territory governed under mandate to petition the League of Nations if they believed that the stipulations in Article 22 of the League Covenant or mandate texts were being violated. (Pedersen, 2015)

Barsoum read or had a resumé of most of the memoranda and accompanying maps that reflected a claustrophobic, overlapping

geopolitical ambition already submitted by various Near Eastern delegations.<sup>48</sup> Most of these submissions echoed the vocabulary of President Woodrow Wilson's principles with the promise of justice, noting that 'every people, whether large or small, deserved self-determination.' Wilson's speeches had been translated and printed in full in Arabic newspapers soon after its delivery in 1917. (Manela, 2007)

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48 A list of relevant Memoranda submitted by plenipotentiary and received officially by the Conference secretariat and some were distributed privately by member of the 'Walking Delegations':

1—Memorandum by Prince Faisal was among the first to submit his memorandum as early as January 1919. For full text see Faisal, 1919; Miller, 1924.

2—Memorandum of the Armenian entitled: 'The Armenian Question Before the Peace Conference'. Submitted by Avetis Aharonian and Boghos Nubar Pacha on February 26, 1919. Probably the longest memorandums contain 35 pages, reflected only on the Armenian plight and demand for the establishment of independent Armenia, with no mention of embracing within Armenia any other Christian communities who had equally suffered. (Aharonian and Nubar, 1919) They claimed the recognition of an independent Armenian state, based on Article 61 of the Treaty of Berlin 1878. (Wise, 1923) Comprising territories know as Russian Armenia, the territories of Armenian Republic of the Caucasus and Turkish Armenian with territories span seven Ottoman Vilayets, in addition to Cilicia which provide the vital seaport of Mersina and Yumurtalik (Ayas) on the Mediterranean.

3—Memorandum of Chérif Pasha, Président de la Délégation Kurde à la Conférence de la paix, Memorandum sur les revendications du peuple Kurd, dated Paris, March 22, 1919, 15 pages. Sherif Pasha argued that 'in virtue of the Wilsonian principle everything pleads in favour of the Kurds for the creation of a Kurd state, entirely free and independent.' In the memorandum, he also outlined and justified his delineation of Kurdistan (Sherif, 2001; Diener and Hagen, 2010).

4—Memorandum by Muhamad Rashid Rida to Lloyd George. A statement of Arab aspirations for unity and independence by an Arab Reformer chaired the first Syrian Arab Congress in 1920. FO 371/4232/105317, dated 25 June 1919.

5—Memorandum/Petition of the Transcaucasia/Persian walking delegation member of the Church of the East to the Peace Conference (June 1919) The document elaborated on the numerous promises made by British, Russian and French military officers and diplomats; Some of the details are described in Eva Haddad (1996). A copy of this Memorandum can be found in the Hoover Library.

6—Memorandum by Namik, Said A and R Nedjib (walking delegation member of the Chaldean Church) entitled: 'La Question assyro-chaldéenne devant la conférence de la paix' dated July 16, 1919. Paris: private distribution to Peace Conference Delegations. A copy can be found in the Hoover Library, Stanford University. (Almond and Lutz 1935)

7—Memorandum by Patriarch Peter Hoyek of the Maronite Church the highest ecclesiastic of Syriac Orient attended the conference in his temporal rather than ecclesiastical capacity. His memorandum dated 25 October 1919 demanded the establishment of Greater Lebanon with the possible autonomous or semi-autonomous [Maronia] a Maronite mountainous entity, with no mention whatsoever of any other Christian community in Greater Lebanon. See (Hoyek, 1919).

Barsoum—through his friendship with Prince Faisal and his acquaintance with members of the Hijaz delegation (Fig. 5)—frequently met with and had the opportunity of conversation, discussion and debate about the proceedings, resolutions and business accomplished by the conferences so far, especially issues concerning the future settlement of the Near East. Most importantly, he joined special and amicable sessions almost on a daily basis with Lawrence and Louis Massignon, both members of the delegations of their countries. Luckily, they were both accessible to Barsoum due to their continual presence with Faisal and his delegations. Lawrence and Louis Massignon were well informed of the process of the conference, the evolving Near East situations and of Faisal's plan, its reception by their governments, Britain, and France the only remaining influential bipolar political relationship of the Entente. Lawrence and Massignon were very helpful for Barsoum to understand the ongoing realpolitik because of their dual responsibilities and sympathies to Faisal's interest and that of their respective countries in the region which were governed and bound by the agreement of Sykes-Picot 1916. Added to that were all of Barsoum's numerous opportunities of interviews, meetings, discussions and networking with many members of the British, French, Italian and American delegations, on issues of concern specifically to him and his Syriac Orient communities and the wider Middle East.

Barsoum became animated with insight into the intrigues of power politics, diplomacy and the ongoing challenge of power reconfiguration and re-entrenching in the Near East. These were essential deeply educational encounters for an inexperienced young bishop. This steep learning curve helped Barsoum rationalise his understanding of the realpolitik and the stipulations of the League of Nations, and the potential of its Mandate System regarding the future governance of the Ottoman Arab provinces. Barsoum realized that nearly every Christian who lived in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire, together with the deportees who were then living in refugee camps in Mesopotamia and the Levant, would almost all be living under the Mandate System directly administered by France and Britain for an indefinite initial period. Barsoum was more rational, politically aware and astute regarding what was and was not possible or available in the new geopolitical reality for the indigenous Christian communities. Barsoum reckoned that one must

be realistic about their reality and not endeavour to challenge futilely the shackles of geopolitics of their homeland.

Therefore, the elaborate demands in many of the memoranda submitted and the accompanying documents, which were based upon a misleading concept of self-determination, were neither realistic nor acceptable in the evolving geopolitical climate which would challenge the numerous interests in the region, let alone sustainable in a geographical sense.

The obvious absence of official representatives of Eastern Christianity posed a great dilemma for Barsoum, who found himself the sole representative of the Syriac Orient<sup>49</sup> at the Paris Conference. Especially official plenipotentiaries of the Syriac-speaking communities who were expected to attend and represent the Church of the East, Chaldean Church and Syrian Catholic Church were almost equally affected by the war and its aftermath and had sustained martyrdom and losses. (Barsoum, 1920a, b) A sizeable percentage of these communities were ethno-religiously cleansed, displaced, and were then living an uncertain future in refugee camps in the Levant and Mesopotamia—both war-torn territories with no sovereignty. Therefore, their voice should have been heard, cases made known, and promises translated into international law in peacetime.

Added to that, the Entente completely isolated the Vatican in diplomatic terms by barring the Holy See and its representatives from attending and participating in the Paris Peace Conference. This deprived a significant Catholic voice of peace from being heard. This obviously disadvantaged European and Eastern Christians from a collective Christian stand of value expected in this pre-cumenical era that was proportionate to their suffering and their future physical and spiritual security in the region. (Benedict XV, 1920; de Dreuzy, 2016)

Barsoum endeavoured to establish some form of pragmatic co-operative collective Syriac Orient approach, led by Patriarch Hoyek

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<sup>49</sup> Apart from Patriarch Hoyek, Barsoum was the only official plenipotentiary in attendance in Paris on behalf of his Patriarch and his Syriac people. Surma Khanoum the official Plenipotentiary of the Church of the East reached London but was not able to attend the Conference. Surma's peace mission merits further study. (Rosie Llewellyn-Jones, 2019) The patriarchs of both the Syrian Catholic and the Chaldean Churches were in the Vatican during the conference but did attend. This paper will deal with these issues later.

and incorporating members of the Syriac Orient delegation who represented a wide spectrum of the home and diaspora of the Church of the East and also the Chaldean Church, together with some students who were present in Paris. (Yoosuf, 2017) (For a list of members of these delegations, see Beth-Shmuel, 2008.)

Barsoum's endeavours, unfortunately, to form such a united Syriac Orient front were in vain. After lengthy discussion, no one was interested or able to form an effective and collective Oriental Christian stand, due to the fact that Hoyek<sup>50</sup> was bound by his mandate for Greater Lebanon and a possible autonomous area of the Maronites. Therefore, he was not disposed to any collaborative work with the rest of the Syriac Orient, nor even his relatively lengthy memorandum or the composition of his delegation acknowledged the presence of any other indigenous Christian in Greater Lebanon. The Syriac Orient 'delegation' had still not abandoned the concept of self-determination and its political potential for their communities, in spite of its diverse localities. This was clearly reflected in their various separate memoranda. (For an eyewitness narrative of the convergence of views and efforts exerted by Barsoum among the Syriac Orient delegation, see original manuscript, Yoosuf, 2017).

Allegedly, there were also some pragmatic co-operative approaches at Paris between the Armenians and the Kurds, despite the history of these two nations who have frequently lived side by side. They may well have submitted a joint political communiqué to the secretariat of the Conference—the news of which appeared in the Turkish newspaper *Al-Sabah* on 24 February 1920.

Mindful of the equal sufferings of all Christians in the region, Barsoum felt obliged to include and represent the absent spectrum of the Syriac Orient of Mesopotamia and the Levant at the Conference. Confirming their historical presence as autochthonous communities in the region, he affirmed the collective indigeneity of the Syriac Orient

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50 Considering the fact that Patriarch Hoyek of the Maronite Church attended in his temporal capacity as *pôle troc* of the drive for the establishment of Greater Lebanon with the possible autonomous or semi-autonomous Maronia, a Maronite mountainous entity in the *Mutasarrifiyya* administrative districts of Mount Lebanon. See the sections in this chapter dealing with the genre of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs representations at the Paris Conference: The Maronite Church, Church of the East, Chaldean, the Syrian Catholic Churches representations or the lack of it merit further research.

by referring to the Syrians, Syro-Chaldeans and Assyrians, maintaining the upper valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia as the geographical domains of their homeland. So, if and when the concept of self-determination was to be implemented then, on indigeneity bases, the Syriac Orient should be considered first. Meanwhile Barsoum demanded the emancipation of some of the cities so refugees could be repatriated. Barsoum also confirmed their human losses at '90,000 Syrians and 90,000 Nestorians and Chaldeans'. (Barsoum 1920a,b, Abdul-Nour, 2016, Dinno, 2017) (For a list of damages and losses in lives and properties sustained by the Syrian Orthodox Community during 1915-1918, see Fig. 17.)

More importantly, the magnitude of the cause and plight of the Christian Orient had been widely but erroneously known and presented as Armenian-specific. One of Barsoum's priorities at the conference was to rectify and verify this misleading information. His passion was enshrined forcefully in all his discourses, interviews, and memoranda. (Barsoum, 1920a, c) Barsoum confirmed that all Christians had suffered and were victims in equal proportion. Conveniently, the Christian massacres were referred to in official documents, diplomatic dispatches, the press, and literature as being only an Armenian cause, Armenian persecution, Armenian question and Armenian massacre.<sup>51</sup> Such political practice was and still is uncondusive to frank and open debate of the truth and denies the due justice to the rest of Christians in the region. Barsoum did not hesitate to state the truth clearly in his memorandum:

We regret bitterly that this ancient and glorious race which has rendered so many valuable services to civilization should be so neglected and even ignored by European press and diplomatic correspondence, in which all Turkish massacres are called 'Armenian Massacres' while the right name should have been 'The Christian Massacres' since all Christians have suffered in the same degree. (Barsoum, 1920a)

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51 For a sample of official documents, diplomatic dispatches and literature then available in different languages relating to the Armenian question, see Great Britain, Parliament, *The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, Miscellaneous No. 31* (1916), London: HMSO (Rustem Bey, 1918; Lepsius, 1919; Andonian, 1920; Hovannisian, 1968).

Barsoum's memorandum reflected a humanitarian solidarity of equality for all the Syriac Orient. He demanded and confirmed, on their behalf, their rights, welfare, and peaceful existence. He asked, 'for indemnities in compensation of our damages', and for 'the assurance for our national and religious future'. (Barsoum, 1920 a, b)

In effect, in his succinct and reasonable six-point memorandum he set up a collective benchmark, if and when the Syriac Orient cause and case were discussed at any fringe conferences of the Paris Peace Conferences, whether at the San Remo Conference or the London Conference which eventually produced the Treaty of Sèvres (10 August 1920), which was eventually rejected by the Turkish government, or then at League of Nations or any other regional or international body. Barsoum was very careful to embrace the entire Syriac Orient spectrum clearly and specifically and independently in his memorandum, avoiding the use of highly confusing cross-denominational terminology.

Barsoum intentionally delayed the submission of his memorandum (Barsoum, 1920a) until the end of the conference. He knew that the Entente, mainly Britain and France, was approaching the finale of the Conference without arriving at any final decision regarding the future settlements of the Near East. The final settlements were to be attempted at the forthcoming London Conference and at San Remo.

The Middle East was—and still is—a important geopolitical strategic region not only for the victors of the Great War but also for the other emerging world powers. Considering the plural ethno-religious mosaic in the Near East, the implementation then and now of the concept of self-determination fully to the satisfaction of all concerned will produce fragmentary nation-statelets with impaired sovereignty. It will provoke a plethora of potential political infighting that will create a perpetual intersection of geopolitical challenges and other state-building problems. Such political structures had not been catered for by the concept the League of Nations' Mandate System which was already ratified, endorsed, and enshrined at the time of signing of the treaty of Versailles 1919.

Consequently, Barsoum's pragmatic vision, altruism and inclusiveness were misunderstood. Therefore, we still hear sporadic voices considering and accusing Barsoum of not sharing with some of his Syriac Orient compatriots or their neighbours in the region the same support for the Wilsonian concept of self-determination. In



addition, he allegedly presented himself during his diplomatic mission to Paris and London as 'Assyrian' and then later changed his stand. (Barsoum, 1936, 1952)

On the contrary, all the official headed letters with his signatures were consistent throughout and clearly indicative of who Barsoum was and who he was specifically representing at the Peace Conference. (See Figs 2, 6; Barsoum, 1920a, b, c, d.) Such documentary evidence dismisses any claim to the contrary that may have circulated since. Adding to that his scholarly monograph, which he published later entitled 'In the Name of the Nation', empirically and in academic terms clarified without any shadow of doubt any controversial ambiguities regarding the name of the Syrian Orthodox Church that he belonged to and represented throughout his diplomatic mission. (Barsoum, 1936, 1952)

#### **BARSOUM'S PEACE MISSION TO LONDON**

London was the second 'port of call' of the Bishop Aphram Barsoum Peace Mission. His visit to London in February 1920 had importance and significance as a mission and should not be viewed in a vacuum. London in 1920 was the victorious imperial capital. Behind the ceremonial façade, Lloyd George's coalition government were preoccupied with containing the aftermath of the war and the economic and social impact of winning a war and losing a generation of youth (more than 700,000).<sup>52</sup> On the home front they had millions of people from the armed forces and associate industries that needed to be reintegrated into society and the economy. In addition to that they had to maintain the peace and prepare for the recruitment of a 900,000 strong 'British Occupation Army'.

It is important to be aware of the zeitgeist in London at this spring equinox of 1920. The year started after a white Christmas. Britain was covered with snow in some places up to 25cm and experienced harsh weather with a record temperature of -20°C. After a rather rough sea passage on the English Channel, a February chill welcomed Barsoum

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<sup>52</sup> Great Britain engaged 5,397,000 in the First World War, 703,000 were killed, 1,663,000 injured, total casualties 2,367,000. See Nicholson, 2001.

in London with a sky often extensively covered or overcast by low and dense cloud, surface wind at 15 to 25 mph.

1920 was not a normal, let alone a peaceful, year; it was an action-packed transition year. A close look at a panoramic view of the fluid political scene of London in February 1920 reveals that the capital of the empire represented a political bazaar frequented by all those who had an interest in the legacy of the Ottoman Empire including other collapsed empire, lobbying for and advocating their rights and interests which were dealt with by decision-making statesmen in what seems to be a continuous Peace Conference.

If one examines the diaries of the Royal Court of St James, Whitehall and Lambeth Palace, one will immediately realize that for Bishop Aphram Barsoum, who arrived unannounced in London seeking to meet the sovereign, prime minister, secretaries of state and the Archbishop of Canterbury, it was almost impossible to secure any meeting let alone accomplish any progress.

Logistically minded and familiar with London and Paris from his first research visit in 1913, he realized that advocacy is an effective tool of diplomacy and it should not be without style and media coverage. Barsoum secured central accommodation in the Waldorf Hotel in the Aldwych comparable to his hotel in Paris. An impressive grand Edwardian building in The Strand, of equal distance from the axes of his mission of advocacy, Whitehall, Lambeth Palace and the British Museum Library in Bloomsbury, Barsoum had chosen the Waldorf Hotel, one of the best addresses as his London residence and office where he held audiences, meetings and interviews in its impressive foyer and it appeared on all his letters as his London corresponding address. The Waldorf is now a five-star hotel which charges £250 or \$350 a night. For the same standard of service, the 1920 tariff was 40 pence a night with English breakfast. Being vegetarian, Bishop Barsoum, opted for a simple continental breakfast and paid 25 pence a night only! Barsoum was the first among the residents of the Waldorf to have his breakfast and browse through the daily English and French newspapers, keeping himself abreast of the unfolding current affairs.

Unlike the visit of Patriarch Ignatius Peter III/IV to London in 1874, Bishop Abdulla accompanied him and kept an almost hourly

diary for the entire journey.<sup>53</sup> With a little knowledge of London, you can easily decipher the places mentioned in the diary and organise an interesting tour to follow the footsteps of Patriarch Peter III/IV<sup>54</sup> mission in London.

After much research one could trace four pivotal axial points to Barsoum's peace mission in London in 1920.

### **BARSOUM IN PARIS AND LONDON—ENGAGING WITH THE MEDIA**

Lobbying, advocacy and media are an art and an academic discipline now taught at university. Barsoum seems to have developed such skill during his various advocacy contacts with successive Ottoman provincial governors and CUP officials in the Levant and Mesopotamia.

Realising that the media, especially newspapers, are effective tools for advocacy, Barsoum accepted interviews to a few leading newspapers in Paris and London. Wasting no time in London, soon after his arrival on 3 February 1920, Barsoum carefully selected his media interviews in London. The first among them given to *The Morning Post*. *The Morning Post* on Wednesday 4 February ran a feature with the title: 'Syria's

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53 The Diary was verified, serialized and published by Ignatius Zakka I Iwas in the Patriarchal Journal.

54 In London Patriarch Peter III/IV had a busy ecumenical schedule and packed social programme. He had many meetings with Archbishop Archibald Campbell Tait (1868-1882), Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State for India (1874-1878), two audiences with Queen Victoria and mingled with and was welcomed in London society. He attended theatres, classical music concerts and watched the famous Cambridge Oxford boat race on the Thames, a high occasion on the London social calendar. Peter III's portrait which was drawn from life by a Victorian artist who had never painted an Oriental before shows an imposing bust-length head and shoulders; to the front the portrait of Peter III is shown facing right in a traditional Patriarchal dress consisting of a black gown worn over it, with specific headdress and a fur scarf. The patriarchal portrait was presented to Lambeth Palace and still hangs with other portraits of the Lambeth collection of Anglican archbishops. Being one of only two non-Anglican portraits in Lambeth collection the other is for Abdullah II the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch. (Abdul-Nour, 2020) There are in excess of 150 biographies of Queen Victoria but none has mentioned her two consecutive audiences with Patriarch Peter III/IV. For the time of Patriarch Peter III/IV, see Peter III, 1875; Taylor, 2006 and 2013. In spite of the availability of interesting and unpublished archival data, so far no attempt seems to have been made to write the biography of Peter III/IV or Patriarch Abdullah II and their era!

Archbishop. Mesopotamia and its future', an edited version of the lengthy interview with Mor Severus Aphram Barsoum.

Rarely, we come across material written about Aphram Barsoum by an impartial commentator. Therefore, *The Morning Post* gives an insight of the thought, political perception and the reason for Barsoum's mission to London. Excerpts below cover most of what *The Morning Post* carried in its feature.

As they say: 'there is no second chance to give a first impression'. This was the first impression that Barsoum gave to the representative of *The Morning Post*, its editor and readers:

A picturesque figure has arrived in London in the person of Monsignor Severus Barsoum the Syrian Orthodox Archbishop of Syria who has come as the delegate of the Patriarch of Antioch is a handsome man with dark, humorous, dancing eyes and has a keen sense of humour. He was good enough to receive a representative of the *Morning Post* yesterday [3 February 1920] in the lounge of a fashionable London Hotel, where his violet turban, rich red soutane, and his long oriental black cloak were in striking contrast with the frock-coated Englishmen and gaily-dressed ladies who are its ordinary habitués.

Precise, transparent, to the point, Aphram Barsoum stated with confidence:

This is my second visit to London', he began 'I was here six years ago [in 1913] on academic mission', but (with a smile) other things than knowledge are at present occupying the minds of men, and my present mission may best be described as political and diplomatic. I have been sent by the Patriarch of Antioch, who resides at Mardin, in Mesopotamia, to draw the attention of the Allies to what my half-million co-religionists have suffered under the Turk.

He then drew the attention of readers to the French leg of his mission and his intention to match in London his success with statesmen in Paris.



Fig. 16. 'Décidé à en finir avec Fayçal'. The text is of a letter from General Henri Gouraud to General Mariano Goybet congratulating him on his victory and entry to Damascus on 24 July 1920 after the Battle of Meiseloun [Maysaloun]. The image upper left shows the folding-up of the Arab flag. (Photo courtesy of collection of General Goybet's family)

I have seen M. Poincaré<sup>55</sup> in Paris and I hope, during my stay in London, to lay my case before the heads of the Foreign and India office.

55 Monsignor Raymond Poincaré (1860-1934) Barsoum had an audience with Poincaré in January 1920. An interesting minute of their meeting survived in the French Archive.

Barsoum was not in the business of ‘mincing his words or beating about the bush’. With a command of language, clarity of vision, focused thought, and courage that he exhibited throughout the interview, he listed his main concerns and left nothing for speculations; the newspaper reported that:

The Archbishop, who speaks admirable French and has a Frenchman’s preciseness, stated that he has three special points to put before the British authorities. They are:

1. Remove the Turk entirely from Mesopotamia.  
After removing the Turk don’t leave the Kurd in his place ...
2. The Armenians, English People must remember, are not the only victim of the Turk.
3. Orthodox Syrian and Chaldeans have also suffered indeed; one hundred thousand of his own people have perished as the result of Turkish massacres.<sup>56</sup>

Mor Severus went with an apparent informed insight, analysing and forecasting unfolding situations as the Ottoman Empire was being partitioned by the Allies.

For Bishop Barsoum, Greater Syria was his parish. After the war Syria become a terrible tableau of large resettlement camps of the war-torn Syrian Orthodox communities and other vulnerable victims. A parish of orphans and widows came from societies that had been ravaged, where the welfare, rehabilitation and the current Syrian affairs had become inseparable. (Asfar, 2012)

He had also something to say about the general liquidation of the Turkish empire and the problems which are at present agitating Great Britain, France and the Arabs.

Aware of the remit of his mission and familiar with the aspirations of Arab politicians and public opinion in Syria, he had a chance to

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56 For a list of the then available statistics of Syrian Orthodox fatalities officially submitted to the Paris Peace Conference 1919 by Barsoum (Barsoum, 1920b), see Fig. 17.

meet and closely liaise and co-operate with Prince Faisal and his Hijaz delegation during his participation at the Paris Peace Conference stay in Paris. Barsoum met Faisal for the first time soon after Faisal entered Damascus with the Arab Army, on 3 October 1918, almost a month before the declaration of the Armistice in the final stages of the Great Arab Revolt against the Ottomans. (Rogan, 2015)

Aware of the fact that almost a year to the day after entering Damascus, Faisal announced on 5 October 1919 the establishment of an Arab constitutional government in Damascus (Barsoum, 1936; Al-Rihani, 1980), Barsoum started to elaborate on the convoluted political situation in Syria. *The Morning Post* wrote:

He [Barsoum] thinks the present line dividing Syria into spheres, one French, the other Arab, may become a serious danger line!

Barsoum spoke confidently and shared his intuition and understanding of the French design for Syria versus the state of the intra- and inter-Arab relations and the precarious position of Prince Faisal in Syria. *The Morning Post* reflected on this issue:

He [Barsoum] does not think that at the moment there is much chance of a really effective union between the Arabs of the King of the Hijaz and the Arabs of Syria, but who can tell what may happen in the future?<sup>57</sup>

Turning to Mesopotamia which was a cherished home and close to his heart, but more importantly as a shepherd, his mind was focused

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57 Indeed, shortly, the intuition and the reading of the political situation in Syria by Barsoum came true in less than six months. 'La bataille de Khan Maysaloun' of July 1920 was under way to ratify class A mandates granted to France at San Remo by force between the forces of the Arab Kingdom of Syria lead by General Yusuf al-'Azma (1884-1920) Minister of War and Chief of General Staff of the Hashemite monarch King Faisal I on one side, and General Marion Goybet leading the battle ready and militarily superior French army of the Levant under the command of General Henri Gourand on the other side. After a hard resistance and fight at the Battle of Maysalun 24 July 1920, Faisal was defeated and the French army under General Marion Goybet entered Damascus the day after on 25 July 1920, victorious and jubilant to have won a war against their Great War allies, who together with the British secured liberated Syria on behalf of the Entente. See congratulation letter from Gourand to Goybet (Fig. 16)..

on the welfare and prosperity of his flock dwelling along the Syriac corridors of Mesopotamia, especially in Mosul which was then a stable flagship of Syrian Orthodox archdioceses. Barsoum seemed to have had genuine desire to share his concerns with statesmen, politicians and above all the British public, whose sons were then stationed in Mesopotamia. The newspaper quoted his frank assertion:

As to Mesopotamia, he thinks that the British are making a mistake with their control over only one part of it and leaving the Turk still in the North!

The unsettling cause of Mosul and its future was close to his heart. Barsoum would not leave an opportunity without trading on what became later known as the ‘Mosul Problem’. (Beck, 1981; Shields, 2004) The destruction of Nineveh, one time capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the largest capital city in the ancient world in 612 BC, taught Maslawis a hard lesson. Since then, they had never allowed their city to be ransacked by advancing troops. Shrewd as they were they always negotiated and devised a peaceful conditional outcome, from the advent of Islam to their negotiated surrender in 2003.<sup>58</sup> The unprecedented fall

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<sup>58</sup> The advancing 101st Airborne Division (‘Screaming Eagles’), whose personnel are graduates of the US Army Air Assault School, on Mosul during the last stages of the War. Their motto, *Rendezvous With Destiny*, was put to the test as the desired truce negotiated surrender of Mosul. The ancient city of Mosul was the last major and pivotal city to surrender and be occupied in the Gulf War without the expected level of casualties. The exhilaration of the prize of occupation of Mosul without the anticipated bitter fighting to the last man and woman, triggered the premature, too conclusive, highly controversial and criticized view of the end to major combat operations in Iraq during the ‘Mission Accomplished’ speech by the American Commander-in-Chief on the aircraft carrier USS *Abraham Lincoln* on 1 May 2003. However, as history, especially military history, does not repeat itself, it disarms an informed analogy and analysis. Therefore, it is too difficult to comprehend and too early to reflect and find the truth behind the unprecedented fall and surrender of the city of Mosul on 9 June 2014. A city of two million inhabitants protected by more than 70,000 well equipped soldiers, policemen and security personnel crumbled in front of the smallest advancing force that ever endeavoured to capture the city throughout its long history. The true story of the extent of the drastic fall of Mosul, the permitted ruthless campaigns of ethno-religious cleansing of its autochthonous Christians, Yazidis and Muslims and the extent of its extensive destruction sustained during the liberation campaign, left the ancient city of Mosul without any skyline, raised the ancient city to the ground and reduced it to more than 15 million tons of ruins and rubble.



of Mosul in June 2014 was still an unfolding mystery! On the day the Armistice of Mudros 1918 was declared, the advancing British army reached Shirqat south of Mosul. The British army entered Mosul in peace without a bullet fired after a negotiated surrender with Mosul notables and the Turkish *wali*. Therefore, the city of Mosul and the entire Muslim and Christian inhabitants did not suffer the fate of other cities in Mesopotamia. The diverse socio-religious tapestry of Mosul emerged almost intact, which flourished, and considered as an essential resource and refuge for the entire Christian communities in other cities of the Ottoman Empire. Even before the end of the war, the geopolitical fate of Mosul was a burning issue and the main topic of discussions with all Maslawis that Barsoum met during his first visit to Mosul soon after his episcopal consecration in 1918. For Barsoum Mosul is a nation, not a city. Aware of the populous consensus at Mosul, he felt obliged and morally mandated on behalf of his fellow Maslawis, regardless of their faith, to use this opportunity to convey the wishes of his fellow countrymen through the British media. Barsoum made a metaphorically subtle reference during his interview with *The Morning Post* to the fate of Mosul in any future settlement of the post-war partition of Ottoman territories under the League of Nations, flagging the prospect of Mosul's economic potential<sup>59</sup> to substantiate his vision.

‘Baghdad’, he said, ‘is the heart of Mesopotamia, and he who holds the heart should hold the whole’. Its possibilities from the point of view of riches he [Barsoum] thinks are immense, and will far exceed anything that Egypt can possibly provide.’

However, the ‘Mosul Problem’, proved to be a perilous problem, the final settlement of which lingered in the corridors of the League of Nations up to the end of 1926, way after the conclusion of the Treaty of Lausanne 1923. (Beck, 1981; Wright, 1926)

He was fully aware that during the process of decision-making, Western politicians, often, mistakenly based their calculations on the numerical demography, rather than on more pressing factors on the ground, such as geography, ethnicity, national and religious sentiments,

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<sup>59</sup> For the economic potential of the discovery of a promising reserve of the oil fields in the province of Mosul, see Fitzgerald, 1994.

sensitivities and affiliation. Barsoum touched a sensitive political chord, *The Morning Post* concluded:

In conclusion the Archbishop, half in jest and half in deadly earnest, referred to the question of numbers which is so popular in Western Europe. 'The Turks', he said, 'claim to have a majority in the parts of Mesopotamia which they still occupy. Naturally, after ceaseless massacres it is quite possible that they are correct!'

With a clear conscience and frankness, Barsoum put his wishes and that of his Syrian nation categorically and bravely. He ended up with a bang!

But we wish to be outside their jurisdiction forever!

#### **BARSOUM'S POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN LONDON**

At breakfast, Barsoum read what was written and realized that his diplomatic mission in London is now in black and white on a broadsheet and conveying knowledge of the matters which had been his concern. Having set the media ground for his mission, Barsoum moved to concentrate on the political front.

In the aftermath of the Great War, two schools, Lawrentian and Wilsonian,<sup>60</sup> of divergent political thought emerged among Whitehall's Middle East policymakers. The first, propounded by T E Lawrence, 'Lawrence of Arabia', found support in the Foreign Office where many favoured Arab national ideals and backed the Hashemite family for ruling positions in the region. The latter, epitomized by Arnold Wilson, the civil commissioner for Iraq, was thought to reflect the India Office view that direct British rule in Iraq was essential and that Hashemite pretensions should be opposed. The lines separating the India and Foreign Offices were not so clearly drawn. Many senior officials in the India Office

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60 T E Lawrence known as 'Lawrence of Arabia'. (James, 1999) Arnold Talbot Wilson (1884-1940), the British civil commissioner in Baghdad in 1918-20. (Wilson, 1930; 1931)

were disturbed by Wilson's programme for Iraq and some were prepared to support Hashemite aspirations. However, Lawrence's 1920 campaign for Hashemite rule and his hyperbolic press attacks on Wilson's policies had the paradoxical effect of moving the India Office to defend Wilson and to revert to their anti-Hashemite stance. Finally, the triumph of the Lawrentian over the Wilsonian schools at the end of 1920, was crowned when Wilson was removed from Iraq and Middle East policymaking was consolidated in the Colonial Office. This culminated by convening on 12 March 1921 the Cairo Conference at the Semiramis Hotel under the chairmanship of Winston Churchill, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, with the participation of forty experts on one aspect or another of British policy in the Middle East, including Gertrude Bell and Lawrence. During this conference Faisal was offered the crown of Iraq, and after a referendum Faisal was crowned king under the British Mandate of Iraq on 23 August 1921. (Klieman, 1970, Paris, 1998 and Tripp, 2007)

Lord Curzon of Kedleston (1859-1925),<sup>61</sup> a Conservative statesman, had his dream fulfilled when he became in 1919 the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the British War Cabinet under the coalition's premiership of a Liberal politician, Lloyd George (1916-1922), who was one of the 'Big Three' at the Paris peace negotiations, and which he handled brilliantly. After the Treaty of Versailles Lord Curzon deputized for Lloyd George at the table of the 'Big Three' and excelled in his task to the end of the Paris Peace Conference and beyond at Lausanne.

Barsoum thought that from now on Lord Curzon would be a key player in the forthcoming negotiations with the French and the Turks. Accordingly, the Foreign Office should be Barsoum's first political

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61 Curzon was well travelled and had an international insight, especially into the Middle East during his Viceroyalty in India (1899-1905), which was then controlled from India. Like other politicians (e.g., Chamberlain, Arthur Balfour) Curzon favoured British Empire efforts in Mesopotamia and supported the dispatch of the Indian Army to Mesopotamia. Initially he became Lord Privy Seal member of the War Cabinet 1916-1919, then succeeded Arthur Balfour as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs from October 1919 to January 1924 (Toye, 2007 and Bennet, 1995), during which he negotiated the Treaty of Lausanne with the İsmet İnönü Pasha (1884-1973). A thorny and exhaustive process which had taken longer than the war itself, its conclusion marked the final phase of the peace-making process after the First World War. (Nicolson, 1934)

‘port of call’ and it was essential to meet Lord Curzon and speak to him face to face.

Barsoum sent his first letter on 2 February 1920 to the Foreign Office specifically requesting a meeting with Lord Curzon. Relatively soon a reply was received granting Barsoum an interview on 10 February at the Foreign Office. Barsoum turned up promptly on time and met with the high-ranking officer Mr (later Sir) John Tilley<sup>62</sup> (1869-1952), Assistant Secretary to the Right Honourable Lord Curzon. Mr Tilley conducted the interview with Barsoum. The communication may have been in both English and French. The minutes of the interview were handwritten by John Tilley; his handwriting is not easily intelligible. To the best of my ability, I attempt to transcribe the minutes below. Mr. Tilley wrote:

The Archbishop of Syria called today on behalf of the Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrian rite whose residence is at Mardin. He confirmed that: ‘I ascertained those details as there are several patriarchs of Antioch.’

The minutes reflected Barsoum’s concerns and frustration:

‘He urged that more than a year had passed and his people were still under the yoke of the Turk and the atrocities were still being committed.’ to which, [Mr Tilley] replied that ‘no one was more anxious than the King to see a settlement reached.’

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62 Sir John Anthony Cecil Tilley (1869-1952): After King’s College, Cambridge, Tilley took up in March 1893 a post in the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office. He records in his memoirs that the Eastern Department thought highly of itself socially and was a little ‘superior’ to the other departments. The memoirs continue to plot his rather rapid rise through the Foreign Office hierarchy including a stint as the First Secretary at the British Embassy in Constantinople 1906-1908, member of the Privy Council, ending his diplomatic career with a final posting as Ambassador to Japan in 1926. (Tilley, 1942; Tilley and Gaselle, 1933) In his memoirs Tilley also reflected on a rather curious fashion of working hours at his department: ‘The early boy in the department came at eleven. Someone else was expected to come at twelve and the others about twelve-thirty. After one was definitely late ... . We hoped to get away about seven, but were often kept till eight, or later ... ’

Curzon's assistant secretary was soon to ascertain and comment on Barsoum's political awareness.

He [Barsoum] no doubt knew that a conference was just about to assemble in London.

Convinced as he was and keen to set the record right and amend what was increasingly becoming an accepted fact, Barsoum reiterated here what he said in his speech and interviews at the Paris Peace Conference and to *The Morning Post* and what he would reiterate in future correspondence that: the cause of Christians in the Middle East and the massacre do not only concern Armenians. He was adamant to highlight the fact that those massacres were not just against Armenian. The Syriac Orient or the Syriac-speaking communities too suffered comparably, if not more proportionally. He enshrined that in all his interjections at conferences, meetings, letters, and interviews. In his publications he allocated chapters for the suffering of the Syrian Orthodox along with Armenians in the contemporary history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries from 1855 to 1895 to 1915.<sup>63</sup>

He said [Mr Tilley minded] that the Armenians had captured the ears of the world but no one realized that the Syrian Christians were being massacred too, no one listened to their cry and came to their help.

By then Barsoum was aware of the geopolitical partitioning by the Sykes-Picot Agreement and felt obliged to express his opinion. Barsoum dealt with the issue of the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire into British and French spheres of influence, without paying any attention to its effect on the indigenous Christian communities.

His country was wrongly divided into two by the frontier drawn between the British and French spheres—in the French sphere no attempt was made by the French at protection.

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63 He took historiography of his nation in his stride and felt obliged to fill the existing void, which was overlooked by generations of writers to record the history of his Syriac nations. (Barsoum, 1924, pp. 360 -370)

Mr Tilley realised that Barsoum's subtle and knowledge-based argument merited a measured explanation. Therefore, Mr Tilley attempted to assure Barsoum and explain the British position:

I said that the final frontiers would no doubt be drawn by the Conference, but that meanwhile we could not [illegible, ?'control'] our own sphere of administration to help his community.

Mr Tilley recorded that Barsoum would submit a six-point memorandum and list of loss and damages (in human and materials) sustained by the Syrian Orthodox Church and community<sup>64</sup> to explain his view and claims for reparation. Barsoum delivered the promised memo on Thursday, which he [Tilley] did put before the Secretary of State. Barsoum seemed to have been very keen to take his message directly to Curzon, to share and understand his insight and opinion. Tilley, also confirmed that Barsoum requested and insisted on meeting Curzon:

He pleaded for a few minutes' interview with the Secretary of State [Curzon] as he had made so long a journey to help his unfortunate people. Tilley said that 'I could only promise [Barsoum] to pass on his request.'

In addition to the calamities suffered by the Syrian Church and communities, the Church sustained considerable damages and losses inflicted by the advancing British forces in Mesopotamia which merited compensation. Tilley wrote:

[Barsoum] said that the British General in Mesopotamia had told him to expect no compensation for losses that had been inflicted there by his own force. He thought at least his people might be given relief.

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<sup>64</sup> For a document of the list of damages, see Fig. 17. (Barsoum 1920c, Abdul-Nour, 2016) See also the first published Arabic translation of this document in (Ibrahim, 1996, pp. 67), which was used thereafter in some publications without any referral to its source!

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ARCHEVÊCHÉ SYRIEN  
DE SYRIE  
DAMAS, ROMS  
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Liste des dommages que la nation syrienne ancienne Orthodoxe,  
en Mesopotamie et en Arménie, a subi pendant la guerre en 1915-1918.

Nom du vilayet	Nom des villes & des Karas	Nomb de vil-lages	Nombre de familles	Ames massas crees.	Anglaise et cou-vents rui-nés.	Pre tres et reli-gieux tués.	Eveques & Vicaires.
<b>V. de Diarbekir</b>							
	Diarbekir et alentours	30	764	5379	5	7	
	Slivan	9	174	1195	1	1	
	Lidjet	10	658	4706	5	4	P. Siman, Vic. episcopale
	Deireket		50	350	1	1	
	Severek	30	897	5725	12	12	Mgr. Denha, Ev. De Severek
	Veranohehir	16	303	1928	1		
	Mardine	8	880	5815	12	5	
	Sacur	7	880	6164	2	3	
	Hsiebine	50	1000	7000	12	25	P. Stiphan, Vic. patriarche
	Djesiret	26	994	7510	13	8	
	Becheriet	30	718	4481	10	10	P. Gibrail, Archimandrite
	Baravat	15	282	1880	1	1	
	Midiat	47	3935	25830	60	60	(P. Ephrem, vicaire. Mgr. Yacoub, eveque de Deir ez Zor.)
<b>V. de Bitlis.</b>							
	Bitlis	12	130	850	1		
	Seert		100	650	1	2	P. Ibrahim, V. de Seert.
	Gharwan	9	283	1870	2	4	
	Gharzan	22	744	5140	12	9	
<b>V. de Karpout</b>							
	Karpout	24	508	3500	5	2	
<b>S. Ourfa.</b>							
	Ourfa.		50	340			
<b>Total:</b>		<b>345</b>	<b>13350</b>	<b>90313</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>7</b>

Fig. 17. List of Damages and Losses in lives and properties sustained by the Syrian Orthodox community 1915-1918. Document presented by Barsoum to Paris Peace Conference. (Image courtesy of National Archive Ken. FO. 371/5130/112)

Tilley seemed to be of the same opinion as that of the general on the ground in Mesopotamia; he said:

I did not hold out much hope of his getting it.

John Tilley summarized the interview and passed it to his superior. It took three days to reach the desk of Lord Curzon next door on 13 February 1920. Curzon was once described as someone who spoke to members of Parliament in the Commons like ‘a divinity addressing black beetles’. Barsoum was not immune from Curzon’s inapproachability. Frustrating, foggy February passed, and nothing was heard. No political activities are to be traced to Barsoum. It seemed to have been a mere waiting game, through which Barsoum maintained his contact and lobbying through Lambeth Palace.

Meanwhile, Barsoum combated the boredom of such a disappointing waiting game by the daily systematic occupation of his time researching Syriac manuscripts at the British Library.

Disappointed with Curzon’s response, but determined not to leave any stone of advocacy unturned, Barsoum decided to widen the scope of his political advocacy. He widely circulated his memorandum and the list of damages that had been sustained by the Syrian Orthodox by approaching other men of authority and key decision-makers in London: He wrote a few letters all dated 8 March 1920 to the Prime Minister Lloyd George, whom he called ‘the President’ of the House of Parliament and ‘the President’ of the Supreme Council (the Privy Council); all received a letter with an attachment from Barsoum, together with yet another letter reminding Lord Curzon. Those letters varied but they stated his concern and enclosed with each the same memorandum and the list of damages. (Barsoum, 1920a, b, c) Barsoum always sought to represent his Church and nation. It seems that Barsoum wrote in this regard, more than the above-mentioned letters. Those missing letters and replies from the Prime Minister Lloyd George and from ‘the President’ of Parliament and any action taken may come to light at some point in the future.

Barsoum received from the President of the Privy Council the following acknowledgement on 12 March 1920:

Acknowledged on behalf of the President of the Supreme Council the receipt of your communication, and to inform you in reply that it has been brought to the attention of the council.



Finally, and at long last after one and a half months, Lord Curzon expressed his deep regret at the lack of a response through Lord Curzon's assistant on 17 March 1920, although no mention of the interview with Mr John Tilley at the Foreign Office on 2 February was made:

Earl Curzon of Kedleston acknowledges your letter and memorandum of 8<sup>th</sup> March and conveys his Lordship assurance that the interest, will not be lost sight of when the moment for their consideration arrives.

Indeed 'the moment of their consideration arrives' more than once and Lord Curzon was fully involved and instrumental at the Conference of London 1920, at San Remo 1920 and the ensuing Treaty of Sèvres 1920 and finally at the Treaty of Lausanne 1923. However, it is still debatable had Curzon spared the time and granted Barsoum a meeting, would that encounter have had any influence on Curzon's comprehension of the predicaments of the Syrian Orthodox and other indigenous communities in Turkey and on his policy and on the final fine tuning of the outcome of the Treaty of Lausanne 1923. However, the Treaty did not represent the totality of the interests of the Christian communities and the non-Muslims in Turkey.

Understandably, there was intense struggle within the framework of the Entente. Britain and France, and to a lesser degree Italy too, were divided by conflicting interests and bitter rivalry. It was only by hard bargaining and reluctant compromise that they were able to reach agreement, during which many issues were lost sight of! (Montgomery, 1972)

Barsoum must have realized from the reply of Curzon that there would not be room for his cause in the political realm!

Now that a century has lapsed, it may not be easy to appreciate and fully evaluate the efforts exerted by Barsoum in his endeavours at the Paris Peace Conference and London. He sought to spare and secure his community and other vulnerable indigenous communities from the political challenges and changes in the post-war Middle East which would not be in favour of the Christian East.

**BARSOUM' ECUMENICAL OR INTER-CHURCH ENGAGEMENT IN LONDON**

Talking of a sense of continuity and experience, by 1920 Baron Davidson of Lambeth (1848-1930), Archbishop Randall Thomas Davidson (1903-1928), the 98th archbishop to succeed Augustine (598-604) the first Archbishop of Canterbury, had been the Cantor for seventeen years. His record is yet to be broken as being the longest serving Archbishop of Canterbury and the only archbishop to celebrate his Silver Jubilee at Lambeth<sup>65</sup> since William Laud (1633-1660). Davidson spent most of his long ecclesiastical vocation at Lambeth apart from eight years as a bishop (1895-1903). Davidson was a contemporary of three former archbishops and five Syrian Orthodox patriarchs, three of them he met at Lambeth. He had opportunities for close involvement with three Lambeth Conferences in 1878, 1888 and 1897. 1908 was Davidson's fourth Lambeth Conference and the first at which he presided as president (Hobhouse, 1908). Davidson was very familiar with Syrian Orthodox/Anglican inter-Church relations and aware of all related communications since the 1870s as chaplain of Archbishop Tait (Taylor, 2005). Davidson was also familiar with the work of chaplains of the East India Company who had been working with the Syrian Orthodox Church in India and Mesopotamia under the auspices of the Church Mission Society (CMS)<sup>66</sup> since the 1800s, in addition to communications of ecclesial-political importance emanating from Mesopotamia that the Colonial, Indian and Foreign Office had to share with Lambeth. As a chaplain for the archbishop, he, and Archibald Campbell Tait (1868-1882) met Patriarch Peter III/IV (1872-1894) at Lambeth during his visit to London in 1874 (Parry, 1892, 1895), then he met Bishop Abdullah again in 1899. As an archbishop, Davidson met Patriarch Abdullah four times during his 1908-1909 visits to London. Davidson also met Rabban Aphram Barsoum in 1913 during his sabbatical leave

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65 In the Syrian Orthodox Church, Davidson's ecclesiastical record is only matched by the record of Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (1980-2014). Iwas was the only Syrian Orthodox Patriarch to celebrate his jubilee in the last 200 hundred years. (Abdul-Nour, 2005)

66 CMS is the oldest functioning mission society in Britain. It established relations with the Syrian Orthodox Church in Travancour (now Kerala), Southern India since 1800. (Buchanan, 1812) CMS had a mission in Mesopotamia and one of its missionaries was the first to ride (a penny farthing) bicycle in Mosul.

in London. Although, communication in French between Davidson and the young monk Barsoum did not reflect on the chemistry that was apparent with Bishop Barsoum in the winter of 1920. Davidson was also familiar with the Church of the East and the Archbishop of Canterbury Mission to the Assyrians. (Coakley, 1992)

Archbishop Davidson and Barsoum needed no prior briefings or introduction; they got down to business straight away. They had lunch together and were in continuous communication throughout Barsoum's stay in London. However, the Church of England is a Church with institutions; the archbishops are bound by the resolutions of the Synod and Lambeth Conferences.<sup>67</sup> Decisions were not made lightly, let alone made unilaterally; they were made after thorough study, discussion and much consultation with advisers and experts. Recommendations of the subcommittee that was established to deal specially with the Oriental Churches and reported to the Conference were all adhered to.

These struggling Christian churches, each and all of which have often turned towards us for help, have a real claim upon our love and sympathy.<sup>68</sup>

The resolutions of the Lambeth Conferences up to 1908 were instrumental in governing the relations between the Anglican Communion and the Syrian Orthodox Church. Davidson was not only

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67 Lambeth Palace, a working palace on the south bank of the River Thames. It is the headquarters of the Church of England and the London residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Lambeth Conference took its name from the Lambeth Palace. It is an international conference attended by all bishops of the Anglican Communion. It is convened every ten years. Its resolutions are binding. Other Churches are invited to send representatives to attend Lambeth Conference. Usually, the calibre of representatives sent reflects the level of ecumenical relations of that Church with the Church of England. For the last century, successive archbishops of Canterbury had written to patriarchies of the Syrian Orthodox Church inviting them to send their representative to attend Lambeth. Syrian Orthodox patriarchies sent bishops of high calibre and ecumenical understanding. Bishop Aphram Barsoum was expected to attend the Lambeth Conference 1920 but apologized due to the situation in Syria. Four bishops represented the Syrian Orthodox Church at different Lambeth Conference: Mar Gregorios Abdullah, Mar Severus Zakka I Was, Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Mor Philoxenos Matthias Nayis. The next Lambeth Conference due to convene in 2020 was postponed until 2021.

68 For details, see: Davidson, Randall (1920) *The Five Lambeth Conferences*, London: SPCK.

compelled but also sympathetic and willing to help make Barsoum's political and diplomatic missions a success.

Since the visit of Patriarch Peter III/IV to London in 1874 a tradition seemed to have developed that when heads of the Syrian Orthodox Church or their official envoys were on an official visit to London, Lambeth Palace with the collaboration of the Foreign Office and the Court of St James arranged an audience with the sovereign.<sup>69</sup> On the understanding that the sovereign is above politics, only ecclesiastical matters were to be discussed. Barsoum expressed a wish to have an audience with King George V (1910-1936) and discussed the possibility with Davidson who seemed to be sympathetic.

Regarding the audience with King George V, Davidson sought the advice of the Revd William Ainger Wigram,<sup>70</sup> who was very familiar with the position and predicament of the Syriac Christians in Mesopotamia. Wigram was against the arrangement of an audience for Barsoum with King George. Wigram was adamant and argued that the mission of Barsoum was political and was better handled by His Majesty's Government.<sup>71</sup>

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69 Patriarch Peter III had an audience with Queen Victoria (1819-1901) at Windsor in 1874. Queen Victoria was impressed with his spiritual stature and in an unprecedented gesture Queen Victoria requested Patriarch Peter to come back to Windsor. On arrival the second time the Queen took Patriarch Peter to Frogmore and specially requested his prayers at the mausoleum where her beloved husband HRH Prince Albert was buried. In a solemn and moving moment for the sovereign the Patriarch and his entourage prayed in Syriac at the sarcophagus of Prince Albert. Their voices echoed in the magnificent Germanic architecture of the chamber; it was an unprecedented and moving moment that biographers of Queen Victoria are yet to discover and write about. Patriarch Abdullah II had two audiences with King Edward VII (1901-1910) during his stay in London 1908-1909 (Parry, 1892, 1895 and Taylor 2005).

70 Wigram had the opportunity to reside in Mesopotamia as a long-standing member of Archbishop Benson's Mission to the Assyrians which was established in 1886 and he was about to be sent back as 'ecclesiastical council' to the Syrian Orthodox. During his stay in Mesopotamia, Wigram researched and wrote his thesis on 'The Separation of the Monophysites' (1923). He wrote few interesting books: *Our Smallest Allies* (1920), *Cradle of Mankind* (1922) and *The Assyrians and their Neighbours* (1929). Wigram accompanied Patriarch Mar Shimun XX to convalesce at the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of Mar Mattai before accompanying Surma Khanum to London on her way to attend the Paris Peace Conference 1919 but she never turned up. Wigram's relations and intimate knowledge of the Church of the East made him in equal measure a famous and intriguing figure among Syriac speaking communities.

71 See Davidson's communication with Wigram in this regard. Davidson papers,

However, Archbishop Davidson maintained his support for the Syrian Orthodox Church. Whenever the opportunity arose, he did not fail to write and remind British decision makers of his concern for the Syrian Orthodox Church and Christians in general in Mesopotamia and Syria.

The relations between the Church of England and the Syrian Orthodox reached its zenith during the time of Archbishop Davidson, then it declined during the wars especially after Davidson's retirement on 12 November 1928. We detect no serious effort shown by Patriarch Aphram to revitalize relations with the three archbishops of Canterbury, who succeeded Davidson between 1928 to 1957 and who may have been of less interest, experience, and knowledge of the Syrian Orthodox Church than their predecessors.<sup>72</sup>

#### **BARSOUM—A PERPETUAL CULTURAL CRUSADE IN LONDON**

For Barsoum the political axis was the main and the most complex and frustrating factor of his peace mission. Considering, the fact that the Paris Peace Conference had ended, the Near East settlement was still fluid awaiting the outcomes of the London and San Remo Conferences. Consequently, the political axes were moving at a glacial pace in a cold winter of 1920 London. It is a helpless and endless waiting game for a response to Barsoum's correspondence with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Office and Privy Council. Barsoum had no time to waste in worries. Having successfully used his waiting time at Paris by examining the Syriac manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale and other libraries and browsing interesting new books at the oriental bookshop, he planned to use the opportunity of being in London again to continue his research, which is an integral part of his cultural crusade, on the Syriac, Arabic and Ottoman Turkish manuscripts and their textual cultures at the British Museum Library. The domed reading room of the British Museum became his study room, resource, and news centre.-

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Lambeth Palace Library.

72 Syrian Orthodox Anglican ecumenical relations during the time of Patriarch Aphram Barsoum (1933-1957) and his contemporary Archbishops Cosmo Lang (1928-1942), William Temple (1942-1945), Arthur Michael Ramsey (1945-1961) merit closer research (Taylor, 2005; 2014).

Barsoum started his structured day at the British Museum with his daily slot of news and current affairs update. He continued to browse quickly through the press headlines and important news carried by the daily English and French newspapers, keeping himself informed of the current affairs. He then scanned through the latest Hansard, to read the transcripts of minutes of daily parliamentary debates of the House of Lords and House of Common. The daily catalogue of the unfolding barrage of gloomy and disturbing post-war post Paris Conference news ushered a never-ending series of challenges each day Barsoum stayed in London. The political situation in Britain and steadily falling sterling crowded the news. The evolving attitude and reaction of the United States to the League of Nations, the first worldwide intergovernmental organization, culminated in the US Senate rejection of the Treaty of Versailles for the second time on 19 March 1920 and refusal to ratify the covenant of the League of Nations, in effect maintaining isolation policy. (Wright, 1930 and Pedersen, 2007, 2015)

The news of political turmoil in Bolshevik Russia continued to unfold. The world reaction to the news of the first short-lived Turkish government (Muvakkat İcra Encümeni, which lasted from 25 April to 3 May 1920), which followed with second government (İcra Vekilleri Heyeti, which lasted 3 May 1920 to 24 January 1921), the unsettling fluctuation and shifts in policies of the new government in Paris after the recent election and its dreaded effects on the Near East, the disturbing news from Syria, the Syrians' resistance to the advancing French army which had landed in November 1919 on the Levant shores, all pre-empted the appointment of a decorated French veteran, General Henri Gouraud (1867-1946) as High Commissioner for Syria and Lebanon, to readdress their foothold and control in Cilicia. The developments of the French army of the Levant under the command of General Henri Gouraud in the Franco-Turkish War and the sudden retreat into Syria after the Battle of Marash, which took place between 21 January-13 February 1920, meant this shambolic French army retreat and its fatal effect on Christians, mainly Armenians, returning became known as the 'Marash Affair'. (Kerr, 1973)

The reception of Prince Faisal in Syria on his return from the Paris Peace Conference, the fomenting national reaction to Faisal's announcement of his Faisal-Clémenceau accords, then began to filter into Syria. Then came news of the convening of the Syrian Nation

Conference which unanimously rejected the Faisal-Clémenceau accords and unilaterally proclaimed and declared Syrian independence and the creation of the Syrian Arab Kingdom within its natural boundaries with Faisal as its king, on 8 March 1920 from the balcony of the renowned Baron Hotel in Aleppo.

The events in Syria accelerated the convention of the Peace Conference at San Remo on 9-26 April 1920, confirming the Mandate System meant a slight modification to the agreed demarcation of Sykes-Picot accord, giving France the mandate over Lebanon and Syria, to Britain the mandate over Iraq, Transjordan and Palestine. Meanwhile, the news came of the *Misak-i Milli* National Pact or National Oath which was issued on the last term of the Ottoman Parliament. Parliament met on 28 January 1920 and published its decisions on 12 February 1920, together with the map of *Abd-i Milli*, which was presented to the new Turkish Grand National Assembly for adoption. The map includes considerable overlapping territories in Iraq and Syria with the map adopted at San Remo. (Abdul-Nour, 2016) These overlapping disputed regions between Britain and France as a mandatory power and Turkey was where the majority of Syrian Orient and Armenians deportee camps were. These events represented an unsettling omen of perpetual geopolitical turmoil for Barsoum and his community. A century later the geopolitical depredations of some of these events are still informing and indeed challenging contemporary affairs in the region.

In spite of the fact that the spine-chilling news of events never ceased unfolding, it did not prevent Barsoum utilizing his time in London at the British Museum Library, completely absorbed in researching the Syriac and Arabic manuscripts, enjoying the safety and potential longevity of permanent residency at the British Museum while their siblings back home, if they survived, were destined to oblivion. Barsoum has already knew about many of those manuscripts<sup>73</sup> from his study tours in parishes along the Syriac corridors of Mesopotamia in Turkey, Syria and Iraq. (For Indexes of the manuscripts existed, assessed and recorded pre-war by Barsoum, see Barsoum, 1996, 2008a, b, c; Ibrahim, 1987a, 1992, 1996)

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73 For a comprehensive list of his publications including manuscripts and indexes together with a list of drafts of unpublished books and manuscript indexes compiled by Aphram Barsoum, still to be extracted from the Syrian Orthodox archive, see Ibrahim, 1996 pp. X-XXXIV.

**BARSOUM'S CONTINUING CULTURAL CRUSADE**

Learning is a treasure that will follow its owner everywhere.

*(Chinese Proverb)*

Our work will not be complete without dealing with a glance at Barsoum's cultural crusade. Alas space in this article will only allow an overview. Basically, Barsoum is a product of the Syrio-Arabic intellectual culture of an urban centre milieu, the ancient city of Mosul, a multilingual, multicultural world on the buzzing and busy trade routes at the turn of the century. Barsoum's spontaneous affinity to education and culture blossomed early in his life. His teachers at the Dominican School in Mosul spotted his talent and nurtured it. Barsoum was encouraged to write his first article at the age of 14 in the inaugural issue in 1901 of *Ikhlil al-Ward*, the first ever journal to be published in Mosul by the Dominicans. In 1902 he played the key role of St Tarcisius the Acolyte<sup>74</sup>—The Boy Martyr of the Eucharist (263 to 275 AD), a daring talent for the teens of his generation. (Hababa, 2005) In answering a call at the age of 17 he joined the monastic community at Deir al-Za'faran, impressed and encouraged by the prophetic sermons of his spiritual mentor, the longest serving Metropolitan of Mosul,<sup>75</sup> Mor Dionysius Behnam

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74 St Tarcisius the Acolyte—The Boy Martyr of the Eucharist (263 to 275AD), a play on the Biblical theme: 'Greater love than this no man has, than that a man lay down his life for his friend.' It was first translated into Arabic by Salim Hassoun (1873-1947), the Arabic literature teacher at the Dominican School of Mosul and the editor-in-chief of *Ikhlil al-Ward* (1901-1909). Hassoun relied on Barsoum and other people in the school to direct and stage this play in Mosul in 1902. This play can be seen in the old video clips featured in this movie taken from an extremely rare 'silent film' produced by the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. This old film production was made at the start of Great War in 1914, in the final year of Pope Saint Pius X's pontificate, who was often referred to as the 'Pope of the Holy Eucharist' This play is available on: <<https://gloria.tv/video/GmsCcKoLUy2L3LS7Ka2RgCcCK>> [accessed on 11/11/2018].

75 The ancient Archdiocese of Mosul is the flagship among Syrian Orthodox archdioceses at the turn of the century. The archdiocese was established by the Apostle Thomas, then Mary and Addi. Its long list of metropolitans serving Mosul as a well-established archdiocese goes back to the fourth century, among them was Mosa Bar Kepha (†903). The last and the second longest serving metropolitan who served Mosul for 42 years until retirement was Mor Gregorios Saliba Sahmon (1979-2011). (Shamoun, 1984) His young successor Mor Neicodemous Daoud Sahraf, became the last metropolitan who served Mosul and was the last among





Fig. 18. Commemorative inscription plaques reflecting the uses of the name of the Syrian Orthodox Church in Arabic and Syriac in churches built in 1921, 1925 in Lebanon (top two) and ancient church at patriarchal monastery of Deir al-Za'faran, Turkey, renovated in 1876. (Photo courtesy of Mor Clemis Daniel Kourieh, the Metropolitan of Beirut)

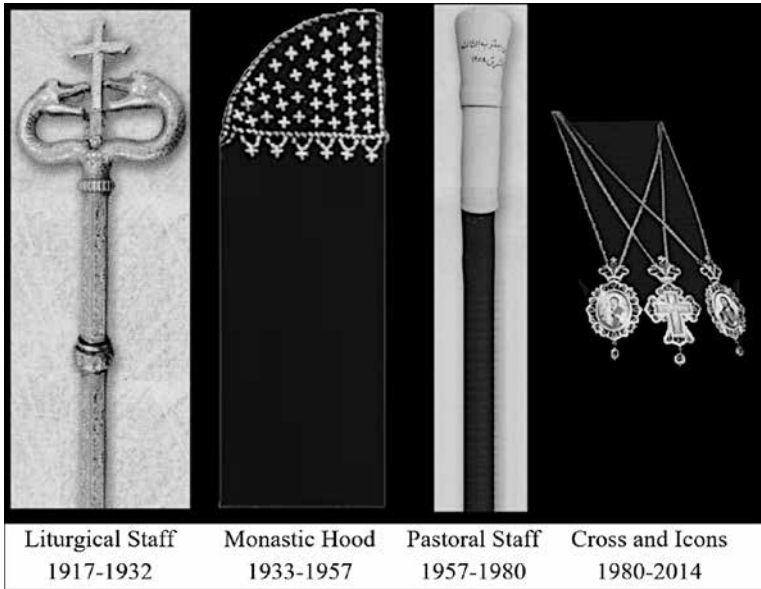


Fig. 19. Ecclesiastical vestments of four successive Syrian Orthodox Patriarchs: Elias III, Aphram I, Jacob III and Zakka I. They were worn by Patriarch Aphrem II, during his installation on May 29, 2014. As an indicative epitome of leadership's genre and manifesto recompense. (Photo courtesy of Abdul-Nour collection)

Samarchi (1867-1911). (Shamoon, 1984) He left the comfort of his cosmopolitan birthplace Mosul in 1904, leaving behind the life of the well-established Syrian Orthodox family at Mosul together with

Christian leaders in the city to leave after its fall on 9 June 2014; he courageously stayed in Mosul tending to the spiritual welfare of his community as they deserted this Christian stronghold and beloved city in a forced *en masse* exodus and face the consequences. He was the first Metropolitan in the history of Mosul to face such a dire and unprecedented situation throughout its two millennia history of prosperous co-existence. Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim travelled to Mosul under reduced circumstances to officiate at the installation ceremony of Bishop Daoud Sharaf. Mor Gregorios said: 'I had an excruciating feeling that I was installing the last Bishop of Mosul!' (Personal communication). Bishop Sharaf eventually joined his entire Syrian Orthodox community in exile and is still serving as we write this article as the Metropolitan of Mosul in Exile, serving his once prosperous well-established Christian community in Mosul, now ethno-religiously cleansed and endangered, currently living as Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in reduced circumstances, some in UN camps and others in makeshift accommodation in a politically disputed area of Iraq. Mosul was liberated in 2017 but the security is not giving the community any assurance to go back to their city. History will tell if Mosul is able to regain its once prosperous Christian communities.



Fig. 20. The front cover pages of the first issues of *Al-Hikma Journal* (1913-14) and first and the last for *Al-Majalla al-Batriqiyya* ('The Patriarchal Journal') (1933-2014). (Photo courtesy of Patriarch Zakka I Inas and Abdul-Nour Collection)

his circle of school classmates and friends, Jewish, Christians and Muslims, who were students with him at the Dominican School in Mosul. Most were the pioneers of the cultural and political circle of the intelligentsia of twentieth-century Mosul. Many of those luminaries together with Barsoum featured in the encyclopaedic Who's Who in Mosul (al-Talib, 2008). At Deir al-Za'faran he became engaged with the education programme. Initially, Barsoum was given the responsibility of overseeing the ancient library and printing press, which was acquired through the Syrian Patriarchate Education Society (SPES), that was formed during the visit of Patriarch Peter III (1872-1894) in 1874 to London, to enable the Church to promote education. (Parry, 1893, 1894) This was in preparation for his planned first sabbatical leave in Europe in 1913 to research the Syriac manuscripts collections at the British Museum Library in London and other collections at Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham, Paris, Florence and Rome. Barsoum embarked on the gargantuan and painstaking task of the first ever comprehensive inventory of research and study of manuscripts collections scattered in the churches, monasteries and in private libraries in Tur 'Abdin, Turkey. With the help and liaison of the local clergy he managed to inspect closely and document Syriac manuscripts in private collections in almost every Syriac family house in the scattered towns and villages in Tur 'Abdin (Fig. 6). This study tour made Barsoum the first ever and only scholar to inspect almost all the surviving Syriac manuscripts in the region of Tur 'Abdin, Syria and Iraq at the turn of the century. These thankful meticulous efforts enabled

Barsoum to document and compile as comprehensive as possible an index of the then extant Syriac manuscripts. The collected data and details of colophons of these manuscripts is the only information to date ever made available to scholars on these scattered collections of Syriac manuscripts. Many vanished without a trace due to the pillage sustained by these once idyllic Syriac hamlets, villages, townlets and towns in upper Mesopotamia in the run-up to the war and its aftermath. This valuable scholarly research was published posthumously in 2008 by his successor Patriarch Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas. (Barsoum, 2008a, b and c) During his research tour Barsoum felt the need to theorize and standardize the translation procedures from Syriac to Arabic so that scholars, in his anticipated 'Cultural Renaissance' in the Church and its milieu, would have available some theoretical framework or guidelines to encourage and aid them in translating some of these valuable manuscripts. Barsoum decided to write as early as 1909 an Arabic treatise entitled: *Risālah fi usūl al ta'rib 'an al sirīāniyah* ('Epistle on the principles of translation from Syriac [into Arabic]'). The treatise 1938 revised version benefited from Barsoum's three decades of translation experience. Barsoum, focused on his methodological exploration, pre-empted the thinking of the importance of the linguistic form and concepts such as fidelity and freedom or word-based and meaning-based translation which are still in current issue among scholars debating modern translation theory. This study was discovered and published posthumously. (Jamoussi and Kritsis, 2019)

### **BARSOUM'S PERIODICALS**

Barsoum utilized the printing facilities of the Syriac Press at al-Za'faran Monastery, that he was managing, to print many books authored by him and others. With the support of the Patriarch Abdullah, Barsoum established, edited and published the journal *Al-Hikma* (Arabic for 'Wisdom'): *Revue Religieuse, Littéraire, Historique et Nouvelliste*—the first ever Syrian Orthodox scholarly reviewed literary periodical. The first issue of this journal appeared in August 1913. *Al-Hikma* had to discontinue due to the successive tumultuous years of the *Sayfo* followed by the disturbance of the Great War that befell the region. It became impossible to produce another issue of *Al-Hikma* at al-Za'faran Monastery. The reissuing of

*Al-Hikma* took Barsoum and the editorial board 14 years to be in a position to republish *Al-Hikma*; its second issue came off the press on 27 October 1927, this time at St Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem with an editorial comment:

The fierce war prevented us from publishing *Al-Hikmat*. Those difficult and terrible days when the pens were silenced and full reign were given to the swords and cannons. *Al-Hikmat* waited impatiently for the dawn of peace to resume its literary struggle.

Barsoum was fiercely proud of the history and tradition of his Church and nation and fired with ambition for their future. Barsoum was very keen to educate, enlighten and widen the horizon of his people with the available knowledge of his era and what was often hidden in their own Syriac manuscripts, whether in libraries abroad or what was survived in the region, and provided it for them in a language they could understand, Syriac and Arabic. He knew education was the only accessible and affordable vehicle not only to aid its revival but also the survival of the new generations of the backbone of his Church in their new Middle Eastern milieu.

Barsoum felt that *Al-Hikma* which served the Syrian Orthodox culturally since 1927 was no longer enough to answer the increasing popular demand of the Syriac intelligentsia for knowledge and culture; he planned for another periodical to be published in tandem at St Mark Monastery Jerusalem. The first issue of this new journal was published in April 1933, less than three months after Barsoum's consecration as patriarch, under the title: *Al-Majalla al-Batriqiyya* ['the Patriarchal Journal']: *A Religious, Literary and Historical Review*. (For covers of the first and last issues, see Fig. 20.)

Barsoum's periodicals continued to flourish and be published regularly under the auspices of three successive patriarchs, Aphram I, Jacob III and Zakka I. Like Barsoum, his successors who were also bibliophiles and prolific writers in addition to their numerous literary outputs never failed to fortify these journals with interesting, rich articles and encouraged other scholars to contribute. Under the editorship of both Jacob III and Zakka I and, out of appreciation and genuine loyalty to their mentor and predecessor Barsoum, they endeavoured to edit and

publish in the *Patriarchal Journal* much of Barsoum's unpublished research and writings, in a full and timely publication.

*Al-Hikma* which started at al-Za'faran Monastery in 1913 and was republished from St Mark Monastery Jerusalem in 1927 is still publishing today. *Al-Majalla al-Batriqiyya* started in Jerusalem in 1933 and then moved with patriarchal headquarters to Damascus. This renowned journal continued its publication unabated for 85 years throughout the twentieth century, 54 years of them in Damascus.

Recent issues of the *Patriarchal Journal* were a special obituary issue for the late Patriarch Zakka I Iwas (1980-2014), the longest serving Syrian Orthodox Patriarch and other to commemorate the centenary of the *Sayfo* 1915. However, since the death of Patriarch Zakka I in 2014, the *Patriarchal Journal* could not keep up its literary momentum, standards and intellectual verve. It receded from being the cultural vehicle of the patriarchate and the chronicle of the Syrian Orthodox Church. The centenary of the *Sayfo* 2015 issue of the *Patriarchal Journal* may prove to be the swansong of this vital patriarchal literary and intellectual vehicle, which is now a pale shadow of its past. As one observant literary critic put it, 'It's eminently destined to be victimized by the axe of annihilation.' Currently, there appeared sporadically glossy commemorative pictorial issues published under the same title in 2015, 2016 and 2017, basically a hardcopy regurgitating selectively news and events extracted from Facebook with no cultural or intellectual value.

Data in Barsoum's periodicals were of great value for this paper and will remain a sought after and indispensable resource and research tool for future students and scholars of the Syrian Orthodox Church. This is thanks to the hard work and collective collaboration of many of the selfless dedicated Syrian Orthodox scholars at the Department of Syriac Studies at the Patriarchate which operate under a motto inspired by the intellectual approach of Patriarch Barsoum to education: 'The abundance of books enlivens the intellectual life in the Church.'

In support of his scholarly and ecclesial legacy the collective index of Barsoum's periodicals, *Al-Hikma* and the *Patriarchal Journal*, and many other books are available electronically online.<sup>76</sup>

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76 [www.dss-syriacpatriarchate.org](http://www.dss-syriacpatriarchate.org).

Barsoum was a keen researcher with a special love and interest for Syriac manuscripts. He was eager for an opportunity to inspect Syriac manuscript collections in Western libraries to complement his ongoing research in the region. His dream was fulfilled by a special fund provided by his paternal and maternal families in Mosul. Barsoum embarked in 1913 on his first research visit to London and Paris to continue his codicological examinations of manuscripts collections at the British Museum Library, Oxford, Cambridge, Birmingham and other libraries housing Syriac manuscripts in Britain and France. On his return from London, he was appointed by Patriarch Abdulla as the abbot of Monastery with the responsibility to oversee the development of the curriculum and teach at al-Za'faran seminary.

His research culminated in compiling a manuscript index and publishing his masterpiece or magnum opus, which was received by a broad scholarly audience, entitled *The Scattered Pearls* to mark the end of the French mandate and the independence of Syria. (Barsoum, 1996) It was an encyclopaedic reference compiled by Eastern scholars specifically for Eastern scholars with the then familiar style and the methodology of his time. He was not only interested in adding to the knowledge of what already available to Western scholars. Barsoum wrote his books to make available important material that he collected and would be almost impossible to access by future generations of clergy, scholars and interested laity of his community and others. His main concern was to provide a source for the education in the seminaries that he helped to establish in the working monasteries in Turkey, in Mosul and Beirut. *The Scattered Pearls* received wide acclamation and many editions and translation since it was first published in Arabic in 1943 to mark the silver jubilee of Barsoum's episcopate and was translated into French and Syriac. (Barsoum, 1991) Now it is available in English and more recently the Romanian edition was launched. Interesting commentaries, reviews and a doctoral thesis on this book and other works by Barsoum and poems were written by many Western and Eastern scholars of Syriac studies. (Moosa, 1965, Ibrahim, 1992, Taylor, 2003, Brock, 2019)

Barsoum was nominated and elected in 1932 to the prestigious Arab Academy in Damascus, Syria. This prestigious and competitive scholarly position was also held by his successors Patriarchs Jacob III and Zakka I for their acumen in the Arabic language and number of publications.

However, Barsoum's 'cultural crusade' culminated with a ban on his publications in the Turkish Republic:

According to the Publications Law No. 51, the Turkish Ministry of the Interior issued its decision No. 33/3220 dated 2/6/1937 banning the entry of the publications of the old Syrian [Syrian Orthodox] Patriarch Efrim [Aphram Barsoum]. The decision is being implemented on 6/7/1937.

Qararanama [Decree] of the Turkish Republic No. 2/6789 signed and sealed by President Gazi Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Premier Ismat İnönü and seven other ministers of state.

Barsoum cultural legacy still the guiding beacon for the current generation. Barsoum will be remembered among scholars as *un grand savant*.

**BARSOUM'S LEADERSHIP IN REDUCED CIRCUMSTANCES.  
ACTION IN QAMISHLI.**

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. (John 10:14)

Barsoum could look not just on the past or present but to the future through the piercing eyes of those children and young people who were living with and who remained alive still within their families, 'the remnants of the Swords' (*baqaya' al-suyufi*) (Saliba, 1984)—a community of deportees of Syrian Orthodox, Syriac Orient and Armenians in tent villages, or in ramshackle mud huts and squalor in the north-east triangle of Syria known as al-Jazira region bordering Turkey to the north and Iraq to the east.

His daunting experience as a bishop of the Levant at the end of the Ottoman era, the war and during his peace mission to Istanbul, Paris, London and Rome might be considered against the background in which the world had allowed such destruction of the Christian East. It was eery and spine-chilling, identical to the warnings given



to the early Church in the Letters to the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse in the Book of Revelation: 'Wake up. Strengthen what remains.' (Rev. 3:2)

Barsoum knew well his people and the peculiarities of their social identity and spiritual construction that helped him form a socially, culturally, ideological, and historically constructed understanding of the potential of his community; this was evident in some of his early writings and reflections. (Barsoum, 2008) Barsoum also knew well the region, its history and potential, this was clear from his writing too. (Barsoum 1955, 1983) This vital empirical knowledge, including his close bond with his community, was long established at the turn of the century. Barsoum had personal encounters, knew, and interacted with people in many Syrian Orthodox parishes and archdioceses in the province of Mosul, Aleppo and Diyarbakir, during his extensive fieldwork research to collect data of the available Syriac manuscripts and inscriptions in churches, monasteries and private collections in the scattered parishes in Iraq, Syria and Turkey. (For the remits of the Syriac inhabited towns and villages in Tur 'Abdin visited by Barsoum during his pre-war field research, see Fig. 6)

The hands-on intimate knowledge of leaders, clergy and *mukhtars* [elders] of their community was a crucial asset. It helped Barsoum keep his finger permanently 'on the pulse of his nation'. It enabled him to feel and think logically and act wisely within the temporalities of his society, to offer time for soul-searching to bring about a glimpse of light at the end of the tunnel of their successive predicaments.

Barsoum's spirit of optimism and energy focused on the peacetime needs of his decimated, destitute and deprived communities in their new milieu. Showing realistic, humble, easily approachable and co-operative ecclesiastical leadership was a vital qualitative easing factor to enable his ethno-religiously cleaned and destitute community to accept their new reality, their new milieux, and the only few options available to them then in their new, reduced circumstances.

Having tried all avenues for humanitarian aid, relief, welfare and reparations for his community, approached all possible donor governments, charitable organizations and philanthropists, considering the potential post-Great War world recession, Barsoum

became convinced that the needs were mammoth and the aids were extremely in short supply. He had no time to waste in a wild-goose chase into the mirage nor was he eager to find opportunities of jet setting or voyaging and excursions as an excuse in search for an escape into a comfort zone away from the reality of his people. He was conscious enough leader not to prioritize his personal safety, creature comforts, calm, and interests to that of the burning needs of his vulnerable people.

A good leader is a master of prioritizing and task management. He decided that it was of utmost importance that the leader should be present and accessible on the grounds of sharing the miseries and day-to-day anxiety of his people. Especially, his community needed exceptional attention due to fact that many of them were subjected to the vicious circle of violent events culminating in the *Sayfo* 1915, deportation and destitution in war conditions. Due to such repetitive traumatic stress many became 'Sayfophobics', a lasting psychological syndrome caused by personal experience of acute traumas surrounding the *Sayfo* 1915, which kept prowling and lurking on the back burners among the Syrian community in exile (Abdul-Nour, 2016; Sato, 2007a, b)

Weighing the potential of the available assets of his Syrian Orthodox communities in scattered refugee camps south of the Orient Express railway line, convinced of the collective merit, talent, aptitude and the industrious individuals of his nation, Barsoum realized that in the circumstances the only asset available to his community was their own human resources. Combined with the natural fertile environment of their post-Great War new home, many of the *Sayfo* 1915 surviving Christians were at the heart of the arable 'Fertile Crescent' in the al-Jazira region, of the north-eastern farming system of Syria. This is the largest agricultural production area in Syria, being the strategic agricultural region of Mesopotamia. They started to produce affordable high-quality much sought-after durum wheat, or 'hard grain', the most prized crop of the Fertile Crescent.

Mindful of the fact that agriculture is the prime national economic factor of Syria, therefore, a way had to be found for this gravitational potential energy to be tapped, synchronized and converted into productive kinetic energy to contain this restless uprooted and traumatized society, which was never at rest or equilibrium since they were housed in makeshift refugee camps.

They did not feel at all settled and secure yet in their new home; as the French mandate authority which had acquired the region constantly lurched from one political formula to another, they were in a continuous search for a feasible option for an exit or repatriation formula against the logistics of allowing them to set roots in the new milieu.

Barsoum began to liaise together with the creative thinkers and entrepreneurs in his Syriac community, to overcome the sad, sorrowful, and bereaved memories of the past and propagate and inject into his community the needed atmosphere of optimism in the potential of this naturally blessed milieu. (Asfar, 2012). He was mindful of the French maxim: *Les peuples cessent de vivre quand ils cessent de se souvenir.*'

However, being overshadowed by the legacy of *Sayfophobia* was an impediment in this circumstance. (Sato, 2007a.) Therefore, a measure of positive nostalgia together with merit could be interlaced, harmonized, co-ordinated, and evolved to help his nation leap forward, integrate, to become good, pro-active and productive citizens in their new home.

Meanwhile, Barsoum had also to go the extra spiritual mile, together with the political miles, and in a tumultuous time liaise with the French mandate authority to make available the necessary arable and fertile land to be utilized by his Syriac community and engage them in a settled agriculture profession. He was aware that General Gouraud, the French High Commissioner of Syria and Lebanon who replaced Georges Picot (d'Andurain, 2018), had already enforced the compartmentalization of the country along the Sunni, 'Alawite, and Druze fault lines by establishing the states of Damascus and Aleppo, along with the autonomous 'Alawite territory and the autonomous Druze territory in the southern part of the state of Damascus, leaving the country brewing for the forthcoming Great Syrian Revolt of 1925.

Gouraud had no time for Barsoum's farsighted demands for his community. He was still trapped in finding a way to contain and pacify the Syrian multi-ethno-religious society by implementing 'the French pacification strategy'.

He thought that the policy of his commander, Marshal Louis-Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), France's first resident-general in Morocco and the most famous of France's twentieth-century overseas soldier-administrators, who popularized the notions of

‘peaceful penetration’ and ‘indirect rule’ as part of a grand colonial design of military pacification, economic development, political modernization and social betterment, would work as well in Syria. (Hoisington, 1995)

Eventually, Barsoum convinced the French mandate authority of the right of his community to earn a decent living and be self-sustaining, especially that no recompenses or reparations would ever be paid for the damages and loss they sustained. Barsoum secured the necessary lands in the vicinity of the refugee camps in the then tent city of Qamishli and other locations to implement his viable long-term agrarian-economical programme.

Soon with the help of visionaries and entrepreneurs in his communities, Barsoum managed to create efficient agriculture communities which provided sustainable employment and an honourable livelihood for the displaced and dispirited Syrian community who converted the long neglected Syrian Jazira region into a promising breadbasket, producing high quality cash crops, like wheat, barley and cotton, not only for the needs of the local markets in Syria and the region but beyond. (Asfar, 2012)

As the sun-weathered parents were busy tilling and cultivating the long-neglected lands of the Fertile Crescent, their durum wheat reached Italy and France and provided cuisines with the sought-after durum grain for their pasta. Syriac parents back in Qamishli started to bring bread to the tables of their families together with the much needed hard currency to their new country. (Barsoum, 1955, 1983; Sato, 2006, 2007a, b)

Barsoum’s far sighted vision was not only to cultivate the land but the offspring of his nation too, by devising a vital and systematic education strategy, to bring about social and spiritual revival to the displaced, ethno-religiously cleansed and under privileged society. Considering the limited recourses available to Barsoum he managed to establish a sustainable infrastructure for an educational system in the camp city of Qamishli, to create a new Nisibis across the Berlin-Baghdad Orient Express Railway (McMeekin, 2010; Ediger and Bowlus, 2020) from the deserted ancient Nisibis—the city of the white flower, which was a Mesopotamian city of strategic and commercial importance and the multiple titular see where the renowned School of Nisibis and great centres of Syriac scholarship, culture flourished.

(Palermo, 2014) It rivalled the School of Edessa, the blessed city, in northern Mesopotamia. (Segal, 1970)<sup>77</sup>

Schools sprang up in the camps next to mud-built churches that served the spiritual need of the refugees, who found themselves in the camps cities of Qamishli. This was similar to the education provided to their kin who reached Aleppo, Homs, Beirut, Amman, Jerusalem and Mosul, who were absorbed in the already well-established Church schools in these urban environments.

The schools of Qamishli, and other towns in the governorate of al-Hassakeh, eventually emerged, when the community started to settle, and became prosperous enough in this governorate for Barsoum to create a new independent archdiocese of al-Jazira and Euphrates in 1933. Bishops were appointed to keep up the vision and spiritual momentum. The archdiocese was served consecutively during the twentieth century by four active and conscientious metropolitans Bishop Gregorios Gabriel Anto, followed by Iqlimis Youhanna Abaji (1934-1941), then Eustathius Kyriakos Totenjiand (1943-1988) and currently Eustathius Matta Roham. They succeeded, followed the footsteps, and completed the spiritual and reform march of Barsoum and made their archdiocese the proud *mariée* of al-Jazira. (Saliba, 1984)

During this hard decade Barsoum was present and accessible on the ground for his community across the Levant. Barsoum did not spend his patriarchate in wasted journeys; he could justify being away a couple of times to represent his people at the Paris Peace Conference and for a meeting at the League of Nations. He broke his schedule in Geneva to represent the Church at the First World Faith Conference in Lausanne and then resumed his pastoral visit journey to the Syrian Orthodox Diaspora in America. (Aydin, 2000) Barsoum declined the invitation to represent the Church at the Lambeth Conference due to other priorities, while he was in London; he apologised to Archbishop Randall Thomas Davidson (1903-1928) for attending as an observer at the 6th Lambeth Palace Conference 1920, the first after the Great War. In a letter dated 3 June 1930 Barsoum apologised to Archbishop Cosmo Gordon Lang (1928-1942) for not sending a

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<sup>77</sup> For the Arabic version of this book of Edessa the Blessed City, see *Al-Ruha Al Madinah Al Mubarakah*, with a comprehensive introduction by Mor Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim, Al-Raha Publishing, Aleppo, 1988.

delegation to the 7th Lambeth Palace Conference in 1930, due to the fact that the Church was not yet in a position to send a delegation. (LC/153/129/1930)

The Archdiocese of al-Jazira, nurturing the largest Syrian Orthodox community in Syria, provided the necessary tools for survival and the revival and integration in the new milieu. (Dinno, 2017) Indeed with the agriculture and agrarian reform programme introduced to Syria and Iraq in 1958 as modernisation measures to the land tenure system, the misdistribution of land and land tenancy was challenged. This was inherited from the time of the Ottoman administration and further aggravated by the French authorities in the 1920s. This was not without consequences on the cultivators and farmers. It eventually led to the salinization of once fertile and productive lands and was not without obvious adverse effects on the Syrian Orthodox agricultural community and had a general impact in a food crisis, poverty and inequality countrywide. By then Qamishli had expanded from a refugee camp into a modern city and the young generation who benefited from the zeal of Barsoum's education crusade were well ahead in their careers. Barsoum's wise cultivation came to fruition with the new generation of the Syrian Orthodox community who were well integrated in all walks of life of Syrian society as was the case in Iraq and in Jordan. They excelled in engineering, medicine, law, teaching, the military and all other professions. Unlike in Turkey and Lebanon, the Syrian Orthodox in Syria enjoyed the opportunity to participate in the local and national politics as in Iraq and Jordan. Members of the communities with merit became mayors, diplomats, elected councillors in municipalities, deputies in parliaments, speakers of the parliament, ministers of state and even briefly a president of Syria. Now the Syrian speaker of the parliament is a Syrian Orthodox. Qamishli became renowned for producing the highest number of Syrian Orthodox clergy per capita. Today the majority of the bishops of the Syrian Orthodox Church are from Qamishli; later three patriarchs from Mosul-Iraq served and revived the Syrian Orthodox Church throughout the twentieth century (Dinno, 2017, Sato, 2007). The incumbent and the first patriarch of the current era, Ignatius Aphram II Karim, is also from Qamishli. (For a concise list of Syrian Orthodox individuals from Qamishli who contributed to the public life of Syria, see Hanna, 1997.) They are all indebted to the

seed sown by Patriarch Aphram I Barsoum with the help of notable entrepreneurs of its society. (Monofar Barsoum, 1982; Saliba, 1984)

### THE VATICAN IN ABSENTIA AND THE ORIENTAL CATHOLICS AT THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE

The one duty we owe to history is to rewrite it.

*Oscar Wilde*, *Intention*, The Critic as Artist

It is remiss to write any balanced scholarly overview on Barsoum without focusing on the background of Barsoum's active interaction with the then incumbent leaders of the Eastern and Oriental Churches,<sup>78</sup> especially those who were in union with the Apostolic See of Rome and contemporaries of the transition milieu of the Great War, Mandate System, and the emerging nation states.

This section will focus only on the Catholic patriarchal trio of the Syriac Orient tradition, their role, and relations with the Vatican, especially, in connection with the Paris Peace Conference. The Patriarch of the Maronite Church Elias Petrus Hoyek (1843-1931) at the age of 76 enjoyed the seniority amongst the wartime patriarchs. The Syrian Catholic Ignatius Ephrem II Rahmani (1849-1929) was aged 70. The Chaldean Patriarch Joseph VI Emmanuel II Toma (1852-1947) at 67 was the youngest and longest-serving patriarch. (Ramo, Rassam, 2014) It is also imperative to study Bishop Gabriel Tappouni (1879-1968). (O'Mahony, 2010) Later the Syrian Catholic Cardinal/Patriarch Ignatius Gabriel I Tappouni became a lifelong contemporary of Barsoum. They co-existed cheek by jowl throughout their lives and vocation, in the context of the ecumenical sentiments (or the lack of it) in the pre-Vatican II milieu. Their multifaceted relations were complex, yet the vital and interesting association of Barsoum-Tappouni as students and teachers at the Dominican School in Mosul (Hababa), monks in Mardin, then bishops and patriarchs in Syria, was an important era of the history of their sister Churches, whom they guided in a pre-ecumenical period under the Ottomans, French Mandate, nation-states, and independence which is still neglected by

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<sup>78</sup> For a list of leaders of the Eastern and Oriental Churches contemporary to the Great War mentioned earlier, see fn. 24.

scholars. (For the background history of the Syrian Catholic Church, see Flannery, 2008; O'Mahony, 2010.)

By the same token, the picture would not be complete without focusing on the effects of the relations of Oriental Catholic patriarchs with the Vatican during the era of the wartime pontificate, Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922), especially, the repercussion of the restrictions and limitation imposed by the Entente on the Vatican and the pope's diplomatic role and involvement in the Paris Peace process. (Crispotti, 1916; Browne, 2018) Also, the fact that the absence of Vatican representation on behalf of the Eastern Catholic' patriarchs and their communities whose future affairs and presence would be directly affected by decisions made at the Paris Peace Conference, demands our attention.

The reflection then is on the interactive response, necessary collective liaison, co-operation and solidarity of the Oriental Catholic patriarchs with Pope Benedict XV who were all contemporary to the Great War, its entanglements and ramifications on the quality of their responses in such reduced circumstances, the fall-out of the peace process and the formative processes of political, social and economic changes which posed significant challenges in shaping the resettlement and future presence of indigenous Christians in the new Middle East.

### **ORIENTAL CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS: AFFILIATION TO TWO STATES, THE OTTOMAN AND THE VATICAN**

From the 'Tulip Era'<sup>79</sup> to the beginning of the nineteenth century was a turning point in the development of the Ottoman Empire. The

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79 The 'Tulip Era' (Turkish = Lâle Devri) (1718-1730), a period of great intellectual awakening and in which the poets spoke as much of love and wine as they did in their praise of the wisdom of Sultan Ahmed III (1703-1730). By establishing embassies in major European cities, the Ottoman Empire opened itself to Europe as never before perceiving Europe as an indispensable element of the Empire's policy rather than merely a rival which had to be crushed. The era came to an end in autumn 1730 as a result of a revolt led by the conservatives, mainly Janissaries, objecting to the excessive European influence and reforms. Sultan Mahmud II, the grandson of Ahmed III, forced the disbandment of the centuries-old Janissary corps and replaced it with a more modern military force in what is known as 'Auspicious Incident' on 15 June 1826, in anticipation of reviving and re-ushering in the reforms of the Tulip Era.



Ottomans introduced the reform era (*Tanzimat*, 'Reorganization') during the reigns of Mahmud II (*Tanzimâtçı*, 'the Reformist') (1839-1861) and Abdülaziz (1861-1876). Reforms enshrined in the *Hatt-ı Şerif of Gülhane* ('Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber') were announced on 3 November 1839 and the *Hatt-ı Hümayun* ('Imperial Edict') on 18 February 1856 to organize the affairs of the *Ra'ÿā* (Arab 'subjects') and their relations with the state. (Abdul-Nour, 1916) Initially, the *millet* system, which was already institutionalized as an ethno-religious administrative system, gave Jews and Christians subjects of the empire a specific form of organization and juridical status. (Bosworth, 2012) Among Christians, only the Greek and Armenian Orthodox communities were granted full *millet* status and their patriarchs assumed the position of *millet bashi*. They were allowed to reside and establish patriarchates in the Ottoman capital and to take responsibility for the official affairs of all other Eastern and Oriental Orthodox living in the sultan's domain. (Harrow, 2015; Gibbons, 2014) Furthermore, the patriarchs of the Oriental and Eastern Catholics and their communities also enjoyed special privileges, immunity and all other facilities and advantages due to the extension of the regime of the Capitulations.<sup>80</sup> (Angell, 1901; Brown, 1922) This included Catholic and thereafter the Protestant Churches in the empire. Consequently, extended privileges of the regime of the Capitulations, consolidated and sustained the Catholic communities and facilitate the process of gaining full *millet* status and subsequently Catholic patriarchs became *millet bashi* or *ethnarchs*. (Frazee, 2006; Abdul-Nour, 2016)

To enforce the stipulations of the *millet* system, soon after the official endorsement by the pope of their patriarchal elections,

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<sup>80</sup> Capitulations: The term capitulations came to be associated with the Ottoman Empire. It was first been used in the Treaty of 1535 between France and Turkey. (Angell, 1901) By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century a now expansive capitulations regime provided a panoply of privileges including immunity from local jurisdiction, not only for foreign nationals, but often also for an extensive group of local protégés to which the foreign state was able to extend its protection. By the second half of the nineteenth century capitulations came to be perceived as the symbol synonymous with surrender of Ottoman inferiority with respect to Europe. The capitulations regime impinged negatively on the economic prosperity of the granting state, the Ottoman Empire; it was seen as an unjust infringement of its sovereignty. Turkey sought to abrogate the almost 400-year-old regime of the Capitulations and finally implemented it in October 1914. (Brown, 1922; Bentwich, 1923 and 1933)

consecrations and after they received their *pallium*, the new patriarchs travelled to Constantinople to submit their credentials to the sultan. This was with the endorsement and support of the then apostolic delegate<sup>81</sup> and the French ambassador to the Sublime Porte to obtain the customary sultanic *berât* or *firman* [decree] stamped with the *tughra* ['seal'] of the sultan to acknowledge and endorse their patriarchal position as *millet bashi* of their respective community. In effect the patriarch became officials of two states, the Ottoman and the Vatican, responsible on behalf of their communities to both states.

Unlike their counterparts, the Oriental and Eastern Catholic patriarchs received their own *firman* or sultanic decree with relative ease, speed, and affordability, if not at a subsidised cost. This contrasts with the newly elected patriarchs of the Oriental Orthodox and Church of the East, who were at a great disadvantage as they did not have full *millet* status nor enjoy the privilege of the extension of the Capitulations. They had to go through the Armenian patriarch

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81 Due to the loss of the Papal States, the Vatican resorted to the appointment of Apostolic Delegates to certain countries to perform the duties of the Nuncios. Apostolic Delegate to Turkey then was Archbishop Augusto Bonetti (1835 -1904) appointed on 6 May 1887, operating from the French Embassy. Bonetti represented the Holy See until his death in Constantinople on 19 August 1904. Jean Antoine Ernest Constans 1898-1909 was then the French Ambassador.

The Holy See lost its sovereignty during the reign of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), when the 'Roman Question' arose in 1870 with the loss of the Papal States during Italy's wars of unification, or the *Risorgimento*, between 1859 and 1870. (Chadwick, 1998) The first Savoyard king of a united Italy since the 6th century, Victor Emmanuel II of Italy (1861-1878), progressively despoiled the temporal power of the papacy by the annexation of Rome to the Kingdom of Italy under the dynasty of the House of Savoy. Consequently, the Holy See lost its sovereignty and did not have full diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire and with many other European countries. Five popes were contemporary to the challenges of issue of sovereignty of the Holy See which lasted for almost sixty years until the Lateran Treaty 1929: a concordat between the Vatican and Italy, signed at Rome 11 February, ratified and exchanged on 7 June 1929. The Sovereign Pontiff, Pius XI (1922-1939) and His Majesty, Victor Emmanuel III King of Italy (1900-1946) resolved their differences. Italy restored and assured 'the Holy See absolute and visible independence and of guaranteeing to it indispensable sovereignty also in the field of international relations, it has been necessary to establish the State of the Vatican, and to recognize so far as the latter is concerned, complete ownership, exclusive and absolute power and sovereign jurisdiction on the part of the Holy See' Italy recognizes and reaffirms the principle of its Kingdom's Constitution of 1848, whereby the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Religion is the Sole religion of the State.' For the text of the treaty see Lateran, 1929; Chadwick, 1998.

to liaise with the Sublime Porte in order to issue the necessary official Ottoman *berât* or *firman*. This daunting ecclesiastical and official bureaucracy was a cumbersome and very costly process. Therefore, many Syrian Orthodox patriarchs would happily avoid this demoralizing process. When Patriarch Ignatius Younan of Mosul (†1818) was asked about his indifference to obtaining the necessary *firman* the patriarch replied: 'The Cross is my *berât* and *firman*!' (Saka, 1985, 173) Thereafter, at different times and occasions patriarchs might receive the traditional ceremonial sultanic seal (*tughra*)<sup>82</sup> as an acknowledgment of their *millet* status and a token of appreciation of their loyalty as individual or community to the empire. However, the *tughra* is different to the more recent invention the Ottoman 'coat of arms'.<sup>83</sup>

82 The *tughra* (Ottoman Turkish = *tuğrâ* or *tuğrağ*. English = signature, or seals). The unique signature of the sultan written in an outstanding calligraphic style. Patriarch Peter III (1872-1894) of the Syrian Orthodox Church receives an earlier *tughra* in 1881. Patriarchs Eliya XIV Abulyonan (1878-1894) of the Chaldean Church and Ignatius George V Shelhot (1874-1891) of the Syrian Catholic simultaneously received such Sultanic recognition in 1881. The *tughra* of the Syrian Catholic was sent to the patriarchal residence in Aleppo-Syria. Then the *tughra* was re-transferred to the Patriarchate in Mardin during the time of Ignatius Behnam II Benni (1893-1897). The *tughra* presented to the Chaldean arrived in Mosul in a distinctive official ceremony and installed at the main hall of the Chaldean Patriarchate in (1886). Miraculously, the *tughra* survived the bombing and destruction of the Chaldean Archbishopric in Mosul on 7 December 2004. The *tughra* was still on display at the Chaldean Archbishopric on the eve of the fall of city of Mosul in June 2014 almost a century after the end of the Ottoman Empire. No trace of the *tughra* could be found after the liberation of Mosul 2017. (Hababa, 2018) Contrary to the European coat of arms the *tughra* was incorporated in a prime position at the top of the newly created Ottoman coat of arms (*Osmanlı Arması*).

83 The interesting narrative of Ottoman coat of arms' development is yet to be explored scholarly. During the Crimean War (1853-1856) between the Russians and Ottomans at the time of Sultan Abdülmecid I (1839-1861), England and France were allies of the Ottomans. Queen Victoria (1819-1901) decided to present the Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I with the Order of the Garter. However, it became apparent that the Ottoman Empire had no coat of arms, and their official emblem is the *tughra* the seals of the sultans. Consequently, Queen Victoria commissioned Charles Young (1795-1869), an English officer specialist of arms, who served in the heraldic office of Garter King of Arms, the senior member of the College of Arms in England, from 1842 until his death in 1869, to create a coat of arms for the Ottoman Empire. (Seccombe, 1885) Young as Garter King was sent to Istanbul as joint-commissioner to invest the Ottoman sultan in 1856. Traditionally, a coat of arms forms the central element of the full heraldic achievement which in its whole consists of shield, supporters, crest and motto. Young carried out the necessary research to establish Ottoman features which would be suitable to design the

There were also occasions for the patriarchs as leaders of one of the Ottoman *millet* to be received in state and granted a separate audiences with the Ottoman sultan. Rahmani received his sultanic '*berât*' or '*firman*' on 28 December 1898. Emmanuel II was soon, probably the first among the Syriac-speaking patriarchs, to secure an audience in 1902 with Sultan Abdulhamid (1842-1918), most likely with the help of the French Ambassador in Constantinople, before the Maronite Patriarch Elias Hoyek (1899-1931) who had an audience with Sultan Abdulhamid in 1905. (Rassam, 2014)

Emanuel II had another opportunity of an audience with the sultan and other Ottoman senior statesmen at the time of the announcement of the new Turkish Constitution in 1909, during the Second Constitutional Period which lasted from 17 December 1908 to 18 March 1920. Probably this time Emmanuel II was accompanied by Mr Daood Yousifani of Mosul (1879-1923), the elected Christian deputy for Mosul to Meclis-i Mebusan, of the Meclis-i Umumî (The Lower House of the Ottoman Parliament).

## ORIENTAL CATHOLIC CHURCHES AND THE VATICAN

During their pre-war vocation Patriarchs Hoyek, Rahmani and Emanuel II were contemporary to four popes and papal curia: Pope Pius IX (1846 to 1878), Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903), Pope Pius X (1903-1914) and Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922). (Chadwick, 1998) Special attention was given by the Vatican to the Oriental Catholic Churches during the

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Ottoman coat of arms comparable to escutcheons of the European arms tradition with the added *tughra* as a unique Ottoman feature. Queen Victoria then presented Sultan Abdülaziz (1830-1876) to become the 756th Knight of the Order of the Garter on 14 August 1867. (Shaw, 1906) Later under the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II the coat of arms initially invested and designed by Young further developed to include 37 symbols, shapes and objects with specific tinctures or their conventional representations most of them symbols seen in daily life, etched in the memory of Ottoman society for hundreds of years. The most important characteristic of the Ottoman coats of arms is made in conjunction with militaristic aspects and reforms implemented towards the end of the 18th century. The emblem achieved its final form and became the official Ottoman coat of arms on 17 April 1882. Among the first head of state to be presented by Sultan Abdulhamid II with the Ottoman coat of arms was Emperor Wilhelm II of Germany during his state visit to Jerusalem in 1898.

pontificate of Pope Pius IX. The longest serving and ‘most important pope’ in modern Church history. The loss of his temporal power and the mounting challenges to his pontificate and leaderships were only a couple of the many trials that filled the long pontificate of Pius IX, due to the political conflicts between nations and the religious arguments about the Church’s place in the world. (For analysis of the government of the Papal States, and of its governors, the cardinals, and prelates of the Roman Church, in the crucial decades of conflict with liberal Europe in general and with *Risorgimento* Italy in particular, which resulted in the eclipse of an independent, autonomous Papal State, see Weber 1978).

Pope Pius IX was an ardent supporter of the centralization of ecclesiastical power in the papacy and the great advocate of Roman primacy and infallibility.<sup>84</sup> As far as the Eastern Church was concerned Pope Pius IX passed more laws concerning the Eastern Churches than any pontiff before him, in an effort to bring them into conformity with Western practice. In June 1862 Pius took the first step in securing control over the Eastern Churches by establishing a special commission for Eastern Affairs within the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. The commission’s purpose was the preservation of the Eastern rites. It stated: ‘The Holy See demands one thing only, that in these rites nothing be introduced which would be contrary to the Catholic faith, dangerous for souls or opposed to virtue.’

He thought the best kind of relationship between Rome and the Eastern Catholic Churches had been one in which the Orientals looked to Rome as children to father. Clearly, Pope Pius IX wanted every bit of administrative autonomy handed over to Rome. The last words spoken by Pope Pius IX, reflect that: ‘Guard the Church I loved so well and sacredly.’ The Oriental patriarchs fulfilled his passion. (Frazee, 1983)

#### **BENEDICT XV (1914-1922): THE POPE OF PEACE AND THE VATICAN’S PEACE DIPLOMACY**

Appealing for peace in the first ever encyclical of his pontificate Benedict XV said: ‘Certainly those days would seem to have come upon

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<sup>84</sup> Pope Pius IX convened Vatican Council I which made papal infallibility a dogma of the Church on 18 July 1870. (Walsh, 1982)

us of which Christ Our Lord foretold: “You shall hear of wars and rumours of wars—for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”.’ (Matt. 24:6-7)

Wars re-focused the spiritual and moral role of the papacy as the global bastion of peace. Therefore, it is incomprehensible to see the spiritual and physical void caused due to the absence of the pope and representatives of the Vatican at the Paris Peace Conference and the peace settlements under the auspices of the League of Nations. The pope’s absence as the sovereign and a head of Church representing many affected Catholic Churches worldwide, especially the Catholic Churches in the Middle East, was highly controversial. (Crispotti, 1916)

Although none of the Oriental Catholic patriarchs were created cardinals (which did not occur as a significant designation of the eastern Catholics patriarchs until the inter-war period and post-Second World War and the Second Vatican Council) and could not contribute to the 1914 papal conclave, they were already experienced heads of their respective communities for more than a decade by the time Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) was elected. The Sacred College assembled in the Vatican Papal conclave of 1914 with cardinals from combatant nations to choose a successor to Pope Pius X (1903-1914)<sup>85</sup> who passed away on 20 August 1914. This was held shortly after the Great War broke out and in the shadow of the urgency the German advance which had compelled the French government to transfer from Paris to Bordeaux. The temptation was strongly felt that this time round the conclave of the Petrine succession must answer the urgent needs of the moment for a pope who was interventionist and ‘an instrument of peace’; it was rather difficult to grasp a glimpse of the ‘white smoke’ from the Sistine Chapel on 2 September 1914 before it vanished into plumes of thick black clouds of smoke from the raging guns in Europe.

Most concerned about the future of peace and the task ahead, the newly elected sexagenarian Franciscan pope is reported to

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<sup>85</sup> Pope Pius X (1903-1914). The material world will never entice great men. The spirit of poverty was closely united in the Pontiff with humility, simplicity, tender piety and saintliness of life. The climax of that is enshrined in the reference to the Last Will and Testament of Pius X who wrote, ‘Born poor, having lived poor, and certain to die poor’. However, Pius X felt the pinch of the political isolation of the Vatican from 1870. He was known to have said: ‘I am prisoner of the Vatican’ (Kertzer, 2006). For memories of St Pius X, see Merry del Val, 1939.

have said: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.' Now the pope, patriarchs and cardinals all became contemporaries of the Great War (1914-1918) that placed their wartime ecclesiastical leadership against a harsh grindstone. They had to lead their Churches through the calamities of that perilous juncture and its aftermath. They were anxious to know how far and wide the diasporic dust of their respective displaced communities would settle.

The war and its consequences were the focus of Benedict XV. There was no time even to meditate during the early years of his pontificate. His profound pacifism, expertise in jurisprudence and experience at the papal diplomatic service led to dynamic challenges to halt the war. Unlike other prelates who may have depicted it as a just war, Benedict XV rejected the conflict as totally unjustifiable. Almost immediately after his election, on the 8 September 1914, the *Ubi primum*, the new pope's first pronouncement on the war, was to affirm the neutrality of the Holy See, stigmatising the war as: 'God's punishment for sin'. (Pollard, 2014) He repeated his predecessor's call for prayers to end the war and included an appeal to the powers for peace. Soon after Pope Benedict XV promulgated his first ever encyclical *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum* (Appealing for Peace) on 1 November 1914. He labelled the war as: a 'useless massacre' and 'the suicide of civilized Europe'. Pope Benedict was soon to suggest on 7 December 1914, a symbolic 'Peace Moment', a temporary hiatus of the devastatingly violent war for the celebration of Christmas. It became known as 'Christmas Truce' (*Weihnachtsfrieden/Trêve de Noël*) in 1914 in anticipation that it would usher in a permanent truce. (Pollard, 2005)

The pope's next peace pronouncement, *Allorchè Fummo*, 'the Apostolic Exhortation to the Belligerent Peoples and their Rulers', was issued on 28 July 1915, to mark the first anniversary of the commencement of war. The visionary prophecy of Benedict's passionate plea about the dire consequences of the vanquished nations was subjected to a humiliating peace. He stated that: 'nations do not die; humbled and oppressed they chafe under the yoke imposed upon them, preparing a renewal of the conflict, and passing down from generation to generation a mournful heritage of hatred and revenge.' (Flannery, 1962)

Five of the seven years of Benedict XV's papacy were consumed by war. Benedict and his Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Gasparri,<sup>86</sup> did not waste time in activating Vatican diplomacy to persuade the warring powers in Europe to come to the negotiating table, while also endeavouring to prevent the war from spreading before Italy joined the conflict in May 1915 and the USA in April 1917. His concordat diplomacy included feeding the famished, diplomacy with the Sublime Porte, brokering a truce to permit the burial of the dead in the war zones and continued throughout the war and thereafter until his death in 1922. (Pollard, 2015)

### VATICAN DIPLOMACY AT THE OTTOMAN SUBLIME PORTE

The Vatican appointed Archbishop Angelo Maria Dolci (1914-1923) as the apostolic delegate and vicar apostolic of Constantinople on 10 June 1914. The Holy See did not have a full diplomatic relationship with the Ottoman Empire. It had no nunciature. Dolci was attached to and operated initially from the French Embassy and then from the Austrian Embassy. The Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Gasparri instructed Dolci to maintain relations with the Ottoman Empire and his task was to help Catholics at this delicate and tumultuous time. In July 1915, Dolci was instructed to write to Sultan Mehmed V (1809-1918) and approached

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<sup>86</sup> Cardinal Pietro Gasparri (1852-1934). Cardinal, diplomat and politician in the Roman Curia. He was the head of the Department of Canon Law at the Catholic University of Paris. Then became the Secretary of the Commission for the Codification of Canon Law, which led the Canon Law reform, spending the next 13 years in seclusion, digesting volumes of decrees and studies compiled over centuries to create the first definitive legal text in the history of Catholicism. The Code of Canon Law was promulgated by Pope Benedict XV and came into force on 19 May 1918. Gasparri also played a significant role in early stages of the codification of Eastern Catholic canon law. From 1914 until his death in 1934 he was *Camerlengo* of the Holy Roman Church, which is an office of the papal household that includes the fiscal administration of the property and revenues of the Holy See. He served also as the Cardinal Secretary of State from 1914 to 1930 under Popes Benedict XV and Pius XI (1922-1939), and successfully concluded a record number of diplomatic concordats during and after the Great War. The Lateran Treaty (1929) was the crowning achievement of Gasparri, he was instrumental and signatory of this pact which restored the sovereignty of the Holy See and established the Vatican City as a sovereign Papal State. He retired to be succeeded by the Nuncio in Berlin, Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII (1939-1958). (Pollard, 2001)



the then instrumental minister of the interior, Talaat Pasha (1874-1921), together with the Austrian and German ambassadors and the Bulgarian foreign minister at a diplomatic reception. They dissented at the treatment of Christian populations in their empire and asked for mercy on behalf of the Christians who were then being subjected to deportation under the implementation of the Tehcir Law (Deportation Law or Forced Displacement). Dolci did not spare any efforts to mobilize the diplomatic corps in Istanbul. (Kieser, 2018) Later Dolci was charged with the Vatican's concerted efforts to present the case and put a peaceful end to the detention of Bishop Tappouni, then the patriarchal vicar of the Syrian Catholic Church at Mardin-Turkey. He was charged with treason in the time of war, the punishment of such a charge may amount to capital punishment. The empress consort of Austria Zita of Bourbon-Parma (1892-1989) appealed to Sultan Mehmed V for clemency and was instrumental in securing the release of Tappouni. (Brook-Shepherd, 1991) Dolci kept Pope Benedict XV and the Vatican informed of the developments at the Sublime Porte, at times by coded telegrams, through the secretary of foreign affairs Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII (1939-1958). (For the diplomatic history of the Vatican with Turkey, see Poyraz, 2016.)

Pope Benedict XV was the only sovereign to intervene publicly in favour of the Christians of the Ottoman Empire. On 10 September 1915 Pope Benedict XV sent a personally signed letter to Sultan Mehmed V in which he highlighted the seriousness of the situation (Riccardi, 1990):

We're told of entire populations of villages and cities being forced to abandon their homes and moved with untold hardship and suffering to distant concentration camps ... We exhort to your magnanimous generosity to have pity and intervene in favor of this people. (Pope Benedict XV)

#### **VATICAN DIPLOMATIC ISOLATION AND POPE BENEDICT XV'S CHRISTMAS TRUCE AND PEACE NOTE**

Despite Benedict's suggestion of a Christmas truce in 1914 and further attempts to mediate peace in 1916, in anticipation of clear

wisdom at a global level and a genuine pursuit to retrieve the moral high ground of a world torn by war, Pope Benedict XV inaugurated a 'Peace Note',<sup>87</sup> a seven-point peace plan to the powers issued on 1 August 1917. The belligerents rejected Benedict XV's peace initiative; neither side felt the moment was ripe for a peace. The Germans who considered him *Der französische Papst*, rejected any 'Papal Peace' as insulting. Consequently, Austria-Hungary could only acquiesce. In France the pope was denounced as *le pape boche*. The French politician Georges Clémenceau, a fierce anti-clerical, regarded the Vatican's initiative as anti-French. The Italian accused the pope of spreading defeatism. (Pollard, 2005) One reason why some of the Allies, especially Italy, but also France and England, were uneasy with the papal initiative was the feeling that when read carefully those seven points, the talk of restitution of property implied that the Papal States, or at least Rome, would be restored to the papacy. Obviously, any papal peaceful endeavours would be taken as a reminder of the 'Roman Question' and pose a major difficulty for Italy, considering the fact that Rome, the Papal States and its sovereignty had been lost since 1870. Benedict was bitterly disappointed by the failure of the Peace Note, and the irrational public reactions to it.

In spite of cool and critical reception of the Peace Note by President Woodrow Wilson, Pope Benedict XV and his secretary of state Cardinal Gasparri were both optimistic about the Armistice based on President Wilson's 'Fourteen Commandments' or principles. It incorporated most of Pope Benedict's Peace Note to the powers. However, the pope was rebuffed, allegedly, for being in discreet sympathy with the Central Powers. Furthermore, it could be argued that among the Triple Entente due to the Holy See's temporal interests, its peaceful initiative could not preserve complete impartiality and thus reduced the Holy See's ability to mediate. (Coppa, 1998)

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87 On the third anniversary of the outbreak of the war, the Vatican despatched 'the Peace Note' to the heads of the belligerent powers, offering seven key proposals as a practical basis for negotiating peace:

1. The re-establishment of the moral force of international law
2. Reciprocal disarmament
3. International arbitration of disputes
4. Freedom of the seas
5. Reciprocal renunciation of war reparations
6. Evacuation and restoration of occupied territories, and
7. The conciliatory negotiation of rival territorial claims.

Regarding the principle of admitting the neutral powers it was argued that ‘all powers not interested in dividing the spoils should, nevertheless, have a right to participate in the Paris Peace Conference.’ (Pollard, 2014) Consequently, no invitation was issued to Pope Benedict XV and so he could not attend the Paris Peace Conference as a head of state. (Crispotti, 1916)

In the event, exclusion from the conference was no great diplomatic defeat because none of the neutral powers was admitted to the conference. This saved the Holy See a major loss of face.

It is hard to see how the Vatican could have maintained its position of impartiality between the powers if it had participated in the conference. Controversial matters of war guilt, disarmament, reparations, and, particularly, territorial changes were being discussed and decided. That is not to say that behind-the-scenes papal diplomacy was not assured. As we shall see, much of the Vatican’s post-war diplomatic prestige and room for manoeuvre were built precisely upon its distance from the peace settlement. This resulted in positive longer-term consequences for the international standing of the Holy See.

Throughout the war which consumed the first four years of Benedict XV’s papacy, the concordat diplomacy was punctuated with consecutive pronouncements, apostolic exhortations and encyclicals. On 1 November 1914, Benedict published *Ad beatissimi Apostolorum* (‘To the Chair of the Prince of the Apostles’), the first of his 12 encyclicals appealing for peace. On consolidation of the Armistice, Pope Benedict XV issued his third Encyclical *Quod iam diu* (‘That for which’) on 1 December 1918. On the future Peace Conference, the pontiff requested all Catholics everywhere in the world, no matter which side they were on, to pray for a lasting peace and, for those who were entrusted to make it, during the peace negotiations.

Soon after the Paris Peace Conference, and the subsequent conferences, the London Conference and the San Remo Conferences, a topical papal 6th encyclical was issued on 23 May 1920 entitled *Pacem, Dei Munus Pulcherrimum* (‘On Peace and Christian Reconciliation’). This reflected on and called for international reconciliation. (Benedict XV, 2016) In 1914, the Vatican had diplomatic relations with just fourteen states. In 1916, the Italian government demanded that the embassies of the Central Powers to the Holy See leave Rome. This

intervention created difficulties for Vatican diplomacy. Anti-Vatican resentment isolated the Vatican and contributed to the exclusion of the Vatican from the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and from any peace negotiation and settlements thereafter. The Great Powers did not listen to the pope even after the war ended in 1918. The neutrality of the Vatican and its humanitarian relief efforts had significantly enhanced the moral standing of the Holy See and Catholic unity. Eventually, the influence of Vatican diplomacy was greatly extended after 1918, the number of diplomatic relations doubled, and included all of the European great powers except the Soviet Union. (Pollard, 2014)

### **ORIENTAL CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS AT THE VATICAN DURING THE PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE**

According to the established ceremonial tradition the Oriental and Eastern Catholic patriarchs from the Middle East journey soon after the papal election to Rome to offer in the customary way their homage, bow in obeisance to and receive their *pallium* from the newly elected pope and tender their congratulations. They are usually granted a special audience for consultation with the new pontiff in the Vatican on the policies and action plan. However, the war situation may have prevented some of them from performing their homage as early as they wished. However, the Syriac Orient patriarchal triumvirate, Hoyek, Rahmani and Emmanuel II, were all at the Vatican in good time for the Paris Peace Conference from where they were monitoring the unfolding events throughout proceedings of the Paris Peace Conference 1919-1920. They paid homage to Pope Benedict XV and were briefed by Gasparri. He informed the patriarchs that as a condition of her adherence to the Entente, Italy insisted that Britain, France, and Russia should oppose the participation of the Holy See in any subsequent peace conference. Despite active papal peace diplomacy, it failed to gain a seat at the peace conference. To their dismay the patriarchs understood the situation and the reasons why the Vatican was not invited to the Paris Peace Conference. It was made clear to them that neither Pope Benedict nor Gasparri would attend or send a papal plenipotentiary to the Paris Peace Conference.

All Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire were almost equally affected. They suffered the upheavals of war, displacements and

were also expected to represent their vulnerable communities at the Paris Peace Conference. It was clear by then that the patriarchs of the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of the East were both officially invited to participate in the Peace Conference and decided to send Barsoum and Surma Khanum as plenipotentiaries of their Churches respectively. Intriguingly, it was unclear whether Patriarchs Hoyek, Rahmani and Emmanuel II were officially invited or not to the Paris Peace Conference. There is no evidence that Rahmani or Emmanuel II or their official representatives attended the Paris Peace Conference or whether they submitted a memorandum. It is not clear either whether their absence was in solidarity with Pope Benedict XV and the way the Triple Entente dealt with the Vatican. This issue merits further research.

Interestingly, it is not apparent if the *Mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon were invited to send a representative to the conference, nor is there proof that Patriarch Hoyek was invited personally to attend the conference or send a representative. Consequently, Patriarch Hoyek was chosen in his temporal rather than ecclesiastical capacity to be the plenipotentiary representing the *Mutasarrifiyya* and Greater Lebanon rather than the Maronite Church. Hoyek's memorandum<sup>88</sup> concentrated on the forming of Greater Lebanon, but it did leave the possibility of an alternative option of establishing an independent, autonomous, or semi-autonomous, entity 'Maronia' to replace the Maronite *Mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon. Astoundingly, Hoyek's memorandum did not include or mention the presence of any other Christian denominations in greater Lebanon! Surprisingly, among the Oriental Catholic patriarchates in the Ottoman Empire, Ignatius Hoyek (1898-1931) was the only Oriental Catholic patriarch, or for that matter the only patriarch or cleric of such a high rank and seniority to officially attend as plenipotentiary at the Paris Peace Conference 1919. (al-Khoury, 2013) Hoyek's patriarchal entourage like his memorandum did not represent either the Christians or the Catholic spectra of Greater Lebanon. It was made up of one Greek

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<sup>88</sup> Memorandum by Patriarch Peter Hoyek of the Maronite Church, the highest ecclesiastic of Syriac Orient, attended the conference in his temporal rather than ecclesiastical capacity. His memorandum dated 25 October 1919 demanded the establishment of Greater Lebanon with the possible autonomous or semi-autonomous 'Maronia', a Maronite mountainous entity, with no mention whatsoever of the presence of any other Christian community in Greater Lebanon; see Hoyek, 1919..

Melkite bishop and the rest were Maronite bishops. It did not include any Syrian Catholic or Chaldean bishops. At Paris Clémenceau, kept Hoyek waiting in spite of the pressure from French Catholics due to the fact that the important Clémenceau-Faisal negotiations were going on. Therefore, Clémenceau had to delay his meeting with Hoyek. (Clémenceau, 1919) Hoyek's ecclesiastical/temporal role at Paris merits further detailed research.

Hoyek cut short his stay in Paris to go back to the Vatican to attend together with Patriarchs Rahmani, Emmanuel II and the Catholicos of the Armenian Catholic Terzian the consecration ceremony of seven new cardinals; among them was Filippo Camassei (1906–1919), the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. (Rammo, 2006) During his lengthy stay at the Vatican Rahmani no doubt would have consulted some Syriac manuscripts at the Vatican Library if the opportunity presented itself. It was said that among the Oriental Catholic patriarchs that Rahmani allegedly exerted much effort and thus was considered instrumental in formulating the vision of the Vatican, which entwined itself with inspired action on the part of Pope Benedict XV to proclaim St Ephrem a doctor of the universal Church. Pope Benedict XV was, of course, also the founder of the Pontificio Istituto Orientale. (Brock, 2005) Therefore, Rahmani may have stayed in the Vatican to liaise with the Rome curia on logistics to prepare the ground for Pope Benedict XV to issue his 8th encyclical on St Ephrem the Syrian, *Principi Apostolorum Petro*, on 20 October 1920. This affirmed the status of St Ephrem the Syrian as doctor of the universal Church. (Benedict XV, 2016) Rahmani's name, together with the names of Hoyek, and Emmanuel II, was listed in the text of the encyclical and enshrined in ecclesiastical history as being the incumbent Catholic patriarchs of the Syriac tradition. (For St Ephrem's reception in the West, see Brock, 2003; Murray, 2004) It was not clear what Patriarch Rahmani did after the end of the Paris conference. Patriarch Rahmani and Tappouni may well have made representations to the French authority and submitted memorandum and demanded reparations for their losses and damages during the war to the Peace conference, but no evidence has yet been found.

**PATRIARCH EMMANUEL II IN A PEACE MISSION  
TO PARIS AND LONDON**

Rammo, personal secretary and the authorized biographer of Emmanuel II who accompanied him during this period, covered in his biography of Emmanuel II the visit to the Vatican, Paris and London with no mention at all of the Paris Peace Conference or sending a delegate or any act of advocacy. (Rammo, 2006) However, at the close of the Paris Peace Conference, Emmanuel II embarked on what appears to be a comparable but parallel peace mission to Barsoum. The independent Catholic newspaper *La Croix*, a leading Parisian daily, announced on 12 January 1920 the arrival from Rome of the Chaldean Patriarch Emmanuel II Thomas on 9 January in Paris less than a fortnight before the finale of the Peace Conference on 21 January 1920. There were no indications in *La Croix* if Emmanuel II attended any of the concluding sessions or made representation or submitted a memorandum and list of losses and damages to the Peace Conference or to the French authority or whether he met any officials of the Entente during his stay in Paris which lasted until 20 February 1920. During this period Paris was busy with the general election which was held on 17 January 1920. Monsignor Paul Deschanel became the president and Alexandre Millerand replaced Clémenceau. Emmanuel II was received by Millerand on 29 January and by Deschanel on 5 February. He also visited ex-president Raymond Poincaré on 9 February. Emmanuel II submitted to all the same report on the losses and damages sustained by the Chaldean Church and requested compensation and reparation. (Rammo, 2006)

However, there may be an indication of contact and liaison with the Chaldean member of Syriac Orient 'Walking Delegation' at Paris, who could well be initially delegated by Emmanuel II and also had influence on the text of the memorandum submitted at that time.<sup>89</sup>

Later, during Barsoum's peace mission in London, Emmanuel II<sup>90</sup> arrived in London on 7 March 1920 probably to pursue a parallel

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89 Memorandum by Namik, Said A, and R Nedjib (the Chaldean member of the walking delegation) entitled: 'La Question assyro-chaldéenne devant la conférence de la paix' dated 16 July 1919, Paris: private distribution to Peace Conference Delegations. A copy can be found in the Hoover Library, Stanford University. (Almond and Lutz 1935).

90 Successive British Vice-Consuls in Mosul had a keen interest in the Chaldeans and

peace mission to Barsoum. However, Emmanuel II was the guest of the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Francis Alphonsus Bourne (1861-1935) who may have facilitated Emmanuel II's peace mission and arranged an advocacy meeting for Emmanuel II with British officials. Emmanuel II visited the Foreign Office and submitted a document of the losses and damages that the Chaldean Church sustained during the war and requested reparations. (Emmanuel II, 1920) Cardinal Bourne formed and launched in the presence of Emmanuel II a Benevolence Committee for the Chaldean Church. (Vickers, 2013)

The visit of Emmanuel II to London coincided with and had a similar aim to the visit of Barsoum and Surma Khanoum the official Plenipotentiary of the Church of the East to the Paris Conference, who due to one impediment or another never made it to the conference in Paris. (d'Bait Mar Shimun and Wigram, 1920) Here the advocacy mission in London on behalf of her people who were known during the war as 'Our Smallest Allies' (Wigram, 1920; Llewellyn-Jones, Rosie (2019), received excellent attention and support from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Curzon and Her Majesty the Queen. Here the

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the Church of the East inter-church rivalry during the time of Patriarch Emmanuel II. Vice-consul Young's Cinderella service in Mosul may have been cut short for being over interested and taking inter-church affairs more seriously, beyond what was permitted in his job description which deplored consular involvement in local feuds and religious quarrels. (Young, 1909) Vice-Consuls Henry Charles Hony nurtured similar interest in Mosul. He wrote an interesting reflection of his impression of Emmanuel II: 'Emmanuel II, Bishop of Babylon, is an elderly man with big grey beard and spectacles. On first sight he looks as though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, ... He is always very polite, seized you with both hands and conducts you to the highest place of honour while enquiring tenderly after your health.' The patriarch was busy trying to secure the election of [Yousifani] the Catholic candidate to be the deputy for Mosul to Meclis-i Mebusan (The Lower House of the Ottoman Parliament) against [Abdul-Nour] the candidature of a Jacobite [Syrian Orthodox] but protested that he only thought of himself as a Christian and to forget that he was a Catholic. (Candy, 1987) Members of the Archbishop [Benson] of Canterbury Mission to the Assyrians which lasted from 1886 to 1915 were also keen observers of Emmanuel II. (Coakley, 1992) Wigram informed the Archbishop of Canterbury of the opposition of Emmanuel II to the Archbishop's Mission and instigated the decision not to receive Emmanuel II during his earlier visit to London. (Bell, 1935) Wigram was in London accompanying Surma Khanoum at the time of the visit of Emmanuel II and was in attendance at the dinner extended by the archbishop to Barsoum. Wigram had advised Archbishop Davidson during Emmanuel II's previous visit to London and he may well have also briefed the archbishop again regarding Emmanuel II during this visit. (Bell, George, 1935)



Peace Mission to London deserves scholarly attention. We have no documentary evidence that Barsoum and Emmanuel II met in London or collaborated in their peace mission.

Luckily, members of Syriac Orient communities who managed to survive the *Sayfo* 1915 by the skin of their teeth ended up as a community living in post-Great War settlements, in the new nation-states under both the British and French Mandate. Hoyek, Rahmani, Tappouni and Barsoum had their patriarchate in Lebanon and Syria respectively under the French Mandate and had communities in Iraq, Jordan and Palestine under the British mandates and in Turkey also. Emmanuel II's patriarchate was located in Mosul under the British mandate and the Hashemite monarchy. The French considered Hoyek, Rahmani and Tappouni to be close collaborators—a thorny realisation at the time. Barsoum astutely and incisively managed to keep an almost equal distance to maintain the necessary working relations with both the French and British Mandate authorities, more importantly with the Hashemite Kingdoms. This gave Barsoum as a Church leader of that transition period an advantage, at least in Iraq and Jordan and the Holy Land, over Rahmani and Tappouni. The balanced relations Barsoum maintained gave him the freedom to communicate with both officialdom and, more importantly, managed regularly to visit his Church communities in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Palestine. Rahmani and Tappouni were not able to visit their community in Iraq which was considered a bone of contention. They could not pay such essential pastoral visits to Iraq and Jordan, where a considerable section of their communities lived under the British Mandate and the Hashemites. This was most probably due to the fact that their relations with the French had tarnished relations with King Faisal I and the Hashemites, while Faisal I was impressed with Barsoum's composure when they first met in Damascus, and then through their liaison at the Paris Peace Conference.

Like Barsoum, Emmanuel II was shrewd and pragmatic enough to try and manage to keep a safe but interactive dialogue with the powers of his days. Emmanuel II's forty-seven eventful years at the helm, ruled a widespread Chaldean Church from his patriarchate which was located in the relative safety and stability of the city of Mosul. His time as patriarch was spent under the Ottomans, in peace and wartime, British and French influence/mandate and

the monarchy. As a patriarch of a large Chaldean community, he managed to keep throughout a relative political impartiality which reflected positively on the safety and the level of integration of his communities in their milieu regardless of the genre of the power. (O'Mahony, 2008b; Rassam, 2014)

Emmanuel II endeavoured also to enable his community to improve their education.<sup>91</sup> He encouraged the Chaldean intelligentsia to better themselves as citizens and be involved in the welfare of their countries. While Emmanuel II served for seventeen years in Majlis al-A'yan, the Upper House of the Iraqi parliament, as the patriarch of the largest Christian Community in Iraq, he managed to utilize his ecclesiastical clout to affirm the presence of his communities and other Christians, lobbying for Chaldean candidates to secure proper representations at their local and national authority. Under the Hashemite Mr Yousifani became a member of the Constituent Assembly of Iraq and the Iraqi Constitution Drafting Committee that produced the first Iraqi Constitution 1925 which was far more inclusive, all-encompassing and functional, in comparison with the current sectarian Iraqi Constitution 2005, which is in desperate need of a comprehensive revision. Currently, when the Christian community in Iraq was subjected to a ruthless campaign of ethno-religious cleansing, and rendered endangered in their homeland, the Constitution 2005 presented Christians in Iraq as being only Assyrians and Chaldean, excluding at least ten other Christian denominations including the Syrian Orthodox, the Armenians, the Protestants, Evangelicals and other denominations. (Ghanimah, 2002) Now the Christian community in Iraq is in need of constitutional protection as a vulnerable and endangered community. This is where effective exemplary Church leadership is needed, comparable to what Barsoum and Emmanuel exhibited, to enforce and secure constitutional protection for those ethno-religiously cleansed and rendered endangered in their homeland. Emmanuel II worked astutely to fully integrate his community in Iraq throughout the monarchy. He cultivated good relations with

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<sup>91</sup> Emmanuel II realized the importance of education for his community. He was a graduate of St Joseph's, the Jesuit University in Beirut, and he recognised the differences such an educational foundation could make to the integration of Christians into Middle Eastern society. Emmanuel II had to draw on all available resources in 1921 to succeed in his request for a Jesuit school in Baghdad and Mosul from the Holy See. (Girling, 2016)

the King Faisal I who offered the patriarch a permanent seat in the Majlis al-A'yan and secured it for his successors and affirmed the quota for Christian Members of the Parliament. Patriarch Yousef VII Ghanimah (1947-1958) was the last patriarch to serve as a member of the Upper House until his death on 8 July 1958 just a week before the Iraqi parliament was abolished after 14 July 1958 revolution. (Rammo, 2006; Rassam, 2014)

All patriarchs of the Syriac-speaking Churches exhibited extraordinary leadership as bishops and as patriarchs of their Churches in their respective milieux in a flashpoint region of the world before and during two world wars and the intervening peacetime. A part of the Church of the East, the rest of the leadership of the Syriac-speaking Churches decided to maintain neutrality in the Great War. It is debatable whether the trio of Oriental Catholic patriarchs upheld the position of Pope Benedict and the Vatican's declared policy of neutrality or their rational understating of their reality in their milieu. However, their neutrality shielded their communities from participating militarily in the war efforts which spared relatively their communities from sustaining heavier causalities and further consequences. Furthermore, none of the Oriental Orthodox or Catholic patriarchs subscribed to the concept of self-determination that is still fomenting perpetual unrest among other communities in their midst.

## CONCLUSION

Under the reduced circumstances of the Great War era, when all Syriac Orient communities were affected in equal measure, and during the Paris Peace Conference, there was no coherent co-operation among Syriac Orient Church leaders. Ephram Barsoum endeavoured to pioneer a change in this lack of cohesion by unifying the Oriental Churches' leadership. He co-operated with authorities to safeguard the equidistance between Church and state under the mandates and all the emerging independent nation-states to secure survival and healthy co-existence, with citizens enjoying equal constitutional rights and protection. Barsoum showed the needed rational leadership despite the vicissitudes of time. This reflects positively on the revival and prosperity of his community in different states and countries of the Middle East.

Although Barsoum ultimately failed in his mission to unite the Oriental Churches, this overview demonstrates his significant and important cultural crusade, spiritual commitment and heroic effort to bolster the prosperity of his community, as well as his vital contributions to the plight and historical understanding and documentation of the Syrian Orthodox community. The exploration of his life and works presented here offers a thorough history of Barsoum upon which further academic research of his humanitarian, cultural and spiritual contribution might be constructed. Scholarly and academic concern and research interest in this key figure of the Syrian Orthodox tradition is vital now more than ever in understanding the current struggles faced by Syrian Orthodox Christians today and learning important lessons towards supporting the current day community during a distinct yet familiar period of war and the search for peace.

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# THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

*Sebastian Brock*

At the end of the nineteenth century the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch was only to be found in the Middle East and in south-west India. By contrast, at the end of the twentieth century there are dioceses and churches to be found in all five continents. The primary cause of this major change can readily be identified: during the course of the twentieth century the Syrian Orthodox Church has suffered from two traumatic experiences, the massacres that have taken place, above all in 1915, 'the year of the sword (Sayfo)', and the large-scale waves of emigration from the Middle East, first mainly to the Americas, and more recently to countries of western Europe and to Australia. And then, in recent decades the presence of the (non-Chalcedonian) Syrian Orthodox Church in the West has led to the renewal of theological dialogue with the (Chalcedonian) Catholic and Orthodox Churches after a break of over thirteen centuries. It is upon these three features, the massacres, the emigration (especially that to Europe), and the renewal of theological dialogue, that the present chapter will focus.<sup>1</sup> Among the more important matters that are not covered here is the complex twentieth-century history of the Syrian Orthodox community in south India and its relationships with the Patriarchate.

## THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND IN BRIEF

The Syrian Orthodox Church, along with the other Oriental Orthodox Churches (Armenian, Coptic and Ethiopian), has always objected to certain parts of the Definition of Faith issued at the Council of

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1 The section on theological dialogue is, however, very brief, since I have described this elsewhere (see note 36).

Chalcedon (451), on the grounds that the wording implied an excessive separation between the divinity and the humanity of the incarnate Christ. Although various attempts were made in the late fifth, the sixth and early seventh centuries to heal the divisions between those who accepted the Council (today, the Orthodox, Catholic and Churches of the Reformation) and those who rejected it (today, the Oriental Orthodox Churches), the division effectively became fossilized as a result of the Arab conquests of the 630s, since the anti-Chalcedonian Churches, located in areas which came under Muslim rule, were now cut off politically from the Byzantine Empire and the Christian West which henceforth remained solely Chalcedonian. A regrettable consequence of this separation was that the polemical terms used in the heat of the christological controversy also got fossilized in the consciousness of the Chalcedonian Churches and have regularly been used up to—and including—modern times: it is only in the context of recent ecumenical dialogue that it is beginning to be realized that the traditional terms ‘Jacobite’ and ‘monophysite’ (for the Oriental Orthodox Churches) and ‘Nestorian’ for the Church of the East, are not only offensive but also positively misleading.

The designation ‘Syrian’ for the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch antedates the creation of the modern state of Syria. Although it so happens that the seat of the Patriarchate is in modern Syria, the designation ‘Syrian’ in fact refers to the Syriac liturgical tradition of the Church. In the Diaspora, because many members of the Syrian Orthodox Church originate from other countries of the Middle East (Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon etc), and not from the Syrian Arab Republic, the term ‘Syriac Orthodox’ has sometimes come into usage, in particular in North America.

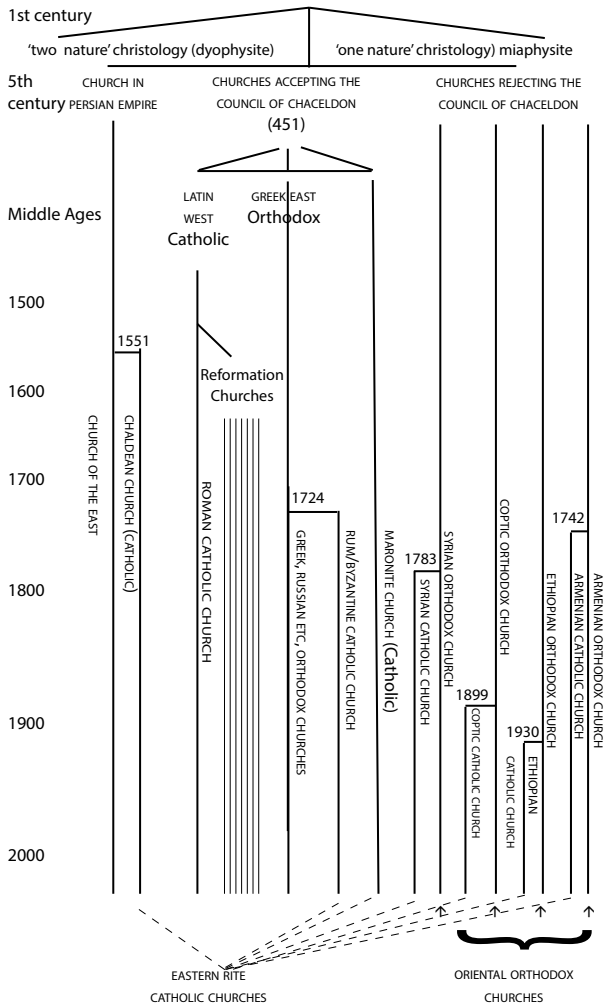
At the end of the nineteenth century the Syrian Orthodox Church was present only within the Ottoman Empire and (since the late seventeenth century) in south-west India. Some idea of the demographic distribution of the Syrian Orthodox populace in the Middle East, c. 1870, can be gained from the figures given in two manuscripts in the Mingana Collection (University of Birmingham).<sup>2</sup> The figures are given

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2 Mingana Syr. 161, f.245b-246a (dated 1872), and Mingana Syr. 310, f.1b-2a (of circa 1894). It seems likely that these tables go back to a ‘Statement of Register of the Syrian Orthodox people’, compiled in 1870 by ‘Abdallah Stoph, a monk from Sadad (near Homs). [3] See, for example, K Gurun, *The Armenian File: the Myth of Innocence Exposed* (London, 1985).

Table 1: The place of the Syrian Orthodox Church among the other Churches

(NB for reasons of space, the Evangelical offshoots of the different Churches of the Middle East have not been included; likewise, the complicated history of Syriac Christianity in southern India is left out of consideration.)







aspirations and the accompanying revolutionary actions. Although it is certainly true that some Armenians did have such aspirations and a small number did commit acts of terrorism, the massive scale of retribution, extended in 1915 to the entire Armenian population was totally unjustified. While this much is generally recognized, what is much less recognized is the fact that the Christian populace of eastern Anatolia belonging to the various Syriac Churches also suffered in the same way as the Armenians.

(a) 1895

Information, sometimes very detailed, concerning these massacres, which occurred mainly in the last three months of 1895, is to be found in several published Syriac accounts, in both prose and verse.<sup>4</sup> Some further details are preserved in the colophon of another manuscript in the Mingana Collection, written in Mosul in May 1896, a translation of which is given in Appendix 2. According to this account, the number of Syrian Orthodox who were killed in the course of these massacres of 1895/6 was 25,000, while that for the Armenians was 80,000.

(b) 1915

Even more dire were the widespread massacres of 1915, during the First World War. Again, besides the Armenians, Christians belonging to the Syriac Churches were also victims, and in Syrian Orthodox oral tradition 1915 is known as 'Sayfo', '(the year of) the Sword', or 'Firman', '(the year of) the Firman (sc. to kill the Christian population)'. Until recently there has been hardly any documentation for these massacres available in print. An account, in Arabic, had indeed been published in Beirut in 1920 by the Syrian Catholic priest Isaac Armalet, who had been living in Mardin at the time.<sup>5</sup> In the last few

4 See the sources for the massacres of 1915, below; the most important is Abdmshiho Na'man, *Dmo Zlibo* (1997), 42-50 (German tr. 39-43), based on a contemporary narrative by the priest of Qarabash, Paulos son of Abdulahad.

5 Ishaq Armaleh, *Al-qusara fi nakabat an-nasara* (Beirut, 1920); cp also Joseph Naayem, *Les Assyro-Chaldeens et les Armeniens massacres par les Turcs* (Paris, 1920; English translation, *Shall this Nation die?* [New York, 1921]). For the massacres in eastern Anatolia of the Assyrians, see G Yonan, *Ein vergessener Holocaust. Die Vernichtung der christlichen Assyrier in der Türkei* (Göttingen/Vienna, 1989); also G Davis (ed.), *Genocides against the Assyrians* (Washington DC, 1999) [a collection of documents; non vidi] and S R Sonyel, *The Assyrians of Turkey: Victims of Major Power Policy* (Turkish Historical Society Publications, VII.168; Ankara, 2001) [non vidi].

years, however, a number of new sources, mainly Syrian Orthodox, have been made available:

—Y Cicek (ed.), ‘Seyfe’. *Das Christen-Massaker in der Turkei, 1714-1914* [in Syriac] (St Ephrem Monastery, Holland, 1981). This is a collection of verse texts by different authors; several contain material of historical interest.

—Suleyman Henno, *Schicksalschläge der syrischen Christen im Tur-Abdin 1915* [in Syriac] (St Ephrem Monastery, Holland, 1987); a Turkish translation has been published in Germany, Ferman: *Tur ‘Abdinli Suryanilerin 1914-1915*, Katliami, 1993. This contains a very detailed account, village by village, in part based on oral information from survivors. Exact figures and names are often given.

—P V M, ‘Documents sur les evenements de Mardine 1915-1920’, *Studia Orientalia Christiana, Collectanea* 29/30 (1996/7), 5-220.

—‘Abdmshiho Na‘man d-Qarahbash, *Dmo Zlibo* [‘Spattered Blood’; in Syriac] (Augsburg, 1997; St Ephrem Monastery, 1999). German translation by G Toro and A Gorgis, *Vergossenes Blut. Geschichten der Greuel, die an den Christen in der Turkei verübt, und der Leiden, die ihnen 1895 und 1914-1918 zugefügt wurden* (Bar-Hebraeus Verlag, Glane, 2002). In 1915 the author was a boy of 12 studying at the Seminary School in Deir ez-Za‘faran (the seat of the Patriarchate, just outside Mardin). His book contains detailed information on the massacres of 1895 as well as on those during the First World War.

—Na‘man Aydin, *Gedshe w-Shabte d-Tur ‘Abdin* [in Syriac] (St Ephrem Monastery, 1997). Poems, with introductions containing information on monasteries and churches.

—Asmar al-Khoury, *Sulfotbo qashyotbo d-‘al Suryoye* [in Syriac] (Sodertalje, 1998). Prose and verse accounts, village by village.

—S de Courtois, *Le génocide oublié. Chrétiens d’Orient, les derniers araméens* (Editions Ellipses: Collection l’Orient politique, 2002); English translation in preparation. This is focused on Mardin, and makes use of French official documents from the time.

From the various sources it is possible to discern a general pattern underlying the massacres: initially the younger men were conscripted, originally (August 1914) into the army, but from March 1915 onwards into forced labour under harsh conditions, as a result

of which many died (one source says that the survival rate was only 30 percent<sup>6</sup> survived). The leading men, including the clergy, in both towns and villages, were first summoned (or simply rounded up) and then imprisoned, only to be taken off in droves and killed in some secluded place. Thus, for example, on 9 April 1915 the governor of Diyarbakir ordered his deputy to seize the leading Christians. In the course of three days 1,200<sup>7</sup> men had been rounded up; these were imprisoned and subjected to various tortures. Finally, on 25 April they were roped together and taken by 15<sup>8</sup> boats, allegedly to go to exile in Mosul, but in fact the governor had given secret orders for them to be taken ashore at the village of Shkafto, after two days' journey, and there to be stripped and killed by the local headman, 'Omarkay son of Farikhaneh. Once the men were all out of the way and disposed of in this sort of manner, those who remained, especially in the villages, where only women and children left, could be attacked and pillaged with impunity.

In 1919, after the First World War had ended, Bishop Severios Barsaum (who was to become Patriarch, 1933-1957) presented figures for the number of Syrian Orthodox villages affected and persons killed in the massacres (see Table 3);<sup>9</sup> when these figures are compared with those in Table 2, it becomes evident that the Syrian Orthodox Church lost well over one third of its people in the Middle East. Eight out of the twenty dioceses in the Middle East were either totally, or very largely, wiped out, and whole areas which had formerly had a sizeable Syrian Orthodox population were now left with none, since those who had escaped being killed had fled elsewhere.

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6 Abdmshiho Na'man (1997), p. 80 (German tr. p. 61).

7 See Abdmshiho Na'man, pp. 81-2 (German tr. pp. 61-2). There is some understandable variation in the figures given in the different sources: a second account on p. 192 (German tr. p. 124) gives '807', and Henno, p. 10, has 'about 700'.

8 The second account in Abdmshiho Na'man gives '17'.

9 The table can be found reproduced in a number of different places (the figures differ minimally; those given here are based on the original document as reproduced by S. de Courtois).

*Table 3:<sup>10</sup> Bishop Severios Barsaum's figures for Syrian Orthodox losses in the massacres during the First World War*

Town	villages affected	families	persons	churches	priests
Amid/Diyarbakir	30	764	5,379	5	7
Bsheryyeh	30	718	4,481	10	10
Bitlis	12	130	850	1	
Cizre	26	994	7,510	13	8
Derik		50	350	1	1
Garzan	22	744	5,140	12	9
Kharput/Elazig	24	508	3,500	5	2
Lice	10	658	4,706	5	4
Mardin	8	880	5,815	12	5
Midyat	47	3,935	25,830	60	60
Nuseybin	50	1,000	7,000	12	25
Baravat	15	282	1,880	1	1
Slivan	9	174	1195	1	1
Sirvan	9	283	1,870	2	4

10 Although it concerns the far more numerous Armenian population, a very important contemporary account of the massacres in this region is to be found in L A Davis (ed. S K Blair), *The Slaughterhouse Province. An American Diplomat's Report on the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917* (New Rochelle, 1989). Davis was the American Consul in Kharput from 1915-1917. That the Syrian Orthodox were also included is clear from his passing references to them, alongside the Armenians, in his dispatches (to the American Ambassador, Henry Morgenthau), of 30 June 1915 (p. 144) and of 30 December 1915 (pp. 179-80). On the massacres of the Armenians, particularly important is his comment in his Dispatch of 24 July 1915, where he says: 'I have written strongly about the situation and proceedings here because it is impossible to write about them at all and not do so. It is not that I am in any way a champion of the Armenian race. It is not a race one can admire or among whom I should chose to live. But whatever the faults of the Armenian people may be and however conclusive may be the proof that some of them have been involved in a revolutionary plot, the punishment inflicted upon these people is so severe, the tragedy is so terrible, that one cannot contemplate it and certainly cannot live in the midst of it without being stirred to the depths of one's nature. ... [I]t is impossible to conceive of any justification that can be urged for a measure so severe.' (p. 160) A moving account by a survivor from a village in the Kharput region is given by Elizabeth Caraman, *Daughter of the Euphrates* (New York, 1939). These figures have frequently been given erroneously as the line of data for Slivan (sic) was for some reason omitted from the table as given, for example, in Sébastien de Courtois, *Le génocide oublié Chrétiens d'Orient, les derniers araméens* (Paris: Editions Ellipses, Collection l'Orient politique, 2002) which has now been translated into English, *The Forgotten Genocide: Eastern Christians, The Last Arameans* (New York: Gorgias Press, 2004) which included the omitted statistic in the table on p. 239. The original source is helpfully reproduced in Aziz Abdul-Nour, 'The Faithful Presence of the Syrian Orthodox in a Challenging Milieu: Sayfophobia, Citizenship, IDPs 1915-2015, and beyond', *Living Stones Yearbook* 2016, pp.139-198, 182. See also this volume, p. 85, Fig. 17..

Savur	7	880	6,164	2	3
Siirt		100	650	1	2
Siverek	30	897	5,725	12	12
Urfa (Edessa)		50	340		
Viranshehir	16	303	1,928	1	
<i>Total</i>	<i>345</i>	<i>13,330</i>	<i>90,313</i>	<i>156</i>	<i>154</i>

The Kurdish uprising of 1925/6 caused much further suffering to several of the Syrian Orthodox villages in parts of Tur 'Abdin.<sup>11</sup> Among the bases that Kurds took over were two famous monasteries, that of the Cross, and Mor Malke. Both were eventually taken and destroyed by the Turkish army. There had also been plans to sack Mor Gabriel monastery too, since it had been alleged to be another Kurdish stronghold, but fortunately a Syrian Orthodox serving under the army commander learnt of the plans, informed the bishop who managed to get a counter order from the army general in Diyarbakir, thus saving this ancient monastery which, in 1997, celebrated the 1600th anniversary of its foundation.

## EMIGRATION

It was this first traumatic event, the massacres of 1895/6 and 1915, which led to the second traumatic event, the large-scale emigration from Eastern Turkey. Prior to 1895 there had been very little emigration of Christians of the Syriac Churches, but in the late 1890s, and again after 1915, large numbers fled from their homes and either settled in other parts of the Middle East (notably modern Lebanon and Syria), or emigrated to the West, and in particular North America. It was in this initial wave of emigration that many Syrian Orthodox from Diyarbakir settled in New Jersey, those from Kharput in Massachussets, those from Tur 'Abdin in Rhode Island, and those from Mardin in Canada (Montreal and Sherbrooke). Yet others went to Brasil (San Paolo, Campo Grande) and Argentina (Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Frias-S. Estiro). The first priest for North America was ordained in 1907, and

11 The following is based on the Syriac account by Na'man Aydin in *Qolo Suryoyo* 62 (1988), pp. 155-53 [sic]; also his article in *Qolo Suryoyo* 117/118 (1997), pp. 226-19 [sic]. (*Qolo Suryoyo/Kolo Suryoyo* is the very informative magazine of the Archdiocese of Central Europe, and has been published on a regular basis since 1978).

the first two Syrian Orthodox churches were consecrated in 1927 (New York) and 1928 (Worcester, Mass.).<sup>12</sup>

Although the second massive emigration from Eastern Turkey did not get under way until the early 1970s, two political events of the intervening years resulted in Syrian Orthodox emigration from two other parts of the Middle East. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 had led to many Palestinian Christians being driven out of their homes, and among those who emigrated to the West were a number of Syrian Orthodox, including the Bishop of Jerusalem, Mor Athanasius Samuel, who had been one of the first people to recognize the importance of the Dead Sea Scrolls, buying a number of them from the Beduin finders.<sup>13</sup> In 1957 Mor Athanasius was appointed Metropolitan of the newly created Archdiocese of North America, and he subsequently played a very important part in the development of the Syrian Orthodox community in America: new churches were acquired, or built, and the main liturgical books were translated into English and published in bilingual editions.<sup>14</sup> When Mor Athanasius died in 1995 the number of Syrian Orthodox parishes warranted the division of the Archdiocese into three separate Patriarchal Vicariates (Eastern US, Western US, and Canada). There are now some 35,000 Syrian Orthodox in North America as a whole.

Further emigration from Israel and the West Bank has taken place as a result, especially, of the June War of 1967, and the First and Second Intifada. As a result, the number of Syrian Orthodox left in Jerusalem (focused on the Monastery of St Mark) and Bethlehem is now very small.

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12 The information on North America is derived from an unpublished typescript on the history of the Syrian Orthodox in North America by the Very Revd John Meno.

13 Athanasius Y Samuel, *Treasure of Qumran. My Story of the Dead Seas Scrolls* (London, 1968). Further information, based on information from the diary of the author's father, a friend of Mor Athanasius, is to be found in G Kiraz's (Syriac) colophon to his *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels*, IV (Leiden, 1996), pp. 371-4. G Kiraz has also given an account of the Syrian Orthodox community of Bethlehem in his *'Iqd al-Juman fi Akhbār al-Suryan* (St Ephrem Monastery, Holland, 1987).

14 Bilingual volumes of the Services for Baptism, Marriage and Burial were published in 1974 (Hackensack NJ), of special services for Festivals in 1984 (Lodi NJ), and of a collection of anaphoras in 1991 (Lodi NJ); for the latter, see my review in *Sobornost/Eastern Churches Review* 15:1 (1993), pp. 71-3.

Emigration of Syrian Orthodox (along with other Christians) from Iraq has been caused by a number of political events in that country: the revolution of 1960, the Iraq-Iran War, and the Gulf War along with its aftermath.<sup>15</sup> In Lebanon, the troubles of 1961 and especially the Civil War, likewise led to considerable numbers of Syrian Orthodox (and of course others) seeking a new and more peaceful home in the West.

Unlike these earlier smaller waves, the second massive wave of emigration again came from eastern Turkey. This time it did not have its origins in turmoil caused by the political situation, but its roots go back to the agreement between the Turkish and West German Governments in 1961 whereby encouragement was given to Turkish workers to go to Germany as Gastarbeiters.<sup>16</sup> Among those who went were a number of young Syrian Orthodox men from the economically depressed area of Tur 'Abdin. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the momentum increased considerably, with whole families settling in the Netherlands and Sweden as well as Germany. This was because the situation in Tur 'Abdin was deteriorated seriously as a result of Kurdish insurgence in the region. The Syrian Orthodox were caught up in the turmoil between the Turkish Army and the Kurdish insurgents (the PKK), and as a result of the Turkish Army's scorched-earth policy a large number of villages were forcibly evacuated. This situation lasted until 1999 when a ceasefire eventually came about. In the early 1990s the situation in Tur 'Abdin had actually become even worse, due to the activities of Islamic extremists who targeted leading figures in the Syrian Orthodox villages, as a way of instilling fear in the community, the aim being to get the people to leave. Thus, for example, on 29 November 1993 the Mayor of Hah (a village famous for its ancient and beautiful church) was assassinated, and a year later, on 18 December 1994, the only remaining Christian doctor in the small town of Midyat, in the middle of Tur 'Abdin, met a similar fate. Following a regular

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15 The destruction of many villages in the north, in the course of the governments campaign against the Kurds, led to a massive forced emigration of Christians from the north to Baghdad. Many Assyrians, of course, had left, or were driven out, in 1933; for this, see especially R S Stafford, *The Tragedy of the Assyrians* (London, 1935). For a well documented account of Christians in Iraq in recent years, see B Dumler, 'Zur aktuellen Situation der Christen im Irak', *Ostkirchliche Studien* 48 (1999), 107-43.

16 For details on the diaspora in Germany, see K Merten, *Die syrisch-orthodoxen Christen in der Türkei und in Deutschland* (Hamburg, 1997); also H Acar, *Menschen zwischen Kulturen: Aramäische Jugendliche in Deutschland* (Paderborn, 1997).

pattern, their murderers were never brought to justice. It has only been since the time when Turkey was first notified of the possibility of its eventual entry into the European Union, that the local situation in Tur 'Abdin has markedly improved.

In 1973 the West German government terminated its agreement with Turkey over Gastarbeiters. This came precisely at the time when conditions in Tur 'Abdin were becoming intolerable for many Syrian Orthodox, and so the flow of would-be immigrants to Europe actually increased, coming by way of the ever increasing Syrian Orthodox community in Istanbul. Those who still made for Germany now had to claim refugee status (which in effect barred them from returning to Turkey). Because this was not easy to acquire, many people now turned to Sweden as a place of refuge.<sup>17</sup>

In Sweden the first Syrian Orthodox immigrants had arrived as refugees from Lebanon in 1966, along with some Assyrians (of the Church of the East). Owing to the government authorities' failure to distinguish between the two Church groups, the Syrian Orthodox were also described as 'Assyrians'. This subsequently gave rise to much trouble and conflict within the Swedish community: once in Europe, where ethnic identity, rather than ecclesial (as in the Middle East) predominates, many Syrian Orthodox laity wanted to find an appropriate ethnic label that would be recognized in a secular western society; some wished to keep the (historically mistaken) identity as 'Assyrians', while others strongly objected to it, and adopted instead 'Aramean' as their ethnic identity. The issue remains one on which feelings still run high.

## NUMBERS

It is possible to gain quite a good idea of the numbers involved from a variety of different sources. In the Introduction to his book on Turoyo, the Modern Aramaic dialect of Tur 'Abdin, published in 1967, Helmut Ritter provides figures for the number of families and

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17 U Bjorklund, *North to another Country: the Formation of a Suryoyo Community in Sweden* (Stockholm, 1981). For the Netherlands, see F Sumer, *De Syrisch Orthodoxe Gemeenschap* (Hengelo, 1982), and for the community in Istanbul, R Roldanus, *De Syrisch Orthodoxen in Istanbul* (Kamper, 1984).



persons in all the villages (43 in all) which had a Syrian Orthodox population.<sup>18</sup> This will represent the situation before the emigration had started on any large scale. Figures, for the same villages, are next available for 1978, 1979, 1981 and 1987.<sup>19</sup> Then, finally, there are figures for 1995<sup>20</sup> and 1997 [21];<sup>21</sup> these last two more or less represent the culmination of the emigration. This is not the place to give the full details;<sup>22</sup> the general pattern, however, can readily be seen from the figures for some of the more prominent villages (figures denote families,<sup>23</sup> unless otherwise stated):<sup>24</sup>

Village	1966	1978	1979	1981	1987	1995	1997
Anhel/ Yemishli		1306	152	140	135	82	7
Arkah/ Uckoy	120		103	92	88	70	38
Aynwardo/ Gulgoze	140		96	91	93	60	7
Bekusyone/ Alagoz	155	73	62	63	30	15	17
Bsorino/ Haberli	120	78	70	63	40	22	18

18 H Ritter, *Turoyo, die Volkessprache der syrischen Christen der Tur Abdin*, I (Beirut, 1967), pp. \*10\*–\*15\*. For the Syrian Orthodox of Tur ‘Abdin in general, see H Anschutz, *Die syrischen Christen vom Tur Abdin* (Wurzburg, 1985). A wonderful collection of illustrations is to be found in H Hollerweger, *Turabdin. Lebendiges Kulturerbe/Living Cultural Heritage/Canli Kultur Mirasi* (Linz, 1999).

19 The sources for 1978 and 1979: *Qolo Suryoyo* 11 (1979), pp. 25-7; for 1981: *Qolo Suryoyo* 19 (1981), pp. 19-17 [sic]; for 1987 (and 1915): *Qolo Suryoyo* 56 (1987), pp. 140-41 (also Henno, pp. 178-81). Figures for 1966 and 1995 concerning the towns can be found in the table in S P Brock (ed.), *The Hidden Pearl: the Syrian Orthodox Church and its Ancient Aramaic Heritage*, III, *At the Turn of the Third Millennium: the Syrian Orthodox Witness* (Rome, 2001), p. 94. The annually decreasing figures for the Syrian Orthodox in the Province of Mardin from 1972 (17,340) to 1989 (4,829) are given in Merten, *Die syrisch-orthodoxen Christen in der Türkei und in Deutschland*, p. 249.

20 For 1995: *Zur Lage der Christen in der Südosttürkei, in Syrien und Irak* (Augsburg, 1995), p. 88.

21 For 1997: *Qolo Suryoyo* 117/118 (1997), pp. 216, where it is stated that only 300 families were left.

22 For a Table giving the figures for all the villages (and including figures for 1915, given by Suleyman Henno, *Gunbe d-Tur Abdin*), see *The Hidden Pearl*, III, pp. 92-3.

23 To judge by the figures given for both families and persons in Ritter, the families mentioned vary between 5 and 10 persons.

24 In the 1960s the Turkish government systematically renamed all the villages with Turkish names. This act of cultural suppression was presumably aimed at wiping out the memory of the past history of the region.

Hah/Anitli Kafro	73	67	55	52	42	19	18
Tahtoyto/ Elbegendi Kerburan/ Dargecit Kfarze/ Altintash Marbobo/ Gunyurdu	37	44	37	23	15	(forcibly evacuated)	
Midyat Mzizah/ Dogancay Zaz/Izbirak	150		16				
	130	68	64	42	27	12	12
	57		67	38	28	(forcibly evacuated)	
	700	403	400	400	250	108	70
	100		80	56	35	8	7
	75			69	62	53	25

On the receiving end, in Europe, it is said that by the early 1970s there were about 2,000 persons in Germany, the country which received the majority of the early emigration. By contrast, Sweden only had about 1,000 by 1974,<sup>25</sup> although this was soon to change rapidly, as can be seen for the rounded-off figures (of persons) given by Mor Julius Cicek for the different countries for 1977:<sup>26</sup>

Sweden	10,000
Germany	7,000
Austria, Netherlands	700 each
France, Switzerland	600 each
Rest of Scandinavia	500
Great Britain	250
Belgium	100

By the end of the millennium these figures had increased markedly, as the very approximate figures for 2000:<sup>27</sup>

Germany	50,000+
Sweden	45,000+

<sup>25</sup> Bjorklund, p. 63.

<sup>26</sup> The figures are based on Mor Julius' paper at a conference on the Syriac tradition held at the Ambrosian Library, Milan, on 28 March 2003. I am most grateful to His Eminence for a copy of the original Syriac text of his paper, now published in *Qolo Suryoyo* 139 (2003), pp. 86-81 [sic].

<sup>27</sup> The figures are those I gave in *The Hidden Pearl*, III, pp. 99-103, based on information gathered from a variety of Church sources.

Netherlands	12,000
Switzerland	5,000
Belgium	800 families
France	1,000
Austria	300 families
Great Britain	140 families

According to Mor Julius Cicek the present total of Syrian Orthodox in Western Europe is approximately 150,000 persons.

#### **THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW DIOCESES IN THE DIASPORA IN EUROPE**

The creation, in 1957, of an Archdiocese for North America has already been mentioned. In Europe, by 1977 the growing numbers in the emigre communities warranted the creation of two new dioceses, one of Central Europe (covering Germany, the Low Countries, France and Austria), the other of Scandinavia (under which Britain was included). For the former, a Patriarchal Vicar was appointed, Rabban Isa Cicek (the former abbot of Mor Gabriel Monastery in Tur 'Abdin), while for the latter Mor Timotheos Afrem Aboudi was appointed, taking up his residence in Sodertalje, near Stockholm, where most of the Syrian Orthodox had settled). Two years later Rabban Isa Cicek was made Metropolitan, taking the name Mor Julius (Cicek), with his seat, from 1983, at the newly founded Monastery of St Ephrem, near Hengelo in the east of the Netherlands.

In Sweden, partly due to the large increase in numbers, and partly to the conflicts over the designations 'Assyrian' and 'Aramean', a new Patriarchal Vicariate was established in 1994. Three years later, in April 1997, the Archdiocese of Central Europe was divided into two, with Germany as a separate diocese under a Patriarchal Vicar (Mor Dionysius Gurbuz).

#### **MONASTERIES AND CHURCHES**

Throughout history, monasteries have always played a very important cultural as well as spiritual role in the Syrian Orthodox Church.

In the mid twentieth century monasticism was at a rather low ebb, but in the latter half of the century a considerable revival has taken place, although by no means on the same scale as has happened in the Coptic Orthodox Church. In this revival a particularly important role has been played by the Monastery of Mor Gabriel in Tur 'Abdin, the seat of the Metropolitan of Tur 'Abdin, Mor Timotheos Samuel Aktash. Besides having both monks and nuns,<sup>28</sup> the monastery complex also includes a school for young boys which has, for over three decades now, been under the inspiring guidance of its head teacher, Malfono Isa Gulden. This school provides an excellent training both in the liturgical services and in Classical Syriac. Many of the young men now teaching Syriac in church or state schools in Europe have received their training at this school.<sup>29</sup> Although the Monastery receives many visitors from emigres returning for holidays as well as from tourists, the huge scale of the emigration has seriously dried up the pool of children from local villages in Tur 'Abdin, from which in the past the school drew.<sup>30</sup>

Other indications of revival of Syrian Orthodox monastic life in the Middle East are physically visible in the newly built Monastery (cum seminary) of St Ephrem, in Ma'arret Saidnaya, north of Damascus, which was consecrated in 1996, and the Monastery of Mary, Yoldat Aloho (Bearer of God); the latter, consecrated in 2000 and situated at Tel Wardiyat, to the west of Hasseke (E. Syria), is also of considerable architectural interest.<sup>31</sup> In Iraq, the ancient Monastery of Mar Mattai, not far from Mosul, has undergone much renovation in recent years.

In contrast to the situation in America where no Syrian Orthodox monasteries have yet been founded, the emigre community in the Archdiocese of Central Europe has been very active in this respect. This has primarily been thanks to the initiative of the Metropolitan, Mor Julius Cicek. In 1981 the opportunity came of buying a former Catholic

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28 For the rebirth of women's monastic life at the monastery, see E Gulcan, 'The renewal of monastic life for woman in a monastery in Tur 'Abdin', *Sobornost* 7:4 (1977), pp. 288-98.

29 In state schools in Sweden (since 1976), the Netherlands (since 1982), and Germany (since the 1990s) Syriac can be taught as a cultural language when there are sufficient numbers of Syrian Orthodox pupils.

30 See Hollerweger, *Turabdin*, pp. 59-91.

31 Illustrated in *The Hidden Pearl*, III, pp. 83-5.

monastery at an advantageous price; situated just outside the village of Glane, on the Dutch/German border, and not far from Hengelo, the building was converted and consecrated as the Monastery of St Ephrem in 1984.<sup>32</sup> Besides serving as the seat of the Metropolitan, it also provides a religious and cultural focus for the emigre community (in 1994 a large new church was built in the grounds in order better to serve these needs). Since 1986 it has also been the location of the Bar Hebraeus Verlag, which is very active in publishing both liturgical and cultural books in Syriac; before the advent of printing Syriac by computer technology, many of these books were reproduced from Mor Julius' own beautiful handwriting.<sup>33</sup> Much more recently, Mor Julius Cicek was given the possibility of buying a former Capuchin monastery in Arth (Switzerland), again at a generously low price, and this has now become the Monastery of Mor Awgen (an early monastic saint), consecrated in 1999. Meanwhile in Germany (which had become a separate diocese in 1997), a former Dominican monastery was acquired in Warburg, and this was consecrated as the Monastery of Mor Ya'qub (Jacob) of Serugh in 2000.

Prior to the founding of these monasteries, however, numerous churches had been acquired or even built in the various countries of the European diaspora. In the early years, especially, much help, both financial and practical, was afforded by both the Catholic and the Reformed Churches. Today the European diaspora has some 60 churches and is served by 125 priests.<sup>34</sup> Besides the various Church associations, there is now a considerable number of secular lay organisations, many of which produce their own cultural magazines.<sup>35</sup> In very recent years, thanks to the much improved situation in Tur 'Abdin, a few families have started to go back to their ancestral

32 Illustrated in *The Hidden Pearl*, III, pp. 145-6, 150 (top).

33 *Enwangelion Qadisbo d-'ide Moranoye* (Bar Hebraeus Verlag, 1987), with 16 illustrations taken from a thirteenth-century Gospel Lectionary in Tur 'Abdin. An illustration of Mor Julius at work writing out a manuscript can be found in *The Hidden Pearl*, III, p. 147, while a sample of his calligraphy is on p. 182 (top left; an edition of Anaphoras, published in 1985, whose contents are described in my 'Two recent editions of Syrian Orthodox Anaphoras', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 102 [1988], pp. 436-45).

34 Derived from information by Mor Julius in *Qolo Suryoyo* 139 (2003), pp. 86-81 [sic]; see also *Qolo Suryoyo* 126 (1999), pp. 306-288 [sic]. Some of the churches are illustrated in *The Hidden Pearl*, III, pp. 169-71, 176-7.

35 For these, see *The Hidden Pearl*, III, pp. 124-8, and illustrations on pp. 180-1, 183.

villages. Whether or not this will continue and grow will very much depend on the political and economic situation in Turkey in coming years. But, in any case, it would seem likely that the vast majority of the European diaspora will remain where they are.

### THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE<sup>36</sup>

On a purely practical and local level, the Syrian Orthodox emigration in Europe has received a great deal of assistance of one sort or another from the different Western Churches. This was already the case in the very early years of the emigration, and has continued to this day. It was certainly in part due to this large-scale presence, for the first time in history, of Syrian Orthodox in Europe that the need for theological dialogue between the Chalcedonian Western Churches and the non-Chalcedonian Syrian Orthodox Church became more apparent. The Syrian Orthodox Church had joined the World Council of Churches in 1960, and from 1964 onwards there had been Non-Official (and later, Official) dialogue between the Syrian Orthodox and other Oriental Orthodox Churches with the (Chalcedonian) Orthodox Church.<sup>37</sup> But it was not until 1971, however, that Non-Official dialogue between the Syrian Orthodox (and other Oriental Orthodox) Churches with the Catholic Church commenced, thanks to the initiative of the PRO ORIENTE Foundation in Vienna.<sup>38</sup> The two most prominent outcomes of dialogue with the Catholic Church were the meetings in Rome of Pope Paul VI with Patriarch Mar Ignatius Ya'qub III in 1971, and of Pope John Paul II with Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas in June 1984, on both of which occasions a common declaration signed by both

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36 This is only covered here in very summary form since I have given a much fuller account in 'The Syriac Churches in ecumenical dialogue on christology', in A O'Mahony (ed.), *Eastern Christianity. Studies in Religion, History and Politics* (London, 2003), 44-65.

37 The most important documents are reproduced in C Chaillot and A Belopopsky (eds), *Towards Unity. The Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches* (Geneva, 1998).

38 The communiqués and main papers are republished in PRO ORIENTE, *Five Vienna Consultations between Theologians of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church* (Vienna, 1993). From 1994 onwards PRO ORIENTE has organised a series of 'Syriac Dialogues', involving all the Churches of Syriac traditions; five volumes of the proceedings have so far been published.

hierarchs was issued.<sup>39</sup> The latter declaration is particularly important, since allowance is made for intercommunion in cases where a priest of the individual's own Church is not available.

In all these theological dialogues it already became clear at an early stage that the differences over Christology were only surface deep; once one takes the trouble to penetrate beyond these surface differences (which sometimes involve verbally conflicting formulations), the existence of an underlying orthodox faith in Christ held in common becomes apparent. In the light of this, it is clearly an urgent task on all sides, not only to convey a sense of this commonality of faith to both ordinary clergy and people, but also to ensure that the standard textbooks on doctrine and Church history are rewritten, or at least revised, in a spirit of ecumenical openness.

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This rather rapid survey of certain aspects of the history of the Syrian Orthodox Church in the twentieth century has of necessity been very selective, and it should be recognized that many important features, such as developments in the Middle East and in Kerala, have been left aside entirely.

One further important development which has taken place over the course of the last four or so decades should be mentioned, namely the emergence of bishops who have received their higher education in western universities. The significance of this becomes at once clear when it is recalled, on the one hand, that in the 1960s the number of monks from whom new bishops might be appointed had dwindled to a dangerously low level, and on the other hand, that the large-scale emigration from the Middle East to Europe from the 1970s onwards has resulted in many lay people in the diaspora receiving a much higher level of education in the West than their parents. Clearly, in order to meet this new situation it was of great importance, as Patriarch Ignatius Yakub III (1957-1980), Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas (1980-2014) and Patriarch Ignatius Afram II (2014- ) have all realised, to ensure that opportunities be made

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, A Stirnemann and G Wilflinger, *Ortskirche und Weltkirche* (Innsbruck/Wien, 1999), pp. 305-6, 311-13.

available for appropriately gifted students to benefit from a higher theological education in western universities.

An early beneficiary of this new policy was Mor Gregorios Yuḥannon Ibrahim, whom I first met in Oxford during a Patristic Conference in 1975, at a time when he was on an English language course, while studying at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome (he was the first Syrian Orthodox to do so). It was jointly with one of the distinguished professors of the Institute, Fr Vincenzo Poggi SJ, that in 1977 he published an article on a sixth-century Syriac text in the Institute's highly regarded journal, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*.<sup>40</sup> With this educational background he was very well equipped to play an important role in both ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. In connection with the former, he was appointed a member of the Standing Committee of the PRO ORIENTE Foundation in Vienna. His presence in the meetings of the 'Syriac Dialogue', involving all the Syriac Churches and organized by PRO ORIENTE, played an essential part, above all in ensuring the successful outcome of the meetings dealing with Christology, a topic on which the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East held conflicting viewpoints.

Later, as Metropolitan of Aleppo (1979- ), Mor Gregorios not only gave great encouragement and support to a next generation of students studying theology, but he also organised international academic conferences, bringing western Syriacists to Aleppo. At the same time he initiated an important series of publications under the general title *Syriac Patrimony*.<sup>41</sup> For several of these he contributed extended introductions; thus the two different editions of the Beth Gazo provided with western musical notation by Nuri Iskandar, have learned introductions by him on Syriac music.<sup>42</sup>

Two further developments in religious education deserve mention, with the first of which Mor Gregorios was involved at the stage of planning. Thanks to the vision and prolonged efforts of Dr Aho Shemunkasho, who had gained his doctorate in Syriac Studies from Oxford University, it became possible in 2008 to establish the

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40 'Il monastero di Mar Zakkai e il Dialogo del Vat. sir. 173', *OCP* 43 (1977), 161-78.

41 See A N Palmer, 'The Mardin Syrian Orthodox Press, Aleppo. A review', *Parole de l'Orient* 23 (1998), 217-31; also in the Internet journal for Syriac studies, *Hugoye* 1:1 (1998).

42 Beth Gazo (1996) and (2003); the former represents the Mardin tradition, and the latter that of Edessa (Urhoy).



Syriac Institute in Salzburg (Austria), with a Masters course in Syriac theology, in cooperation with the Theology Faculty of the Paris Lodron University of Salzburg. With the assistance of visiting lecturers instruction in a wide range of subjects and at a high level is provided, and the course has attracted students from Egypt, Iraq and India, as well as from Europe, all of whom are able to reside together in Beth Suryoye, opened in 2015.

The second development has been the creation of a Department of Syriac Studies at the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, under the direction of Rabban Roger-Youssef Akhrass, now (since 25 June 2021), Mor Severios. Among the Department's publications are two important editions of liturgical texts, one with the ordinations services for the different ranks of the clergy, and the other with consecration rites for different occasions.<sup>43</sup> More recently, in 1917, R-Y Akhrass and I Syryany have supplemented the five-volume edition (1905-1910) of *memre* (verse homilies) by the great poet Jacob of Serugh (died 521) made by Paul Bedjan, with their two-volume *160 Unpublished Homilies of Jacob of Serugh*. The Department also publishes the annual *Syrian Orthodox Patriarchal Journal*, which now attracts contributions also by western Syriacists.

In tandem with these developments in religious education within the Syrian Orthodox Church, the same period has witnessed the coming together of western Academia with the Syriac Churches: prior to the 1970s there had been virtually no connections between the two, and it was only in 1971 that the two sides first came together at an academic conference. This was when, during a visit to Germany of Patriarch Ignatius Yakub III and some of his bishops, Professor Werner Strothmann, of Göttingen University, invited them to attend an academic conference being held in Göttingen. Since then the links between the two sides started to grow and by now have increased enormously: today, at every conference in the area of Syriac studies there will be numerous members from the different Syriac Churches attending and giving papers. The benefits from this rapprochement have been immense for both parties. To cite just one example: while western scholars have provided catalogues of the various rich collections of Syriac manuscripts in Europe (most notably that of William Wright

43 *Fenqitho d-Kirotoniyas* (Ma'aret Saidnaya: Monastery of St Ephrem, 2009), and *Fenqitho d-Qudosbe* (Ma'aret Saidnaya: Monastery of St Ephrem, 2009). The Patriarchal Seminary at Ma'aret Saidnaya was founded in 1996.

for those in the British Museum),<sup>44</sup> it was Patriarch Ignatius Afram I Barsaum (1933-1957) and Metropolitan Filoksenos Dolabani (1947-1969) who left detailed handwritten catalogues of important Syrian Orthodox collections of Syriac manuscripts in the Middle East, both of which have now been made available thanks to the efforts of Mor Gregorios<sup>45</sup> and of Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I.<sup>46</sup>

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44 W Wright, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum acquired since 1838, I-III* (London, 1870-1872). A large proportion of these manuscripts (now transferred to the British Library) were acquired in the mid nineteenth century from Deir al-Surian, in Egypt, whose remaining collection has recently been catalogued by L van Rompay and S P Brock, *Catalogue of the Syriac Manuscripts and Fragments in the Library of Deir al-Surian* (Leuven, 2014).

45 Reproduced photographically as volumes 8-10 of *Syriac Patrimony* (1994).

46 *Sriṯoṯho*, I-III (Damascus, 2008).

## APPENDIX 1

### SOME KEY DATES

(A useful ‘calendar’ of events of importance for the Syrian Orthodox diaspora in Europe, covering 1977-2003, is given by Mor Julius Cicek in *Qolo Suryoyo* 139 (2003), pp. 75-61 [sic].)

- 1895/6 Massacres, above all in Diyarbakir area
- 1915 The ‘Year of the Sword’ (Sayfo): large-scale massacres in eastern Anatolia
- 1957 Archdiocese of North America created
- 1960 The Syrian Orthodox Church becomes a member of the World Council of Churches
- 1960s First Gastarbeiters from Tur ‘Abdin go to Germany
- 1970s Emigration from Tur ‘Abdin to western Europe on a large scale
- 1971 (27 Oct) Common Communique of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Ignatius Ya‘qub III
- 1973 Germany ends agreement with Turkey over foreign labour
- 1977 New dioceses of Central Europe and Scandinavia
- 1984 (23 Jun) Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I Iwas
- 1984 (7 Jul) Consecration of Monastery of St Ephrem, Holland
- 1986 (5/6 Jul) Opening of Bar Hebraeus Verlag, Monastery of St Ephrem
- 1994 New Patriarchal Vicariate in Sweden
- 1995 Archdiocese of North America divided into 3 Patriarchal Vicariates
- 1996 New Patriarchal Seminary of St Ephrem, Ma‘arret Saidnaya, Syria
- 1997 Archdiocese of Central Europe divided, with separate Patriarchal Vicariate of Germany
- 1999 (20 Jun) Consecration of Monastery of Mor Augen, Switzerland
- 2000 (15 Aug) Consecration of Monastery of Yoldat Aloho (Theotokos), Tel Wardiyat, Syria
- 2000 (27 Aug) Consecration of Monastery of Mor Ya‘qub, Warburg, Germany

## APPENDIX 2

### *HISTORICAL NOTICE IN MINGANA SYR. 95 CONCERNING THE MASSACRES OF 1895.*

Mingana Syr. 95, containing a variety of different texts, was completed by a well-known Syrian Orthodox scribe, the deacon Mattai son of Paulos, in Mosul on 2 May 1896. On ff. 122a-123b he provides a notice (probably his own) concerning the massacres that had taken place in October and December the previous year. Since this notice was only written a few months after the events, it is translated here. It should be noted that the dates given are likely to be by the Old Calendar (the New Calendar was officially adopted by the Syrian Orthodox Church in November 1954). For other sources on the massacres of Syrian Orthodox in 1895, see note 4.

#### *Translation*

In this year, in the month Teshrin I (October) there was fear and trembling in all the regions and cities and villages where there are Christians (Nasraye), while the remnant of the Christians (Mshihaye) living among the Muslims were in terror that they would kill them. They began to kill the Christians (Mshihaye), plunder their houses and burn their possessions, from the city of Trebizond to the city of Amid (i.e. Diyarbakir; above the line, the scribe adds ‘and Edessa’), along with the towns and villages around them. In every town the Muslims rose up against the Christians and massacred them: wherever there were Christians, they massacred them wholesale, without mercy or pity, killing men, women and children, old and young. But anyone who became a Muslim they did not kill—and there were a few people who did turn Muslim. Let us beseech the Lord our God that he spread over us his holy hands, so that the Muslims may not harm us, and that he may deliver us from the hands of the insolent Kurds, by the prayer of Mary, Bearer of God, and of the holy prophets, amen.

This took place in the days of Sultan ‘Abdulhamid, when he sent his son-in-law Sakr Pasha (i.e. Musir Shakir?) to pacify and put in order the nations (i.e. millets). He sent him deceitfully: he left Byzantia (i.e. Istanbul) secretly, and he ordered him to do what he

liked. When he arrived at Trebizond by sea, he sent telegraph messages to every region and city to the judges (i.e. Qadis) and governors to kill every Christian, catching them by surprise. But an order (publicly) went out from the Sultan about the community of the Armenians: because the Armenians were wanting to set up self rule (lit: a king and a house), the Ottoman Sultan 'Abdulhamid, not wishing them to govern their own state (*bayta*), commanded that they be killed. Of the Armenians, 80,000 were killed in the towns and villages, and from our own people, the Suryoye (i.e. Syrian Orthodox), they massacred about 25,000—that is, those that were known (sc. to have been killed), and from the Chaldeans, and apart from them (others) were killed [a]. The pretext (for this) being the Armenians. This took place on Friday 12 October in the year 1895, in the regions of the towns Trebizond, Erzurum, Bitlis and Severeke, (margin: + and Edessa) and in the villages around them; also in Amid and the surrounding villages, the villages around Mardin, Seert, Urfa (Edessa), Kharput, Malatya, Mar`ash and Bshiriyeh, and all the regions and villages whose names are Anadwar (sic; = ?) and Gezirta d-Qardu (i.e. Cizre) [b]. Some were massacred, others turned Muslim. And those who hid to escape massacre had their houses plundered. They dragged people from the churches and houses. This was the work of Kurds, a people without mercy: they sacked the houses of Christians (Nasraye), and their markets and shops. Those who had any life left in them were naked and without food, with no bread or anything else to eat.

The Patriarch and the Syriac Christians (lit. saints), and the faithful people, collected money, wheat and clothing from the towns to send to those of the faithful Christians who had survived in every region and village, because they were all in great affliction and fear.

Now in Edessa there was a second occasion when the command went out from the (local) governor to massacre the Armenian community; and they massacred them and plundered their houses and possessions, (seizing them) from the markets and shops; and they tore down their villages, and everything they had planted in the villages they uprooted—trees, crops and such like. This second occasion took place on 28 Kanun I (December) of the year AD 1895.

Christians suffered persecution and affliction in every city, region and town. And he who survived the slaughter had become Muslim, and many Christians became Muslims out of fear of slaughter and

the sword in the villages and towns: they apostasized (to escape from) plunder and rapine, so as to save themselves from slaughter and plunder. Whoever was saved from slaughter and the sword had all his property and possessions in his house—down to the corn in his house—plundered, and they did not leave them anything to eat, or any clothes to wear. They lived on the ground, without beds, in the dust, and because of the great amount of hail, cold and snow that year, they began to die; because many had fled to the mountains (to live) in caves to escape from the sword, they died of cold and hunger. The rich in the cities and villages who received the poor and needy into their houses, giving alms to those in want, were suddenly impoverished and left with no food to satisfy and fill their bellies. They had to beg for food like the poor, and to beg for help from those who had some pity to show them. Deliver us, O Lord God, from the hands of the shameless murderers who shed blood for no reason and without any cause.

Our Syrian Patriarch, Ignatius Abdulmasih, was in Amid, and after the massacre had abated, about the third day, he sent a report to the governor, and (the latter) brought soldiers to keep guard over the Christians who had survived the massacre. The governor made an agreement with our Patriarch and told him: In every case where your people have suffered from kidnapping of wives, daughters and young children, I will send for them and return them to you. And in every case where they have plundered any of your people, I will have it returned, because you are among those loyal to the Sultan.

Wherever the Patriarch heard that someone's daughter or wife was in such and such a place, the governor began to send orders concerning them, together with messengers to bring them back. He also began to collect the plunder from the Muslims, but he did not bring back one thousandth of it, and what was lost was lost (for good). And the order went out from the Sultan that whoever had apostasized out of terror of massacre should return to his former confession. And people began to return, little by little. And the sovereign, that is the Sultan, sent a 'prime missive' to our Patriarch, with the seal (*sigillion*), in all solemnity.

*Notes*

- [a] The official government figures of those killed in 1895 were: 1,828 Muslims, and 8,717 non-Muslims (Gurun, p. 150; for the wildly conflicting figures given for the period 1890-1896, see p. 160).
- [b] There had been incidents involving Armenian revolutionaries in most of these towns.

The scribe's subsequent addition of Urfa suggests that he only learnt later of the appalling massacres there (for these, in October and on 28-29 December 1895, see the account, based on the witness of Gerald Fitzmaurice, the chief interpreter at the British Embassy, in Sir Edwin Pears, *The Life of Abdul Hamid* [London, 1917], pp. 249-53). Many of these regions were visited by the biblical scholar J Rendell Harris in 1896; he and his wife Helen have left an account in their *Letters from the Scenes of the Recent Armenian Massacres* (London, 1897).

# THE COPTIC CHURCH IN MODERN JERUSALEM AND THE HOLY LAND

*John Watson†*

The Copts are more visible in Jerusalem today than they have ever been. They are a living expression of the thoroughly-documented Coptic renaissance of the last four decades.<sup>1</sup> The Coptic presence has distinction. It is also a captive presence, unable to escape from the centuries of denominational conflict within the Oriental Orthodox communities in Jerusalem, or from a certain endemic servility to Egyptian political life.

The *qalansuma* is the visible expression of the Coptic revival: the black monastic cowl which covers the head and the back of the neck. It is divided into halves by a sewn line in the middle, and has six crosses on each panel with a lone cross at the base of the neck. The crosses signify Christ and the Apostles. This apparently innocent piece of ecclesiastical garb is in reality an eloquent statement of allegiance to the Coptic Patriarch in Cairo and an expression of commitment to the religious and political renaissance he has directed.<sup>2</sup> The *qalansuma* has only been

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1 Aziz Atiya, *The Copts and Christian Civilisation*, The Fredk. Wm. Reynolds Lecture. Delivered at the University of Utah (Utah: Salt Lake City, 1979. In this lecture, and in his *A History of Eastern Christianity* (London: Methuen, 1968) pp. 119 f.), Professor Atiya employed the same metaphor: 'Like a great and solitary Egyptian temple standing sorrowfully on the edge of the desert and weathering sandstorms over the years until it became submerged by the accretions of time, the ancient Coptic Church led its lonely life unnoticed on the fringe of Christian civilisation ... Like the same massive temple, too, it has proved itself to be indestructible. In the last few decades ... its sons have started removing the sands of time from around the edifice, which has shown signs of shining again.' See also: Aziz Atiya (General editor), *The Coptic Encyclopaedia*, 8 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1991); Otto Meinardus, *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life* (Cairo: the American University Press, 1970); Takao Yamagata, *Coptic Monasteries at Wadi Natrun in Egypt*, (Tokoyo: University of Foreign Affairs, 1983); John Watson, *Abba Kyrillos: Patriarch and Solitary* (Pennsylvania, USA: Society of Coptic Church Studies, 1996).

2 Cf. Pieterella van Doorn-Harder, *Contemporary Coptic Nuns*, University of South



seen in Jerusalem in recent years. The garment was introduced into the Coptic Orthodox Church by Pope Shenouda III (3 August 1923-17 March 2012), by tradition the 117th successor of the Evangelist St Mark, who in 1996 celebrated his twenty-fifth anniversary as patriarch.<sup>3</sup> The *qalansuma* is a monastic uniform, an outward sign of the kind which has become essential to the benevolent autocracy in the Coptic Church at present. Regimentation is the order of the day. Shenouda's rationale for imposing the *qalansuma* is that it resembles the skull cap of St Antony the Great.<sup>4</sup> In reality the clothing signifies a process of clericalisation and professionalism which may have been Shenouda's most important contribution to the Coptic Church.<sup>5</sup>

For centuries the desert fathers were indistinguishable from Egyptian peasants, except when they entered the sanctuary for the Liturgy. Today the cowl is worn like a Papal livery, though in some independent monasteries it is rejected because it is said to be of Syrian-Antiochene origin. Theologically, critics are concerned that the autonomous, prophetic and eschatological role of the desert monks has been lost in the new habit. The Coptic monks in Jerusalem now follow the example of their new Metropolitan in wearing the *qalansuma*. Contemporary photographs show that the previous Patriarch and Metropolitan did not wear the cowl.<sup>6</sup> The adoption of the head-dress is as significant as the changes in Coptic Orthodox leadership.

Archbishop Basil IV was installed as Metropolitan of Jerusalem and the Middle East in 1959 by the saintly Pope Kyrillos VI<sup>7</sup>. Tradition

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Carolina Press, 1995, pp. 90-100.

3 Pope Shenouda III (3 August 1923-17 March 2012) episcopate lasted 40 years, 4 months, and 4 days from 14 November 1971 until his death.

4 The two halves allude to an incident when St Antony had his cowl torn in two during a fight with demons. According to the Copts the shape of the cowl resembles a bib for young children and recalls the childlike simplicity of St Antony and the words of Jesus when he said 'Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.' (Mark 10: 15) In the Islamic world the embroidered crosses stress the monk's removal from the world.

5 See esp. Saad Michael Saad, *Christian Minorities in a Pluralistic Situation*, (University of Chicago, 1984), pp. 23-28.

6 Otto Meinardus photographed the Metropolitan and the Coptic priests in Jerusalem for his 1960 monograph: not one is wearing the cowl. In *Snapshots of Pope Kyrillos VI* (64 pp. undated but purchased in Cairo 1989: Publishers Pope Kyrillos publications, with captions in Arabic, French German and English), the Patriarch is photographed at least sixty times, not once with the *qalansuma*.

7 An international directory of Orthodox bishops, *Orthodoxia* is compiled and edited

dictated that the Metropolitan should be chosen from among the monks of the Monastery of Saint Antony the Great by the Red Sea, so it was that the monk, Abouna (Father) Kyrillos El Antuni became the leader of Jerusalem's Copts. He held a doctorate in Patristics and maintained his scholarly interests throughout his life. He was rarely drawn into public controversy and had little sympathy with the unhappy abeyance of theological thought in favour of the flexing of Coptic political muscle in Egypt. When Archbishop Basil died in 1991, Pope Shenouda turned to the Western Desert for a representative of the more politically conscious and assertive style which he preferred. On 17 November 1991 (7 Hatur, 1708 of the Coptic Calendar, which calculates from the era of the Diocletian persecutions of the Copts, beginning in AD 284) the *Qummu*s (archpriest) Sidraq El Amba Bishoi was consecrated as *Amba* (bishop) and *Mutran* (metropolitan and archbishop) of Jerusalem and the Middle East by Pope Shenouda III. The ceremony took place in Cairo. The Metropolitan took the name Abra'am (Abraham).

Amba Abra'am II of Jerusalem arrived in the Holy City on January 3, 1992.<sup>8</sup> He was wearing the *qalansuwa*, and over it the *'imma*, the circular bishop's head cover, once a sign of ignominy enforced by the Ottoman imperial power, now a sign of Episcopal dignity. The archbishop is a man of great personal charm with a delightful sense of humour. He is representative of the new breed of well-educated Coptic monks, many of whom come from the medical profession. He is a scientist by training, and has a sharpened mind. Metropolitan Abra'am has a secure record as spiritual adviser, including to expatriates in Cairo who found him out when he was *Qummu*s at the Monastery of St Bishoi. His pastoral work was singled out for special and favourable mention by at least one astute Western commentator.<sup>9</sup> Like most of the monks of the Coptic renaissance who come from professions where they have received a thorough specialist education, incorporating all that its best in modern study, the archbishop has felt no need for a comparable

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biennially by Dr Nikolaus Wyrwoll at the Ostkirchliches Institut, Regensburg, Germany. The information used here is taken from the editions of 1986-1987 and 1996.

8 Abraham I, Archbishop of the Holy and Ancient Archdiocese of Jerusalem, All Palestine and the Near East, from 1991 until his death in 2015.

9 Otto F A Meinardus, *Monks and Monasteries of the Egyptian Deserts* (revised edition, The American University in Cairo Press, 1989), p. 120.

theological training. His ready smile and sparkling eyes attract even the world-weary and cynical. It is Amba Abra'am who enlivens the front cover and some of the inside pages of the popular French work on Coptic monasticism by Alain Chevillat.<sup>10</sup> In Francophone circles at least, the archbishop is the icon of the modern Egyptian monk.

In his reformation of the Coptic archbishopric in Jerusalem, Amba Abra'am focused upon the scandal of the disunity of Christians in the holy city, which was often not merely expressed by the indifference which characterises so much ecumenical work, but by open hostility, even physical violence. Within a year of his arrival, the new Coptic prelate organised a special service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January 1993. Clergy and laity of the various Christian communities represented in Jerusalem were invited to a celebration of the Coptic Orthodox Liturgy. On this occasion, Amba Mattaus the Ethiopian Archbishop of Jerusalem concelebrated the Eucharist with Amba Abra'am. The location for this ecumenical exercise was the Church of St Antony the Great, an important, modern Coptic site.<sup>11</sup>

The Church of St Antony lies within the Dair Mar Antunius, the Monastery of St Antony which is owned by the Copts. In earlier times St Antony's was considered to be a part of the Dair as-Sultan, the Monastery of the Sultan.<sup>12</sup> In 1875 the Monastery of St Antony

10 Alain et Evelyne Chevillat, *Moines du Desert d'Egypte* (Lyon: Terre du Ciel, 1990).

11 There is no single comprehensive study in English of the history of the Coptic presence in Jerusalem, but Otto F A Meinardus has placed us all in his debt with his carefully considered contributions to the subject over the last four decades. Apart from primary sources which were available in the Library of the Central College of the Anglican Communion at Canterbury, now, presumably, at Pusey House, Oxford, the major sources of dates and information—though not of interpretation—the present essay were obtained from the following works by Otto Meinardus who has conscientiously treated the Question of the Dair as-Sultan over the last quarter: *The Copts in Jerusalem*, Commission on Ecumenical Affairs of the See of Alexandria, Cairo, 1960; *The Copts in Jerusalem and the Question of the Holy Places*, *Coptic Church Review*, Vol. 16 (1995), pp. 9-25; *Christian Egypt: Faith and Life* (The American University in Cairo Press, 1970), pp. 436-467; *The Copts in Jerusalem and the Question of the Holy Places, The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, (eds) Anthony O'Mahony with Göran Gunner and Kevork Hintlian (London: Scorpion, 1994), pp. 112-128. Otto Friedrich August Meinardus was a German Lutheran pastor (25 September 1925-18 September 2005) had been a well-known commentator on Coptic Christianity and the Coptic Church.

12 The Monastery of the Sultan, Dair as-Sultan, will feature later in this study. Nobody knows why it has its name. Some believe the site to have been a gift of one of the Mamluk sultans—the dynasty reigned in Egypt and Syria from 1250-1517. Others

was restored as a result of donations from wealthy Copts in Egypt,<sup>13</sup> and rebuilding continued into the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup>

The Monastery of St Antony has three churches. At ground level is the Church of St Helena with a narthex that leads to the large Cistern which is normally filled with water. The main church of St Antony was built during the primacy of Amba Basilius the Second (1856-1899) and dedicated by his successor Amba Timuthaus (1899-1925). The church is decorated with frescoes portraying incidents in the life of Christ, including the Institution of the Eucharist. A third church is dedicated to the *Theotokos*, commemorating her apparition to Coptic students in 1954. Amba Yaqubus (1946-1956) consecrated the room of the apparitions into a church where Coptic monks celebrate the Divine Liturgy once a week on the morning of the Blessed Virgin's appearances. Amba Abra'am chose the main church for the ecumenical events of 1993 because the site was free from the controversy which effects so many sites in Jerusalem and because of its associations with recent Coptic archbishops. The ecumenical impact of the occasion was considerable. Ecumenism is not an optional extra in the Holy Land. It alone lends authenticity and credibility to Christian claims of universality. No more than 2.5% of the population is Christian.

In the year after his first major ecumenical venture at St Antony's Monastery, Amba Abra'am examined the Coptic Orthodox educational system in Jerusalem. He found that the Coptic School, the College of St Antony and the school of St Dimiana had a total of only 400 students. In 1994 the students were served by a faculty of 28 members, the majority of whom were graduates of universities in Egypt, Europe or the USA; the student body was 70% Muslim. In the same year there were less than one thousand Copts living in Jerusalem and about two thousand in the State of Israel and the West Bank combined.<sup>15</sup> The position of the Christian minorities in the Middle East is precarious.

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that it was founded by Roxelana, Russian Orthodox wife of the Ottoman Sultan Suleiman 'Qanuni', the Law Giver, known in the West as 'the Magnificent' (1520-1566). Cf. Meinardus, *Copts in Jerusalem*, 1960, p. 47.

13 R E Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine, Sinai and Egypt*, 2 vols (New York: Appleton, 1881).

14 Meinardus, 'The Copts in Jerusalem', *Coptic Church Review* 1995, pp. 20-21.

15 Meinardus *op. cit.*, p. 23, bases his statistics on information received from the Metropolitan.

His Holiness Pope Shenouda III ( who lead the Coptic Church between 1971-2012) has often expressed his dislike for the term 'Diaspora' when applied to the Copts in North America, Australia and Europe. His natural, patriotic loyalty suppresses his sense of political reality. The persecution of Egypt's Christian minority is occasionally violent and public, but more often it is a petty, daily discrimination, much worse for being so underhanded. In Egypt the serious incidence of emigration amongst highly educated Copts is a direct consequence of Islamic and governmental attitudes and actions. In Jerusalem and Israel there are feelings of impasse and despair which drive Copts and other Christians to seek their future elsewhere. In 1995 Amba Abra'am looked at some plain questions: Does the Coptic Metropolitan in Jerusalem preside over an important Christian Museum of Holy Places? Does the archbishop merely attempt to assist Coptic pilgrims in accessibility to sacred spots? Is he pastor of a Coptic community in static case? Or, does the *Mutran* minister to a dynamic holy people who can be fulfilled in their social and devotional life in the Holy City?

Archbishop George Khodr of Hadeth, Beirut, made pointed comment in 1971:

According to our knowledge ... no Christians will be left in Jerusalem. The result will be that the Holy Places will remain without the presence of the people. It will be an assemblage of churches ... viewed in that land as a pre-Israeli relic ... it will be like visiting Baalbec when you see the Temples of Bacchus and Zeus and then without emotion expect the aesthetic emotion. Some religious influences will be left, some nuns ... and highly qualified professors of theology, and archaeologists from the Protestant world who will serve as natural guides for tourists.<sup>16</sup>

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16 Quoted in Kenneth Cragg, *This Year in Jerusalem* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982). p. 110. Khodr was addressing a theological consultation in the Lebanon on issues arising from the Palestinian problem. Kenneth Cragg (8 March 1913-13 November 2012) was an Anglican bishop and scholar a well-known writer on the religious affairs of the Middle East most notably Christian-Muslim relations.

The bitterness which underlies this statement is a measure of the profound anxiety which affects the minorities in the Holy Land and throughout the region. There is a 'steady attrition of a living Christian presence in the land of Christian beginnings', and the Copts know with everyone else that 'the governance of Jerusalem can never be fulfilled in antiquities'.<sup>17</sup>

The major restoration of old buildings, the renovation of the large subterranean cistern close to the Church of St Helena, and the explosion of social and educational projects, like the new College of St Antony at Bet Hanina which was opened in late 1993, are tangible evidences of the Coptic intention to be an effective presence in Jerusalem and its environs, not simply an historical relic. Retrospection is inevitable in such an ancient community, but for Amba Abra'am examining the past was only of real value if it confirmed the present rights of the Copts and anticipated the future: renaissance must renew legitimate pride without arrogance.

Pope Shenouda's new Copts know that there is a long Coptic history in Jerusalem, which may be briefly surveyed.

There are few significant references to the Copts in Jerusalem before the eleventh century, and the gaps in our knowledge, amounting to centuries, are the norm. No secure conclusion can be deduced from the presence of Egyptians during the apostolic preaching on Pentecost in Acts 2: 1-41. By the end of the fourth century, following the discovery of the Cross by Helena the mother of Constantine in AD 328, the Church of the Resurrection—*Anastasis*, known significantly in the West as the 'Church of the Holy Sepulchre', was a centre of pilgrimage where many 'joined in adoration of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ'.<sup>18</sup> By the sixth century stories of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem of St Mary the Egyptian, once an actress and courtesan now a model of repentance, were circulating in the East. This famous Coptic saint died circa. AD 431.<sup>19</sup> The *Palestine Pilgrims' Texts Society* has also shown that Coptic monks were in Jerusalem during the pilgrimages of AD 386

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<sup>17</sup> Cragg, *op. cit.*, p. 111

<sup>18</sup> Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert* (London: Mowbray, 1987). The phrase occurs in the life of St Palagia the Harlot p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> Benedicta Ward, *op. cit.*, tells the tale pp. 26-56 in *St Mary of Egypt: the Liturgical Icon of Repentance*.

and that a Spanish abess saw Egyptian monastics in the city later in the same century.<sup>20</sup>

The Copts are also mentioned as pilgrims in the 'Letter of Guarantee' attributed to the second of the Rightly-guided Caliphs—*Al-Khulafa' ar-Rashidun*, 'Umar b. al-Khattab in the fifteenth year of the *Hijra*, CE 637, but the authenticity of this document is often questioned by scholars.<sup>21</sup> The period of Islamic expansion c. 632-750 was important for the Copts. Islam became the context in which Coptic theology now had to operate and there can be little doubt that the fifth pillar of Islam—the *Hajj* to Mecca at least once in the believer's lifetime—strengthened the notion of pilgrimage amongst the Christians. At the same time, travel became more difficult. In the era of conquests the Copts were often reduced to urban communities enclosed in their own districts or to rural centres surviving in insecurity and impermanence.<sup>22</sup> There is, however, a record in the patriarchate of Amba Yaqub (810-830) which shows that the Copts had their own church in Jerusalem during his reign.<sup>23</sup> A Coptic papyrus of the ninth century refers to a Coptic lady traveller in Jerusalem,<sup>24</sup> and the History of the Coptic patriarchs records a similar visit at the end of the eleventh century.<sup>25</sup> During this period (c. 1089) a Copt called Mansur al-Tilbani became an assistant to the Muslim governor of Jerusalem. Mansur al-Tilbani reconstructed an old church and requested the Coptic patriarch to send a bishop to the Holy City to consecrate the altar. This took place in the Coptic month of Barmahat in the ('Year of the Coptic Martyrs') AM 808 (Anno Domini 1092).<sup>26</sup> Such sparse references as these give, at the very least, an impression of some Christian movement between Alexandria and Jerusalem.

From the time of the Crusades the Coptic picture is clearer and the records more numerous and precise. The turn of the eleventh and

20 Otto Meinardus, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

21 See Meinardus in *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, p. 114.

22 See especially Bat Ye'or, *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: from Jihad to Dhimmitude* (London: Associated University Press, 1996), pp. 43-68.

23 Meinardus, *The Copts in Jerusalem*, Commission on Ecumenical Affairs of the See of Alexandria, Cairo, 1960, p. 11.

24 George C Anawati, 'Un Papyrus Chrétien en Arabe', *Mélanges Islamiques* (Cairo-Paris), II, 1954, p. 98.

25 Aziz Atiya (ed), *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church* (Cairo, 1959), vol. 2, p. 358.

26 Meinardus, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

twelfth centuries saw the establishment of the European crusaders in Jerusalem. Godfrey of Bouillon captured the city in 1099. The Catholics of the West were generally opposed to the Eastern Churches but relations good existed between the Latins and the Oriental Christians.<sup>27</sup> The arrival of the Latin armies and the establishment of a Latin Kingdom anticipated the inevitable decline of the Fatimid Dynasty (AD 909-1171), but did not bring political or religious continuity to the Holy Land, least of all to the Christian churches. Instability throughout the region was aggravated by the crusaders' advance into Egypt and their brief tenure of Damietta in the Nile Delta. Here they established the Latin-Catholic patriarchate of Alexandria.<sup>28</sup> The Fatimid era was finally concluded by the rise to power of the great Kurdish chieftain Salah al-Din, who, from his mastery of Egypt and Syria, outmatched and outfought the Latins and decisively defeated their kingdom at the Horns of Hattin in 1187. Jerusalem surrendered three months later.<sup>29</sup> Salah al-Din seems to have had a special relationship with the Copts for, though it is true that there are records of many conversions to Islam in his time and some forms of persecution by exile or the imposition of special dress,<sup>30</sup> the great Ayyubid made special concessions for the Copts and raised them to important positions in his administration. Few visitors gazing upon the magnificence of Saladin's most enduring monument realise that the Cairo Citadel was built for him on the Muqattam hills by two Coptic architects, Abu Mansur and Abu Mashkur,<sup>31</sup> but it has been remarked of this period that 'subjection and stolidity defined each other in the Coptic psyche'.<sup>32</sup>

Salah al-Din witnessed a dramatic increase in Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem and was petitioned by various groups who wished to establish themselves on a permanent basis in the Holy City. In 1187 he granted exemptions from taxes for Copts who visited Jerusalem as pilgrims, and by the same ordinance the Sultan confirmed the privilege

27 Meinardus, states that the Latins were particularly hostile towards the Copts and Syrians, *The Copts in Jerusalem*, p. 13, this view however, must be set against the important work of Bernard Hamilton, *The Latin Church in the Crusader States: The Secular Church* (London: Variorum, 1980), pp. 188-211, pp. 332-360.

28 Kenneth Cragg, *The Arab Christian*, (London: Chapman, 1991), p. 181.

29 See Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East* (London: Chatto, 1995), p. 91, and Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p. 84.

30 Aziz Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity*, pp. 94-96.

31 Hourani, *op. cit.*, p. 125, and Aziz Atiya, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

32 Cragg, *op. cit.*, p. 182.



of the Copts and the Ethiopians to own certain sites in the Church of the Resurrection.<sup>33</sup>

Otto Meinardus has surveyed the pilgrim documents of several centuries and these are important testimonies to the constant Coptic presence in Jerusalem, and especially in the Church of the Resurrection. Documents of the fourteenth century reveal that nine pilgrims in the period between 1336 and 1384 saw the Copts worshipping in the Holy Sepulchre.<sup>34</sup> Eighteen testimonies, ranging from that of Henry Porner in 1419 to that of the Duke of Saxony in 1498, show that the Copts remained active in the Resurrection Church.<sup>35</sup> Meinardus studied 24 sources from the period 1500 to 1592. These too showed that there was a Coptic presence in Jerusalem in the sixteenth century. In 1537 the Copts had a small chapel directly adjoining the *Kouvouklion*, called the *Aedicule* in the West, it is a marble construction built directly over the Holy Sepulchre and the Chapel of the Angel. The Copts still possess this chapel, usually regarded as the holiest Coptic site because the head of Christ rested here at his burial.<sup>36</sup> In his examination of 23 seventeenth-century documents, varying from the Iberian pilgrim Castella in 1600 to the German visitor Maundrell in 1697, Meinardus again found confirmation of Coptic worship in the Church. In the eighteenth century 5 out of 6 sources consulted revealed Coptic worship from 1704 to 1760.<sup>37</sup> The Coptic Chapel neighbouring the *Kouvouklion* was restored by Amba Timotheus in 1901 and continues in daily use by the monks assigned to the Church: the Coptic Orthodox Church has no records comparable to the pilgrim documents studied by Meinardus, but, as Amba Abra'am remarked in 1994, 'We are here, we have always been here and we shall be here until the Lord comes again.'

The Coptic *Mutran* at the end of the twentieth century can look back to the middle of the thirteenth century as a time when the Coptic Archbishopric was firmly, and apparently permanently,

33 Timotheus P Themelis, *Les Grecs aux Lieux Saints, Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Imprint of the Convent of the Greeks, 1921). This work is cited by Otto Meinardus in all his books and essays on Jerusalem. A copy could be seen at St Augustine's Library, Canterbury in 1986.

34 Meinardus, *The Copts in Jerusalem*, Commission on Ecumenical Affairs of the See of Alexandria, Cairo, 1960. p. 19.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

established in Jerusalem. Tension and misunderstanding between the Copts and Syrians, usually involving property, led the Patriarch of Alexandria, Kyrillos the Third (1235-1243) to appoint an Egyptian archbishop in 1238. He succeeded in regaining the Coptic Chapel in the Holy Sepulchre—Resurrection Church and recovered the Church of Mansur al-Tilbani. The first Coptic Archbishop of Jerusalem was Amba Basileus the First (1238-1260).<sup>38</sup> The 78th successor of Saint Mark in the Alexandrine throne (Ghobrial the Third, 1268-1271) was ‘blessed in the Holy Places’ as a pilgrim and was actually ordained as a Coptic priest in the Church of the Resurrection.<sup>39</sup> Such happy events in the history of the Jerusalem have to be weighed against some that have been dispiriting. The least happy period was in the eighteenth century. Ecumenism is constantly undermined by the discovery that the real intention in inter-denominational relations is to weaken the partner in dialogue. Coptic-Catholic attempts at conciliation go back to the Council of Ferrara-Florence in 1438,<sup>40</sup> but by the end of the seventeenth century two Catholic missions<sup>41</sup> to the Copts had been established in Egypt: the Franciscans in Upper Egypt and the Jesuits in Cairo.<sup>42</sup> It is a characteristic of Catholic and Protestant European missions in Muslim lands that they concentrate upon the conversion of local Christians away from their own traditional churches whilst studiously avoiding any serious attempt to convert Muslims to Christianity. The Franciscan and Jesuit missions to the Copts had no response until 1741 when the Coptic archbishop in Jerusalem, Amba Athanasius, became a Roman Catholic. The Catholic Pope Benedict XIV immediately consecrated Athanasius as Coptic-Catholic Metropolitan with jurisdiction over all of Egypt. Athanasius remained in Jerusalem, working vigorously at proselytism amongst the Eastern Christians. He appointed a distinguished Coptic priest Fr. Yustus Maraglic as Catholic Vicar General in Egypt. Much later three Coptic

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38 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

39 Meinardus, *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, p. 117.

40 Salvatore Tedeschi, ‘Etiopi e Copti al Concilio di Firenze’, *Annuario Historiae Conciliorum*, Vol. 2 (1991), pp. 380-407.

41 Josef Metzler, ‘Bemühungen der S.C. Propaganda Fide um die wiedervereinigung der Koptischen Kirche mit Rom’, *Euntes Docete*, Vol. 17 (1964), pp. 94-108.

42 See the two volumes by Charles Libois, *Égypte (1547-1563)* (Rome:Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1993) and *Égypte (1565-1591)* (Rome:Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1998).

monks became Roman Catholic priests in 1862 and remained to work in the Holy City: a small movement of Copts from the Orthodox to the Catholic tradition continues to the present day. The regular succession of Coptic archbishops from the thirteenth century until the present was briefly broken for a period of four years after the death of Archbishop Athanasius but was renewed in 1770 under Metropolitan Yusab (Joseph).

The present archiepiscopal residence is on the Via Dolorosa, but some Coptic metropolitans have on occasion lived outside Jerusalem. There are hints that some holders of the office returned for extended periods to the desert monastery of St Antony, near the Red Sea, from which most of them have come. According to A Goodrich-Freer in 1904 the Coptic archbishop in the Holy Land resided in Jaffa.<sup>43</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century the Copts had a large monastery at Jaffa which provided pilgrim accommodation for tens of thousands of Coptic pilgrims. Oriental Orthodox pilgrimages to the holy places were common until the late 1940s. Certainly, the role of the archbishop has been bound to the business of Coptic pilgrimage, and it has often been his primary duty to preside at some major pilgrim events whilst leaving the daily business of the church to others. This enabled Basilios the Fourth (1959-1991) to carry out his scholarly work in seclusion.

One annual event of importance is associated with the Coptic Metropolitan. On Easter eve the Ceremony of the Holy Fire (*Haghiot Phos*) takes place. It is clear that the Copts have taken part in this ceremony for centuries. The Chevalier d'Arvieux saw the Copts at the ceremony in 1660, as did Hasselquist in 1751.<sup>44</sup> Though the Copts do not have the right to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the Holy Sepulchre itself, a right reserved for the Greek Orthodox as representatives of the Byzantine churches, the Latin Catholics representing the West and the Armenians from the Oriental Orthodox tradition, the Copts do have sanctuary lamps there which they are allowed to light. They also have Coptic processions within the Church, stopping at every altar for acts of adoration, intercession and benediction. On the Eve of Easter the Greek Orthodox patriarch accompanied by an Armenian Orthodox monk enters the Church of the Resurrection for the Ceremony of the Holy Fire. From the Chapel of the Angel the fire is passed through the

43 A Goodrich-Freer, *Inner Jerusalem* (London, 1904), p. 123.

44 Meinardus, *The Copts in Jerusalem*, p. 35.

southern and northern openings to the pilgrims. The Copts receive the holy fire through the southern opening. Then the holy fire is taken to the Coptic Orthodox metropolitan, who during the Ceremony has remained in the Coptic Chapel of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the west of the Holy Sepulchre. After having received the Holy Fire, the Coptic Archbishop carries it to the Coptic pilgrims. Then the Greeks, Armenians, Syrians and Copts make a procession three times around the Church.<sup>45</sup> This procession is repeated on Easter Sunday morning at 4 a.m. Such annual celebrations have enormous significance in churches which think not merely in years but in centuries. The continuity of archbishop and community is of an importance barely imaginable to an occidental.

Throughout the centuries, the Copts have lived cheek by jowl in the Holy City with the sister church of Ethiopia. Any account of the Egyptian Christian presence in Jerusalem must include some notice of this bitter and tragic relationship. It cannot be the function of this essay to offer all the documentary evidence relating to the conflicting claims of the Copts and Ethiopians to the site known as the Dair al-Sultan (Monastery of the Sultan) on the roof of the Church of St Helena, and to the chapels of the Bodiless Living Creatures and of the Archangel Michael. Both churches claim jurisdiction of the Dair al-Sultan, and, at different times, both churches have managed to convince external arbiters that they were the rightful owners. The Ethiopian case has been eloquently presented in careful, scholarly polemic by Sister Abraham,<sup>46</sup> an internationally distinguished scholar who has lived in Jerusalem for many years, and an academic examination with a Coptic bias is provided by Professor Otto Meinardus.<sup>47</sup> A general statement

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45 Meinardus, *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, pp. 122-123.

46 Kirsten Stoffregen Pedersen (Sister Abraham), 'The Qeddusan: The Ethiopian Christians in the Holy Land', in: *The Christian Heritage in the Holy Land*, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-148. Kirsten Stoffregen Petersen (1932-2017), widely known as Sister Abraham (Catholic) a scholar of Ethiopian Christianity and the history of the Ethiopian Church in Jerusalem and the Holy land. She completed her M.A. in African Studies in 1981 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem with a thesis entitled 'The History of the Ethiopian Community in the Holy Land from the Time of Emperor Tewodros II till 1974' which was published by the Tantur Ecumenical Institute (Jerusalem 1983). In 1984, she embarked on Ph.D courses, receiving her doctorate in 1991 with the thesis 'Traditional Ethiopian Exegesis of the Book of Psalms'.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 112-128.

concerning recent Coptic-Ethiopian relations, with a notice of contemporary developments in Jerusalem, will assist anyone turning to the conflicting accounts which are usual when dealing with the Dair al-Sultan.<sup>48</sup>

The Apostle of Ethiopia was Frumentius, a Syrian known as *Anba Salama*, the Father of Peace or *Kasate Berhan Salama*, the Revealer of Light. Because Frumentius was consecrated by St Athanasius (circa. AD 350), the Egyptian Church claimed authority over the southern Church. The Copts exercised control over Ethiopia for many centuries by appointing an expatriate as bishop, even though he rarely understood the language, culture and psychology of the Ethiopians.<sup>49</sup> This imposition was never wholeheartedly accepted in Ethiopia. The last Egyptian Copt to rule the Ethiopians died on 22 October 1950, after which the ascetic Abba Kyrillos appointed an Ethiopian as Patriarch-Catholicos. The Copts also agreed that they would not establish any bishoprics or titles in the Diaspora without first consulting the Ethiopian Church:<sup>50</sup> we shall see that this was to have serious consequences affecting the Church in Jerusalem.

From the beginning of Coptic-Ethiopian relations many problems usually associated with the relations between the developed and the developing world have been effective agents of alienation and separation. Paternalism, nationalism and racism have played their part in the story. Certainly, the Ethiopians are a proud people who recognise their own cultural history as being equal to that of Egypt. The Copts have occasionally harboured the extremely unpleasant notion that they have preserved the ethnic, racial purity of Pharaonic Egypt so that they can be distinguished from the Muslim majority. The Copts share with many other peoples a suspicion of black people, especially when the black peoples are not subject and obedient. For centuries this incipient and unacknowledged racism has been part of the problem in the relations between Ethiopian and Egyptian Christians. It has often seemed very odd to the Ethiopians that Coptic bishops who crumbled before the might of Islam in the Nile valley were so

48 A fuller account of the relations between Copts and Ethiopians can be found in my essay Abba Kyrillos: Patriarch and Solitary, *Coptic Church Review*, Vol. 17: nos 1 and 2, 1996.

49 Otto Meinardus, *Christian Egypt; Faith and Life* (American University Press in Cairo, 1970), p. 349.

50 Watson *op. cit.*, p. 23.

aggressive and assertive when dealing with Black Christians on the shore of Lake Tanna.

The conquest of the Copts by Islam weakened the claims of Alexandria over Ethiopia. To the southern Christians it seemed that Ethiopia, 'a sovereign Christian state',<sup>51</sup> where the Abuna and his flock could walk with their heads held high was at least as significant as Egypt where the Copts were oppressed, a *dhimmi* people, under the sword of Islam. This history of ambivalent relations between Copt and Ethiopian is very long and most unedifying, acrimony always surrounding the comparison made between the freedom of established Christianity in the Ethiopian Empire and the subjection of the Copts in the Islamic State. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church invariably found that it was numerically much stronger than the Church in Egypt. The Ethiopians have been eager to exploit this fact and to assert the need for complete independence in the light of political developments throughout Africa. Leadership of Christian Africa is also felt to be at stake: the Copts have been enthusiastic missionaries in East Africa, but Ethiopia continually reminds commentators that the Egyptian Church is Arabophone, and culturally and ethnically distinct from most of Africa.

Two men, one a Copt and the other an Ethiopian, did more than any others to restore Christian relations between the Alexandrine Church and the Church led from Addis Ababa. They were Haile Selassie I, (1891-1975) and Pope Kyrillos the Sixth, Coptic Pope of Alexandria and 116th Patriarch in the See of Saint Mark (1902-1971). They shared a vision of Oriental Orthodox unity and achieved much in a relatively short period. Pope Kyrillos visited Ethiopia in 1960. Pope and Emperor presided over the only Oriental Orthodox Assembly at Addis Ababa in 1965, and Haile Selassie delighted the Copts by attending their liturgy in Cairo during a State visit in 1969. If both had lived longer the tragic experience of the Ethiopians under Marxism and its aftermath, especially in Eritrea, would have been quite different. Haile Selassie outlived Kyrillos by a few years, but he was dethroned in 1974 and murdered in 1975.<sup>52</sup>

From the inception of his patriarchal ministry in 1959 there were rumours that Pope Kyrillos would meet Emperor Haile Selassie in

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51 Kirsten Stoffregen Pedersen (Sister Abraham), *op. cit.*, p. 131.

52 An unforgettable account of Haile Selassie's final days as emperor can be found in Ryszard Kapuscinski, *The Emperor*, London, 1983.

Jerusalem. The rumours were reinforced by the Preface (1960) to the important monograph 'The Copts in Jerusalem' when Professor Otto Meinardus seemed to address them both:

It is ... hoped that this study of the historical position of Dair as-Sultan may help to solve some of the problems with regard to property-claims, and that thereby a more satisfactory settlement may be reached ... The author feels assured ... that ... His Holiness Amba Kirillus VI will come to an agreement on this thorny question with His Majesty Haile Selassie, if both parties are imbued with the Spirit of Christian charity, and eschewing all recourse to legal documents and action, wherein worketh not the righteousness of God.<sup>53</sup>

The appeal was apparently unheard. There were, in any case, more pressing issues for Church and Empire.<sup>54</sup>

Ironically, it was during the period when Kyrillos and Haile Selassie were working so closely together that the situation at the Dair as-Sultan was at its worst for many years. Just before the accession of Pope Kyrillos the Coptic Metropolitan and his priests had been expelled from Jerusalem. The Jordanian government had taken over control of East Jerusalem after the British Mandate and the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, but the Arab Republic of Egypt had broken off diplomatic relations with King Hussein and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and the Copts were, not for the first or last time, pawns in Arab politics.<sup>55</sup> *Al-Ahram* of 4 January, 1959 reported that the expelled clergy had been given visitors visas in time for the Orthodox Christmas on 6/7 January. The visas were renewable.

The site now changed hands, and keys, on a number of occasions. In early February 1959 the Jordanians ordered the site to be handed to

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<sup>53</sup> Meinardus, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> See Karekin Sarkissian, *The Witness of the Oriental Orthodox Churches* (Beirut: Mesrob Press, 1968). The author of that important volume had been His Holiness Karekin the First (27 August 1932-29 June 1999) Supreme Patriarch and Catholicos of All Armenians.

<sup>55</sup> For a discussion of Egyptian regional policy, see P J Vatikiotis, *The History of Modern Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976), pp. 405ff.

the Ethiopians.<sup>56</sup> The Copts complained that the Treaty of Berlin in 1878 had guaranteed the site to them. The Copts again held some of the keys to the site. On 22 February 1961 the Jordanian government once more decided that the Ethiopians owned the site and ordered the Copts to give up the keys.<sup>57</sup> According to Pedersen, Cairo now applied pressure and the keys went back to the Copts.<sup>58</sup> On 2 April, 1961 the Jordanians found in favour of the Copts and, as Meinardus has it, 'the Dair as-Sultan was returned to the original owners, the Copts.'<sup>59</sup> In its Christmas Eve report on 6 January 1963 the Cairo Coptic newspaper *El Watani* reported its satisfaction that the Copts were still *in situ* at Dair as-Sultan.

Outsiders are always tempted to scoff at the farcical element in the tale, but tragedy often follows quickly in the wake of comedy. In February 1966 al-Sayyid Anwar al-Khatib became governor of Jerusalem.<sup>60</sup> Anwar al-Khatib had installed electricity and running water. The Copts objected to this disturbance of the *status quo*. Physical violence ensued in which a number of Ethiopians were seriously hurt. This was, unbelievably, whilst the Ethiopians were engaged in the 1967 Easter processions. Pedersen claims that the Copts had gathered an arsenal of stones for some time in anticipation of this confrontation.<sup>61</sup> It is a matter of record that the police were called to intervene. Police protection became the norm. In the six days war of June 1967 the Israelis took control of the Old City and the question of Dair as-Sultan passed to another political jurisdiction.

By the night of Easter 1970 the opposing factions were again ready for open struggle which led to a Coptic appeal to the High Court of Israel. The Ethiopians now held the keys, leaving the passage ways open but controlling the chapels. On 16 March 1971 the Israeli High Court decided in favour of the Copts but allowed the Israeli Government to set up a commission to examine the problem.

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56 Meinardus, *Coptic Church Review* 1995, p. 22.

57 Kirsten Stoffregen Pedersen (Sister Abraham), p. 147.

58 *Loc. cit.*

59 Meinardus, *Coptic Church Review*, 1995, p. 23.

60 Let the reader notice that Pedersen does not tell us of this man's employment by the Ethiopians, whilst Meinardus is quick to note that he had 'served the Ethiopians for 15 years as advocate'.

Pedersen p. 147, Meinardus, *Coptic Church Review* p. 23.

61 *Loc. cit.*, p. 147.



Golda Meir accepted this suggestion and appointed Abba Eban as a commission member. The situation has now continued for a quarter of a century: the Copts have the High Court judgement, the keys to one gate, and one of their priests occupies a monastic cell on the site, whilst the Ethiopians have the remaining keys including those to the two chapels. Coptic appeals in 1977, 1980, April 1981, December 1984 and most recently in 1994 have confirmed their rights but have not resulted in any action. Arbitration by Judge David Bacher also broke down in February 1982.

Pope Shenouda has prohibited Coptic pilgrimages to the Holy Land for as long as the Israelis do not intervene for the return of the Dair as-Sultan to the Copts. He has reiterated this interdiction from his desert exile in 1981, through subsequent years and most recently at Easter 1996. He has been ignored by some Copts. Records in the 1960s show that tens of thousands of Copts were usually in Jerusalem for Easter. The pilgrimage has a vital place in Coptic popular religion. In Easter 1995 it was calculated that 15,000 Copts went to Jerusalem despite the interdiction of the Patriarch.<sup>62</sup> Monks of the monasteries of St Macarius in the Wadi Natrun and from other parts of Egypt have been openly critical of the patriarch and some have led pilgrim groups to the Holy Places. In September 1995, Pope Shenouda reacted angrily to suggestions in the Egyptian press that he was excommunicating people who went on pilgrimage.<sup>63</sup> 'It is a question of Church discipline, that we support our rights before the Israelis.' But Shenouda's ban on pilgrimages to the Holy City was continually raised in Egypt in a debate which included wider criticisms of the pope. In April 1995 an official government journal, published in English and Arabic, debated the issues and the patriarch claimed that his critics were backed by tour companies who were angry because of his refusal to let Copts travel to Jerusalem.<sup>64</sup> Both Shenouda and Amba Abra'am are anxious to establish that their criticisms are always directed against Israel, rather than the Ethiopians.<sup>65</sup> It is true that Amba Abra'am has been more acceptable to the Ethiopians than any other hierarch in living memory. He has

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62 See Syndesmos Orthodox Press Service No. 59, April 1995, pp. 1-4. Cf. *Sourozh*, No. 60, London May 1995, p. 50.

63 In a private meeting with the writer at the Dorchester Hotel, London, September 1995.

64 *Egypt Today*, April 1995, pp. 87-91 by Lee Keath.

65 Meinardus quotes the Metropolitan to this effect in the *Coptic Church Review*, p. 26.

held out a hand of friendship, but his work has been undercut by tragic events outside Jerusalem.

Relations between the Coptic Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church had been seriously effected by the Marxist Revolution and the martyrdom of Orthodox Ethiopia under Mengistu. The Ethiopians found that the Copts had little understanding of the impact of Communism on the old empire and even less sympathy: Ethiopian refugees customarily found more sympathy and help amongst the Catholics and Anglicans. Nevertheless, Pope Shenouda was willing to establish ecclesiastical norms with Addis Ababa and a protocol of reconciliation was drawn up and ratified by both Synods.<sup>66</sup> Whilst preparing the protocols, bringing them before the Synod and signing them, Pope Shenouda was also preparing to establish an autonomous Orthodox Church within the jurisdiction of the Ethiopian Patriarch-Catholicos. In response to requests from Eritrea, Pope Shenouda III consecrated five Eritrean abbots as bishops on 19 June 1994, the Feast of Pentecost, with the promise of the establishment of an autocephalous Eritrean Orthodox Church led by a Patriarch appointed by the Coptic patriarch. The Ethiopians believed that the Copts had reneged on the agreement of 1959 and on the protocols of 1994. Protests were received from Addis Ababa to Cairo.<sup>67</sup>

The five Eritreans had come to Cairo wearing the traditional Ethiopian pill box head-dress. Just before their consecration the Copts dressed the bishops in the *qalansuma* and *'imma*—the monastic dress of the Coptic revival now so prominent in Jerusalem.

The effect of these consecrations upon the Church in Jerusalem was entirely negative. Relations between the Ethiopian Church and the Church in Egypt broke down,<sup>68</sup> but the situation is always fluid and unpredictable and it is wise to reserve judgement on the outcome of these most recent developments.

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66 The present writer was able to study these documents at Deir Amba Bishoi in the Western Desert in April 1994. The Copts have not published them, but the Ethiopians have: Kahsay G Egziabher (Amharic) and Yohannes G Selassie (English) in *Ecumenism in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church*, Addis Ababa, 27 September, 1995 pp. 43-48.

67 Ernst Chr. Suttner, 'Eritreas Eigenstaatlichkeit und die Kirchen', *Una Sancta*, Vol. 49 (1994), pp. 106-124.

68 See Meinardus, *Coptic Church Review*, and Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

Jerusalem is continually present for the Coptic Orthodox Christian wherever he may be. The Coptic Synaxarium has four major festivals with specific readings relating to the Holy Places. On September 26 (16 of the Coptic month *Tut*) the Copts commemorate the consecration of the Church of the Resurrection by St Athanasius the Apostolic (c. 296-373). The Egyptian patriarch was assisted by the patriarchs of Constantinople and Antioch at a time long before the divisions of Chalcedon in AD 451. On the following day—17 *Tut*/September 27—the Discovery of the Holy Cross (AD 326) by St Helena (c. 255-330) is honoured in the Liturgy. On May 20/12 *Bashons* the manifestation of a Cross of Fire over the site of Golgotha in AD 351 is observed. On 10 Barmahat-March 19 the Copts make annual celebration of the restoration of the Holy Cross to Jerusalem. The cross discovered by St Helena in the fourth century had been stolen by the attacking Persians in 614, but was rescued by the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius (575-641) and brought back into the Holy City in AD 629.<sup>69</sup>

At the time of writing the liturgical memory of Jerusalem is all the memory most Copts have of the city because the patriarchal prohibition of pilgrimage remains in force and the problem of Dair es-Sultan is unresolved, but Coptic monks in the *qalansuwa* can be seen everywhere in Israel and in the Palestinian territories.

Abraham II, the Coptic Archbishop in Jerusalem and the Holy Land died on the 25 November, 2015, after a reign of 24 years. Pope Tawadros II (elected to head the Coptic Church 2012) conducted the funeral.<sup>70</sup> This was the first time that the head of the Coptic Church visited the Holy City in modern history. Shenouda III had forbidden Coptic Orthodox Church banned pilgrimage to the city in 1967 due to the changing political situation which impacted upon Jerusalem. Abraham II's has requested that he should be buried in Jerusalem.<sup>71</sup>

69 For details concerning the Coptic Synaxarium see the footnotes in Aziz Atiya, *History of Eastern Christianity*, p. 31.

70 Christine Chaillot, 'Tawadros II, nouveau pape des coptes orthodoxes', *Proche-Orient chrétien*, Vol. 63 (2013), no. 3/4, pp. 268-286.

71 <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/26/egyptian-coptic-pope-pays-historic-visit-to-jerusalem>> [accessed 01/12/15].

# AN EXPLORATION OF THE ROLE OF ARAB PROTESTANT WOMEN IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION: A CONTRIBUTION TO ECCLESIAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*Grace Al-Zoughbi*

## ABSTRACT

The contribution of Arab Protestant<sup>1</sup> women in theological education<sup>2</sup> is a significantly under researched field of study in the Middle East. Arab Protestant women in the Middle East are characterised by multiple marginalities. Their heritage is embedded in the vital Eastern<sup>3</sup> Christian tradition. This contribution first describes the ecclesial and historical context of Protestant Arab women in the Middle East. It outlines the roles of Arab Protestant women in the Arab Renaissance period (*Al Nahda*) 1860-1915 in the context of Protestant Western missions in the long nineteenth century. The Protestant missions during the period of

- 1 The Protestant community accounts for 30-35 percent of all Christians in the world while it accounts for only 5 percent of the total population of the Middle East. Roughly, Protestants only number around one million throughout the region (Grafton, 2020, p. 316). Though Protestants are a diverse minority, their societal impact is beyond their respective numbers (Grafton, 2020, p. 318).
- 2 Theological Education is employed to identify the discipline of studying theology as a formal academic pursuit, as well as the training of adult male and female students to know God more deeply (Kelsey, 1992; Banks, 1999; Ott, 2013). Most distinguished theological schools in the Middle East understand theological education to be conducted for the purpose of training people involved in Christian ministry, unlike some of the Arab distinguished traditional seminaries that are specifically training for the priesthood. However, the actual term 'theological education' is missing from the vision and mission statements of most Protestant theological colleges. Within the Protestant community the self-understanding of TE is expressed in different ways.
- 3 The term 'Protestant' is used here to refer to mainline Protestant and Evangelical Communities in the Middle East, whilst 'Eastern' is employed to refer to churches from the various ecclesial communities belonging to wider Eastern Christian tradition including the Eastern Orthodox, the Oriental Orthodox (Armenian, Coptic, Syriac, Ethiopian) and the Eastern Catholic churches, which are in union with the Catholic church, Melkite Greek Catholic, Maronite, Armenian, Syriac, Chaldean, and Coptic.

the *Nabda* saw the emergence of Arab women theologians. Evaluating the contributions of Arab women in the aforementioned period makes space for Arab women to currently participate in theological endeavours. As an example of an Arab Syriac Maronite woman who contributed to theological education, this paper will briefly consider the life of Hindiyya Anne Al-Ujaymi, who lived in the eighteenth century. This exploration will open a new vista for Arab women to reflect upon as they access theological resources while taking into consideration first their Eastern Christian inheritance and second their context and bringing that to bear. This new perspective will enrich their role, identity, and contribution to theological education.

## OUTLINE

- 1 Introduction
- 2 The Ecclesial and Historical Context for Arab Protestant Women in the Middle East
  - 2.1 Protestantism in the Middle East
  - 2.2 Patriarchy for Arab Protestant Women
- 3 The Role of Arab Women in Theological Education
  - 3.1 Arab Women of the Renaissance
  - 3.2 Arab Women in Theological Education Today
  - 3.3 The Life of Hindiyya Anne Al Ujaymi
    - Hindiyya's Context
    - Her Contribution to Literature and Theology
    - Protestant Thought in Dialogue with Eastern Christianity
- 4 Conclusion

## 1 INTRODUCTION

I walked up the hill from my home in Bethlehem, to get to the Casa Nova Franciscan Palace, anxious to meet two of my previous students, who have now graduated, for a coffee. I had not seen Suhad and Elham since the last time I was in Bethlehem in 2020. It was a delight to see their joyful faces despite a challenging year for everyone but

particularly for the inhabitants of Bethlehem. On top of the usual political hardships on the ground, the pandemic has only made life more difficult. Suhad and Elham, both women, had been two of my best students. Their excellence is demonstrated, not only in their academic achievements but in the way that both have resolved to do God's work. They completed their BAs in Theological Studies in 2019 and have been searching for employment since then, probably knocking on the door of every local school in the area where they were hoping to become teachers of Christian education, in addition to approaching other organisations. The rate of unemployment in Palestine has gone up in the last year; currently for females, it is 37 percent compared to 20 percent for males, whilst it is 43 percent amongst the youth.<sup>4</sup>

In the ambient setting of the beautiful Casa Nova, I could not help but notice the Church of Nativity Basilica behind the terrace where we were sitting, surrounded with the delicately blossoming crimson and fuchsia pink flowers. With Covid restrictions still looming in the air in July 2021, no pilgrims whatsoever were in sight; a rather sad scene, albeit this meant that we had the place, which was usually packed with a multitude of pilgrims seeking refreshment away from the scorching heat, to ourselves. But in reality, pilgrims from around the world enrich the local Christian community with their presence. Their stay in Bethlehem accentuates the need for the local body of Christians to be strengthened by the presence of the global church in its diversity, but alas it has been an unusual year. The following section will describe the ecclesial context in the Middle East, in which Arab women in theological education, like Suhad and Elham, are situated.

## **2 THE ECCLESIAL CONTEXT FOR PROTESTANT WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Home and heartbeat of Christianity, it is difficult to overlook the ecclesial context of the Middle East. Mariz Tadros (2018) asserts about the Middle East, 'there is an extraordinary plurality and diversity in Christian expression across denominational ethnic, cultural and historical identifiers' (pp. 15-16). Scholars divide the different

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4 <[https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/Press\\_En\\_15-2-2021-LF-en.pdf](https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/Press_En_15-2-2021-LF-en.pdf)> [accessed 3/08/2021].

expressions of Christianity in the Middle East into five families: The Church of the East, The Oriental Orthodox family, the Eastern Orthodox, the Catholic churches and the Protestants. The *Protestant* (or Evangelical) churches of multiple denominations, have roots in modern Western missionary movements, and are a minority within Middle Eastern Christianity (Womack 2020, p. 191). Despite their diversity, Christians are within the minority in the major countries of the Middle East. In Jordan they are at 2 percent (Raheb, 2020, p. 507); in Egypt estimates of the population of Christians range between 7-10 percent;<sup>5</sup> in Lebanon they are at 40 percent. The smallest percentage of minority of Christians is in Palestine<sup>6</sup> where the local Christian community makes up only 2 percent of the population,<sup>7</sup> a significant decrease in their numbers has occurred in the past decades. There are twelve Christian churches that are officially recognised by the Palestinian Authority. Around 40 percent of Palestinian Christians belong to the Greek Orthodox, a further 40 percent belong to the various Catholic churches, 10 percent belong to the Oriental Orthodox family (mainly Armenian and Syrian with a few Copts), and 10 percent to the Protestant churches, mainly Lutheran and Anglican (Raheb, p. 506). Albeit the cradle of Christianity, emigration levels have been escalating at increased rates and many Palestinian Christians have left due to socio-political and economic factors as documented by Bernard Sabella (2017, 2020). Similar to the larger Catholic and Orthodox communities, Protestants encounter political and religious pressures (Grafton, 2020, p. 325).

I was relieved that Suhad and Elham were not attracted to the idea of emigration although restrictions on the ground are

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5 The official percentage is unavailable because of the lack of an accurate population census in the last few decades (Roussos, 2021).

6 By 1914, almost half of the Christian community of Bethlehem and one third of Beit Jala had emigrated to Latin and South America. Subsequently Latin America is the biggest 'Palestinian' diaspora outside the Arab world (Raheb, 2020, p. 500). In Bethlehem the Christian populations decreased from 84 percent in 1922 to only 28 percent in 2007; in Beit Jala from 99 percent to 61 percent and in Beit Sahour from 81 percent to 65 percent (Roussos, 2021, p. 13).

7 The Palestinian Christian community is located mainly in the center part of the West Bank with approximately half in the Bethlehem area and the other half divided between Jerusalem and the Ramallah area. Villages such as Zababdeh and Rafidia in the North have few Christians whilst in Gaza, there are less than one thousand Christians currently (Raheb, 2020, p. 506).

becoming harder and tighter with every day. The general context is characterised by the absence of equality, and economic and political instability. In addition to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, high unemployment rates compounded by weakened church leadership, are reasons that increasingly push the Christian community to emigrate (Raheb 2020, p. 509). Just kilometres away from where we were sitting, Jerusalem, where there are more theological institutes and more access to theological education resources, is not accessible to us. Both women acknowledge their rootedness in the land but recounted multiple stories of their relatives who have chosen to emigrate to the West which has consequently weakened the ecclesial context of the Holy Land. I had to reflect how both these women, were acting as active agents in their own homeland, definitely not passive victims.

These two competing accounts regarding Christians in the Middle East, indicate that despite the seemingly complex relationship between Arab Christians as a minority and Muslims as a majority, Arab Protestant women in theological education are in a position to be catalysts of change through recounting their stories of existence, perseverance as a minority and through theologically reflecting on their identities embedded in their Christian heritage. The predominant Islamic nature of the region has confined the various Protestant denominations in the Middle East to a more culturally conservative framework contrary to what is usually found in the West. Western missionary efforts in the Middle East, spanning over two centuries, along with the Arab conservative culture have impacted the way women's agency has been defined. It has made space for them to be educated whilst maintaining their Arab identity.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, robust scholarly attention has been dedicated to Christianity in the Middle East (Raheb and Lamport (eds) 2020, Marteiijn 2020, Schouten 2020, Parkinnen 2020), however this attention has for the major part

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8 Tala Raheb (2020) explores Christian Agency and Lutheran Personal Status Laws in Palestine. In Islam, there is an ongoing debate on how much agency or initiative Muslim women exercise and how much they act as passive recipients of their circumstances. For more on the agency of Arab women, see Bilge, Sirma. 'Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women.' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (February 2010): 9–28. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/07256860903477662>>. Mahmood, Saba, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), Chapter 5.



of it excluded the theological work and voices of Arab women. Some resources (Womack 2019, 2020, Lindner 2011, 2014, 2020, Okkenhaug 2005, 2021) have highlighted the role of Arab women in education in light of Western missions. In the following section we will take a look at Protestantism in the Middle East and the role of Arab women in the Arab Renaissance.

## *2.1 Protestantism in the Middle East*

One of the significant markers of the nineteenth century in the Middle East was the expansion of American and British Missions (Séverine Gabry-Thienpont, 2021, p. 4). The earliest Protestant missions were the Presbyterians in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt whilst it was the Lutherans in Palestine (Tadros, 2018, p. 30). Most scholarship on gender and missions has focused on Protestant activities, particularly in pointing out the significant role of single and married women in missionary societies (Gabry-Thienpont, 2021, p. 3).<sup>9</sup> Education is one of the most significant features of Protestantism (Lindner 2013, p. 126) and hence the influence of educational institutes in the Middle East established through missionary efforts cannot be overlooked.

Many significant universities in the Middle East include Christian missionary roots as their background. The American University of Cairo, the second oldest university in Egypt was established by the United Presbyterian Church in 1919 (Frantzman, 2011, p. 188). The Protestant presence in Egypt goes back to the mid-nineteenth century, when missionaries from the American United Presbyterian Mission made their way there. One hundred years later, in 1954, Presbyterians established two schools for women evangelists in Menia and Tanta. In 1970 the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC) ushered in their first female graduate: Victoria Aziz Fahim, and since that time Egyptian women have been studying theology in increasing numbers.

In Lebanon, one of the earliest schools that was established by missionaries is The Near East School of Theology (NEST). It was formed in 1932 by the merger of the School for Religious Workers in

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<sup>9</sup> Fleishmann 2003, 2006; Okkenhaug, 2005.

Beirut and the School of Religion in Athens. It was built upon a history of Evangelical theological education in the Near East dating back to 1835.<sup>10</sup> In that year, Revd William Thompson, founded in Beirut the first Protestant Seminary in the area. In 1843 the Seminary moved to Abey under the headship of Cornelius Van Dyck, translator of the Bible into Arabic. It offered classes in both theology and general education and was established by the same group of missionaries who began the American University in Beirut (Bailey and Bailey 2010, p. 182), which was founded as the Syrian Protestant College in 1866 (Frantzman 2011, p. 188). The Arab Baptist Theological Seminary was established in 1960 as a result of Baptist missionary efforts.

There are fewer resources on Protestant missions to the Holy Land. Bader Mansour documents the history of the Baptist Missions in the Holy Land from 1867-1950 (2020) in a written resource in Arabic. There are two Arab Protestant theological institutes in Palestine, Bethlehem Bible College, established in 1979, and Nazareth Evangelical College, established in 2014 as a result of merging Nazareth Evangelical Theological Seminary and Galilee Bible College. Of the five Christian universities and colleges located in the Bethlehem area (Raheb, 2020, p. 507), only Bethlehem University established in 1973 (Catholic institute in the Lasallian tradition) and Bethlehem Bible College offer undergraduate degrees in Religious Education and Biblical Studies respectively. The first woman graduate with a BA from Bethlehem Bible College was Layla Hag in 1986, 7 years after its establishment in 1979.

Many of the Protestant theological institutes in the Middle East, whether established by missionaries' efforts or not, have been collaborating together through the Middle East and North Africa Association for Theological Education (MENATE). Established in 1992, MENATE has sought to formulate a unified standard of Theological Education amongst its institutes. Further, the creation of the Theological Forum for Evangelical Thought in the Arab World in 2014, presents an 'analysis of contemporary issues from an Eastern theological perspective' (Grafton, p. 319).

The work of Protestant missions in the Middle East has opened the door for Middle Eastern women to study theology and to contribute to the ecclesial context in the Middle East. There is also a

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10 For the history of this seminary, see George F Sabra, *Truth and Service: A History of the Near East School of Theology* (Beirut: Librairie Antoine S.A.L, 2009).

very large Catholic contribution and to a lesser extent an Orthodox contribution, in the Middle East, however, this paper will not deal with those.

## *2.2 Patriarchy for Arab Protestant Women*

As we continued our conversation, it transpired that not only have Suhad and Elham been looking for employment but also for a suitable MA programme in theology or a related field. I was pleased to hear of their interest to potentially look for online programmes in the wider Middle East. With the limitations of theological education in the Middle East, the prospects of pursuing postgraduate education particularly for women has become difficult. The rich theological educational context of the wider Middle East may offer more opportunities for Arab women, though not as vast as the number of educational institutes in the West. Not only are there cultural and social restrictions for Arab Protestant in the Middle East, but women are also confronted with patriarchal norms which do not typically encourage women to study. Ela Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow* (2010), gives some historical background to the social and cultural reasons why Palestinian girls were not able to study during the Ottoman mandate. She suggests that Arab women were culturally set to become the mothers of tomorrow. Whilst this is certainly a noble pursuit, a theological career and a calling to be a mother are not contradictory. In fact, Elham is already a young grandmother of three grandchildren, and Suhad is a mother of four grown-ups. They both pursued theological education later in life, and, despite their motherhood responsibilities, they excelled. They are both cognisant of the heritage that precedes them evident in the lives of Arab Protestant women of *Al-Nabda* despite patriarchal inhibitions.

Patriarchy was more evident during the *Al-Nabda* period, among Arab women more so than Western women. Most of the missionary women who obtained their education at seminaries in the US were considered part of 'the educated elite' of their period. They continued their education whilst in Syria including studying Arabic (Lindner, 2011, p. 85). Missionary and Syrian women who were members of the Protestant churches were educated and distinctively literate (Lindner, 2011, p. 88). Literature around Arab Middle Eastern traditions puts emphasis on the superiority of the

family, with its patriarchal direction, as the core of the social structure in Arab cultures (Joseph 1996, 1999; Abu-Lughod, 2008). Joseph (1999), a distinguished Lebanese professor and author who has done the most work on the Middle East patriarchy and family dynamics, defines patriarchy as entailing the privileging of male and elder rights, leaving women out of the scene. Her description of a society where males and older people are privileged, and how that breaks down in mutual responsibilities and obligations is helpful. Arab culture is characterised by men who exercise authority over women in different aspects of life including among other facets, education and career and, not surprisingly, theological education, too. The patriarchal structure of Middle Eastern society distributes power according to gender and age (pp. 11-12). As such, women are considered the less powerful and the less prominent.<sup>11</sup>

The contribution of women leadership in the church is a significant Protestant heritage which started with the work of female missionaries in the girls' schools and was the result of the influence of Protestantism (Grafton, p. 321). There are various works on the roles that Western women played in Arab churches as missionaries and teachers, helping to shape some of the cultural and social barriers while opening up others. Comparing these with the discussions on Muslim Arab women and theology is part of the general context for Arab women in theological education.<sup>12</sup> However, due to the limited scope of this article such a comparison will not be addressed here.

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11 For more on Patriarchy in the Middle East, see the academic journal *Die Welt des Islams* which has a special issue on 'Middle Eastern Patriarchy in Transition.' Maktabi, Rania, and Brynjar Lia. 'Middle Eastern Patriarchy in Transition', *Die Welt Des Islams*, vol. 57, no. 3-4, 2017, 265-277. Rosmer, Tilde, 'Agents of Change: How Islamist Women Activists in Israel Are Challenging the Status Quo', *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 57, no. 3-4, 2017, 360-385. Tuastad, Dag H. 'Nationalist Patriarchy, Clan Democracy: How the Political Trajectories of Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories Have Been Reversed', *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 57, no. 3-4, 2017, 386-403.

12 Ruth Roded (1993), wrote about Muslim women theologians in *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections*. The literature on Palestinian women tends to focus on the political, and less on people's social and cultural lives. Cheryl Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank* (2001), discusses many barriers for women and of course, the issue of patriarchy. There are various resources on women and gender and patriarchy in Egypt (Beth Baron 2005, 2014, Margot Badran 2009 and Marilyn Booth 2008, 2015); most, however, deal with the 1920s and 1930s era. As for Lebanon, Ellen Fleischmann (2002) has done work on women and missionaries in Lebanon. Heather Sharkey (2017) also worked on education and missions in Sudan and Egypt.

### 3 THE ROLE OF ARAB WOMEN IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

#### 3.1 *Arab Women of the Renaissance*

Protestant mission was remarkable and helped shape the contribution of Arab women at this time both in ecclesial and cultural contexts. The arrival of Western Protestant mission agencies to the Middle East facilitated the literary and theological activities of Arab women. More recently, Womack and Lindner have dedicated a major part of their scholarship to works that unearth the heritage of Arab Protestant women in the Middle East. They reveal names and contributions of Arab Protestant women who made a difference during the Arab *Nahda* period, thus paving the way for Arab women in current times.

Womack (2019) lists nine *Nahdawi* writers: They are Alice al-Bustani, Farida 'Atiya, Salma Tannus, 'Aziza 'Abbud, Rujina Shukri, Maryam Zakka, Hanna Kurani, Julia Tu'ma (*al Dimashqiyya*) and Salma Badr. Although the publications of these women are not theological per se, their contributions demonstrate that they took part in shaping their own socio-cultural context. It was unusual for Syrian Protestant women to contribute to published theological controversies, yet the *Nahdawi* women sided with the Protestant men in printing speeches, articles and books (Womack 2019, p. 11). Women first signed their names to sermons and articles on education for the mission periodical in the 1880s and published books and novels in the 1890s. In Womack's words, 'These largely neglected texts put the *Nahdawi* Protestant women at the forefront of the Arab women's awakening, which gained momentum in the early twentieth century' (p. 11). Shaped by mission's institutions of higher education, *Nahdawi* women were able to exert their influence on their society through literature and through becoming writers in their context and beyond, beyond even though they were categorized as 'low theology' (Womack and Lindner, 2014, p. 155).

Through my conversation with Suhad and Elham I was inspired to think beyond the limitations that Arab women face in theological education and reflect on the rich heritage they both represent. Suhad belongs to the Latin (Roman Catholic) rite where she has recently resumed her ministry leading a group of women in the church, whilst Elham comes from the Syriac church whose origins are

Eastern Christian, but currently attends a Lutheran church<sup>13</sup> where she also contributes by leading women's meetings. Equipped by their undergraduate education in theology, they are both seeking to make a positive change, and to bring about a 'new renaissance.' They have both graduated from a Protestant theological institute, but their passion is to see their respective churches thrive. For Suhad and Elham to be making a difference from within is remarkable.

Truth to be told, I have been fascinated by the work of Western women who have unpacked the lives and contexts of Arab women in education. In addition to the aforementioned women Inger-Marie Okkenhaug (2021) has done some work on the Swedish mission to the Holy Land and looks at the contribution of five Arab women teachers: Warde Abudije, N Halany, Hanna Abla, Bedea Haramy and Helena Kassisijeh (p. 1). Enriching as these resources are they are written from a Western perspective; the voices of Middle Eastern women are needed to complement the works of Western female scholars. Jean Said Makdisi's work (2007) is a memoir that highlights a century of Arab life and history through the stories of her courageous mother and grandmother. In light of the complex political scene in the Middle East following the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of Arab nationalism she reconsiders the dichotomy between the 'East' and the 'West' in this personal history of three generations of Arab women. The notion that Western missions claimed to be 'the deliverer of women,' does not sit comfortably with Palestinian writer Makdisi (in Joseph 1999, p. 45). She suggests: 'The aim was never to "liberate" the girls, but to domesticate them, to tame them into becoming "better" wives and mothers in the Victorian manner' (p. 49). At the same time, 'they [the Western Missionaries] ignore the appalling conditions of working class and rural women in England or America at this time, and rarely, as they write about women here, do they distinguish one class from another' (Makdisi, p. 47).

Contrary to Makdisi's impressions, this article suggests that the

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13 Mari Parkinnen (2021) examines 'switching or crossing denominational lines' within the Palestinian Christian community. Her results suggest that the main three motives for this mobility are: personal belief, marital and family reasons and socio/economic related reasons (pp. 30-52). In highlighting the tensions that come with 'denominational mobility' it becomes easier to understand why some Arab women are not fully Protestant. Though many attend Protestant seminaries they remain in their traditional churches whilst others, though a minority, convert.

collaboration between the West and the East has forged a fruitful path forward for Arab women in theological education. It is unthinkable to deny the influence of Western missions in the education of Arab women; without it they would have been deprived of the opportunity to take part in educational initiatives of the West. Undoubtedly, the Western missions were pivotal in shaping Arab women's experiences in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, theological education included. This needs to be acknowledged even when 'the West' for many is becoming increasingly unpopular given the current political tension in the Middle East and the interference of Western power. David Kerr puts it this way: 'The witness of the Middle Eastern churches has been both helped and hindered by Western Christians. The goal of education encouraged the Eastern churches to entertain closer relations with Western churches, especially as the latter extended their missionary outreach to the Middle East. Western educational support, however, often demanded its own price in the imposition of Western patterns of church order on the Eastern churches' (Kerr in Bailey and Bailey 2010, p. 10).

### *3.2 Arab Women in Theological Education Today*

Theological education has traditionally been connected to the ministry of ordination.<sup>14</sup> As a result, historically, very few women have been involved in theological education. Despite the cultural and religious assumptions that impact their participation in theology, there has been an increase in Arab Protestant women who are pursuing theological education in recent years. In the past, certain postgraduate programmes in the Middle East were not open to Arab women, so some Arab women benefited from theological education in the West where access to theological programmes is not restricted by gender. The lack of accredited PhD theology programmes in the Middle East within Protestant schools remains an obstacle for many.

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<sup>14</sup> In Jerusalem, Anglican and Catholic school networks were established to educate Christians for a career connected to the church. However, with the emerging of progressive ideas in the late nineteenth century, the schools' focus shifted from a theological education to a secular education (Frantzman 2011, p. 199).

Few Arab Protestant women have attained noteworthy positions related to theological education. Mary Mikhael, for example, is the first and only woman to become president of a Protestant seminary in the Middle East (1994-2011). As a 'champion of education, and women's education in particular' (Grafton, p. 322), and equipped by her postgraduate education in theology in the West, Mikhael authored many articles related to theology and the position of women in the church, along with chapters of books and studies for women.<sup>15</sup> Grafton asserts: 'There is no doubt that a focus on women's education has played a critical role in the support of women in ministry among Protestants' (p. 319). Najla Kassab is the first woman to become president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) in 2017. Rima Nasrallah of NEST has written on Eastern Christian women and their relationship to Protestantism in Lebanon (2013, 2016). In Egypt, Anne Zaki is Assistant Lecturer of Practical Theology at ETSC while pursuing her PhD in Preaching at Fuller Theological Seminary. Viola Raheb and Jean Zaro are two Palestinian theologians who have produced contextual theological publications. More recently, the work of Rula Mansour (2020), an Arab Protestant woman in theological education especially concerned with peace-making and reconciliation, has contributed to further academic publications by Arab women. The increased contributions of Arab Protestant women will not only highlight the work of more Arab women in theological education but will facilitate placing their work in the 'high theology' category.

Arab Christian women theologians are not passive women recipients; they take what they are given and remould it. They inherit not only from the Western missions, but also from their Eastern culture and their contribution to global thought is unique. Today in the Middle East, the legacy of Western missions continues to be embodied in current educational institutes both theological and secular. Yet, in their theological journey Arab women ought to also consider women

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15 Some of Mary Mikhael's publications include: 'Women in Middle Eastern Societies and Churches' (The Ecumenical Review, 64:1, March 2012); 'The Syrian War and the Christians of the Middle East' (*International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 39:2, April 2015); 'St. Paul and the Place of Women in that Church' (*Theological Review*, 2002); *Joshua: A Journey of Faith* (Presbyterian Women, 2010); *She Shall be Called Woman*, co-authored with Anneke Kaai (Piquant, 2009); 'The Christian Woman', which is Chapter Five of *Arabic Christian Theology: A Contemporary Global Evangelical Perspective*, (ed.) A Z Stephanous, 2019); Four articles in the *Arabic Contemporary Interpretation of the Bible*, including 'The Role of Women in the Church' and 'The View of the Church Regarding Women Covering the Head'.



from Eastern Christianity who have equally enriched their heritage like the women of the Renaissance and like Hindiyya Anne Al-Ujaimy of the eighteenth century.

Hindiyya's life and ministry, documented by Avril Makhoul (2001, 2004), Akram Khater (2011) and Bernard Heyberger (2013), offer a paradigm from which Arab women today can take encouragement to engage in theological education, impacting their communities in practical ways through creative initiatives. Though not formally educated in theology due to the lack of theological colleges in that era in the Middle East, Hindiyya's writings contributed to the treasury of scholarly theological resources.

### *3.3 The Life of Hindiyya Anne Al-Ujaimy*

#### Hindiyya's Context

By way of introduction and to put into perspective the upbringing of Hindiyya, the following lines are helpful:

About the year 1735 there was, in the neighbourhood of the Jesuit missionaries, a Maronite girl named Hendia, whose extraordinary way of life began to attract the attention of the people. She fasted, wore a hair-cloth, possessed the gift of tears; and in a word, had all the outward appearance of the ancient hermits, and soon acquired a similar reputation. Everybody considered her a model of piety and many thought her a saint (Heyberger 2013: 1, cites Volney).

Hindiyya was born to a Maronite<sup>16</sup> family in Aleppo, a Syrian town with a majority of Muslims (Makhoul, pp. 9-10). The Maronite church began in 451 'as a monastic community organised around the model of ascetic spirituality' (Chartouni 2018, p. 116).

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16 For the origins of the Maronite church see H Suermann, 'Maronite Historiography and Ideology', *Journal of Eastern Christian Studies*, 54/3-4 (2002): 129-48; Shafiq Abouzayd, 'Maronite Church' in *Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

The Maronites trace their roots back to St. Maron (Morun in Syriac, Marun in Arabic), a hermit who lived in the late fourth to the early fifth centuries. Hindiyya's religious practices began at a young age, and they consisted of, among others, careful attention to the oral prayer forms and disciplines such as fasting (p. 237). As a result, Hindiyya began to see herself as espoused to Christ in a unique way (p. 238). In addition to the Maronite and other indigenous churches, a number of European religious orders such as the Jesuits, Carmelites and Franciscans were also actively present and involved in the spiritual life of Aleppo. Hindiyya was 'positioned at the axial point of a theological and cultural interchange between the Latin Catholic West and the Syriac Catholic East, especially as expressed by the Maronite church tradition' (Makhlouf, p. 3). As a woman, Hindiyya's determination to found a religious congregation is a unique endeavour in its own right, and is an indication of the seriousness and dedication of her Christian faith. Hindiyya became known as foundress and mother superior of a group of monastic women. By 1753 her first convent was established, with the majority of the Sisters being from Aleppo. Eventually the number of her monasteries increased to four.

Hindiyya lived her childhood in a predominantly Muslim context. She lived at the confluence of the encounter between Eastern and Western Christian mission within her own Maronite church and community. Her calling was opposed by her first spiritual leader. However, this did not inhibit her from making a contribution to literature and theology. In Jirmanus Saqr, the Maronite Bishop of Tripoli, Hindiyya identified a new confessor and spiritual director. Contrary to her earlier spiritual director, Saqr (died 1768) believed in the validity of her calling, and under his patronage she was assisted to found her own congregation in Bkirki around 1750 (Makhlouf, p. 239).<sup>17</sup> Thereafter Hindiyya and her Order were formally accepted by the Maronite authorities rather than being under the authority of the Jesuits (p. 239).

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<sup>17</sup> Bishop Jirmanus (died in 1799) succeeded Bishop Saqr as the spiritual director of Hindiyya. He was one of her most staunch supporters in her 'struggles against Vatican oversight and inquisition' (Khater, p. xix).

## Hindiyya's Contribution to Literature and Theology

In contrast to cultural expectations for women, Hindiyya was unusually well-read in Arabic religious works (Makhlouf, p. 9). She has a considerable collection of works ascribed to her in Arabic—though these have not obtained enough scholarly attention (Makhlouf, 2001, p. 235). Further, her individual reading and knowledge of previous distinctive church saints such as St. Clare and St. Teresa of Avila, (Makhlouf, 2001, p. 238) have yielded more theological scholarly thinking and writing than from any other Arab woman in her era and beyond. Hindiyya's work that includes the most conspicuous material relating directly to her spirituality is *Sirr al-Ittihad* or the *Mystery of the Union*. It contains the first known Arabic account of a mystical experience between Jesus and a Christian woman of the Middle East (Makhlouf, pp. 13-14).

Hindiyya's other works include the *aqwal al-rahiba hindiya ajaymi alhalabiya* (Makhlouf, p. 241). A further work is *al durar al-saniyyah* which describes Hindiyya in her later years. A significant work of over 400 pages which includes her 100 counsels covering main themes of religious life for her nuns, authored, and personally delivered between 1767 and 1775 (Makhlouf, 2001, p. 249). This writing was preserved in the library of the Bishop Jirmanus Saqr. It was recently located in the Maronite Patriarchal archives (2001, p. 249). Hindiyya had been confronted with specific interpretations by the church and Jesuit ideas of spiritual direction. In an Eastern Christian tradition, in a monastic context all tensions came to bear, and Hindiyya's own challenges encapsulate this. Hindiyya adhered to the direction of her spiritual advisors but still formulated her own views. She was attentive in securing the 'ecclesiastical permission' before fulfilling what she viewed as God's will (Makhlouf, p. 10).

Hindiyya's mystical life is unfamiliar in the Maronite context. However, when viewed in the lens of Western women who endeavoured to become sacralised, the experiences are rendered common (Heyberger, p. x). To reflect that a woman, namely Hindiyya, was a pioneer in her own right in the Maronite tradition before the emergence of these individuals, is sufficient reason for her personally to be esteemed and held in high honour. Hindiyya and other religious women eschewed social and cultural expectations in the pursuit of their life of faith as

visions of Christ, religious callings, and salvation of souls were considered as more significant than marriage and housework (Khater, p. 8). The overarching representation of Christianity as a 'Western' import is appropriately moderated by demonstrating how Hindiyya and other Arab women 'Arabized Christianity even as they Christianized Arabic'(Khater, p. 5).

### Protestant Thought in Dialogue with Eastern Christianity

Arguably, because Hindiyya confronted the Western mission, she sought to bring her Eastern world into the conversation, by creating her own platform for 18<sup>th</sup> century women in trying to bring different worlds together. But Hindiyya did more than that. She tried to find a way for women to be engaged in theological work, which makes her story to be part of the story I am writing. Profiling an Eastern woman who was culturally bound resonates with the lives of so many Arab Protestant women today. However, in such cases doing theology does not represent an insignificant endeavour but rather it speaks as a bold inspiration to women in theological education in the present and future generations, locally and globally. Hindiyya's Order was eventually disbanded in 1779-80. However, the form of monasticism she introduced was not the reason for this (Makhlouf, p. 16).

This example of analysing of historical theological women is what gives modern women the hope to be acknowledged as valid custodians in passing on the faith, and allows them to make a contribution beyond themselves, just as Hindiyya did. Hindiyya's distinct voice enables her and others to contribute to creating a community of Christian character. Sadly, I finished my undergraduate and graduate degrees in theology without being guided to pay attention to women like Hindiyya. It was only during the course of my PhD research that I encountered Hindiyya and others. Courses provided by Protestant Colleges on Eastern Christianity will help widen the limits of the Ecclesial consciousness in the region. Consequently, I am intentional about introducing Hindiyya to my students like Suhad and Elham. Hindiyya's life and ministry can and should continue to influence contemporary Arab Protestant women like ourselves. Rather than

drawing solely on the work of Western women, in Hindiyya we have an example of an Arab woman from whom we can learn and take encouragement. The bringing together of Eastern Christianity into conversation with the Protestant tradition for Arab Christian women in theology is a necessary task. It offers an opportunity for Protestant women to be involved in theological education beyond the mission context.

## CONCLUSION

Back to the twenty first century where the surreal scene of the Church of Nativity which we were overlooking—albeit without pilgrims—could not be a stronger reminder that this particular shared space (Catholic, Orthodox, Armenian) is our rich heritage as Christians of the Holy Land, the very place where the Lord of Light was born and where He desires the Living Stones of the Holy Land (including women) to carry this heritage forward through their contribution to theological education. As Suhad, Elham and I said our goodbyes, they both reminded me not to hesitate to let them know if I need any help with my ongoing research. Their words indicated their eagerness and passion to be contributors; to which I responded, that they are the inspiration for the work I am doing and that I could not be more proud of them for their Christian faith, dedication to their churches, and aspirations for the future. As Arab women in theological education seek to be custodians of theological education, their contributions to their societies and churches will certainly be irreplaceable.

In addition to Suhad and Elham, throughout my research I have met many women in other parts of the Middle East, Egypt and Lebanon who aspire to contribute to theological education in a multitude of ways. As additional resources are made available to Arab women, they will expand their horizons concerning theological education in the Middle East and beyond. I hope that this work will be a catalyst to make space for Arab women to think about theology, write about theology and posit their contribution to not only theological education in the Middle East but also globally. As Arab Protestant women are increasingly aware of their Eastern Christian heritage, the possibilities expand for them to delve into the gems of the past and resuscitate

the works of women such as Hindiyya Al-Ujaimy of the eighteenth century and many others. Through being indigenous members of the first Christian communities, to being martyrs, deaconesses and saints, women found ways to articulate their faith. Christian women participated in the spread of the Gospel (Lindner 2020, p. 399) and will continue to do so until the work is complete.

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# EVANGELICAL CHRISTIAN ZIONISM: AN ASSESSMENT

*Stephen Sizer*

## INTRODUCTION

Donald Trump probably accomplished more for Israel in his short time in office than any other US President since Harry Truman unilaterally recognised the State of Israel in May 1948. President Truman did so, going against the advice of his State Department, US Mission to the United Nations and ambassadors in the Middle East. President Trump continued the same unilateral, idiosyncratic tradition but with gusto.

In December 2017, for example, reversing decades of US foreign policy, he announced the United States recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and ordered the relocation of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. On 14 May 2018—the 70th anniversary of Israel’s founding—the US officially moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Also, in May 2018, to please Israel, President Trump announced that he was unilaterally withdrawing the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or Iran nuclear deal.

In August 2018, the Trump administration announced it was going to cut all funding to UNRWA, the UN agency that supports Palestinian refugees, alleging its business model and fiscal practices were of an ‘irredeemably flawed operation’. Then in February 2019, the US Senate passed a bill allowing state governments to refuse to do business with companies that boycott Israel. A month later, in March 2019, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side, President Trump declared that the US unilaterally recognised Israeli sovereignty over the Syrian Golan Heights.

In July 2019, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a resolution rejecting the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign against Israel. And in November 2019, Secretary of State,

Mike Pompeo declared that the US government no longer considered Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories illegal under international law, preparing the ground for their expansion and annexation by Israel.

How did Donald Trump come to lead the most pro-Israel administration in the history of the United States? The answer is very simple. In the USA today, white evangelicals are twice as likely as Jewish Americans to believe God gave the land of Israel for the Jewish people (72 percent of US evangelicals compared with 40 percent of US Jews). And while American Jews typically vote Democrat, 81 percent of white evangelicals voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 election.<sup>1</sup>

In March 2018, Benjamin Netanyahu went as far as to compare Donald Trump with the Persian King Cyrus.

During his visit to Washington, DC, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu heavily implied Trump was Cyrus's spiritual heir. Thanking Trump for moving the American embassy to Jerusalem, Netanyahu said, 'We remember the proclamation of the great King Cyrus the Great—Persian King. Twenty-five hundred years ago, he proclaimed that the Jewish exiles in Babylon can come back and rebuild our temple in Jerusalem ... And we remember how a few weeks ago, President Donald J Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Mr. President, this will be remembered by our people throughout the ages.'<sup>2</sup>

Morgan Strong, in an article 'How Christian Zionists got their man into the White House' observed,

The Christian Zionists managed, through the positioning of Mike Pence and fellow believers in the White House, an incredible measure of influence over the most powerful nation on earth ... Pence is not alone in his efforts to

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1 <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/> (Unless otherwise indicated all internet sources following were accessed in July and August 2021).

2 <<https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/3/5/16796892/trump-cyrus-christian-right-bible-cbn-evangelical-propaganda>>.

convince Trump to fulfil what the Christian Zionists regard as a biblical prophecy. Mike Huckabee, the former governor of Arkansas, his daughter Sara Huckabee Sanders, now the White House press secretary, and Sara Palin wield great influence in the Trump administration and are ardent Christian Zionists.<sup>3</sup>

Christian Zionism, in its various forms, evangelistic, political and apocalyptic, is without doubt a theology held by the majority of white evangelicals in the USA.<sup>4</sup>

### THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN ZIONISM

Were it not for the intervention of a small group of eccentric aristocratic British Christian leaders in the early nineteenth century, Zionism, much like contemporary Kurdish or Armenian aspirations for autonomy, would in all probability have simply remained a frustrated political aspiration.

Convinced the Jews would become a Christian nation before the return of Christ, influential evangelical leaders including Lewis Way, Edward Irving, Henry Drummond, Lord Shaftesbury and William Hechler, lobbied politicians in Britain as well as in Europe to facilitate the Jewish colonisation of Palestine.

The movement gained traction from the middle of the nineteenth century, when Palestine increasingly became strategic to competing British, French and German colonial designs in the Middle East. Although largely ignored by Zionist historians, Christian proto-Zionism or Restorationism preceded Jewish Zionism by more than 50 years. Indeed, it was probably Shaftesbury who inspired Israel Zwangel to coin the phrase, 'A land of no people for a people with no land.'

A generation earlier, imagining Palestine to be empty, Shaftesbury wrote to Foreign Minister George Hamilton Gordon, Lord Palmerston,

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3 Morgan Strong, 'How Christian Zionists got their man into the White House' 29 January 2019, <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/how-christian-zionists-got-their-man-white-house>>.

4 Mimi Kirk, 'Countering Christian Zionism in the Age of Trump' 8 August 2019, <<https://merip.org/2019/08/countering-christian-zionism-in-the-age-of-trump/>>.

in 1853 that Greater Syria was ‘a country without a nation’ in need of ‘a nation without a country ... Is there such a thing? To be sure there is: the ancient and rightful lords of the soil, the Jews!’<sup>5</sup> In May 1854, Shaftesbury wrote in his diary,

Syria is wasted without an inhabitant: these vast and fertile regions will soon be without a ruler, without a known and acknowledged power to claim dominion. The territory must be assigned to someone or other ... There is a country without a nation; and God now in his wisdom and mercy, directs us to a nation without a country.<sup>6</sup>

Theodore Herzl acknowledged his own indebtedness to the Revd William Hechler, the Anglican chaplain in Vienna. In his diary for 10 March 1896 Herzl records a meeting with Hechler.

The Reverend William Hechler, Chaplain of the English Embassy here, came to see me. A sympathetic, gentle fellow, with the long grey beard of a prophet. He is enthusiastic about my solution of the Jewish Question. He also considers my movement a ‘prophetic turning—point’—which he had foretold two years before ...<sup>7</sup>

In March 1897, the year Hechler had predicted the Jews would begin returning to Palestine, Herzl described another meeting, this time at Hechler’s apartment. He was apparently amazed to find a large military staff map of Palestine made up of four sheets covering the entire floor of Hechler’s study.

He showed me where, according to his calculations, our new Temple must be located: in Bethel! Because that is the centre of the country. He also showed me models of the ancient Temple. ‘We have prepared the ground for

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5 Cited in Adam M Garfinkle, ‘On the Origin, Meaning, Use, and Abuse of a Phrase’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, October 1991, p. 543.

6 Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury*, K.G., Cassel & Company, London, 1887. p. 478.

7 *The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl*, edited by Raphael Patai, translated by Harry Zohn, Herzl Press, New York, 1960, p. 312.

you!’ Hechler said triumphantly ... I take him for a naive visionary ... However, there is something charming about his enthusiasm ... He gives me excellent advice, full of unmistakable genuine good will. He is at once clever and mystical, cunning and naive.<sup>8</sup>

Christian Zionism may be defined as a political movement, largely confined to Protestant Christianity, that views the modern state of Israel as the fulfilment of Biblical prophecy, thus deserving our unconditional economic, moral, political, and theological support. Grace Halsell summarises the message of the Christian Zionism: ‘every act taken by Israel is orchestrated by God, and should be condoned, supported, and even praised by the rest of us.’<sup>9</sup>

#### **THE GROWTH AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVANGELICAL ZIONIST MOVEMENT**

Christian Zionism is now pervasive within American evangelical, charismatic and independent denominations including the Assemblies of God, Pentecostals and Southern Baptists, as well as many of the independent mega-churches and among television evangelists. Christian Zionism is much less prevalent within the historic denominations (Roman Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian), which show a greater respect for the work of the United Nations, support human rights, the rule of international law, empathize with the Palestinians and co-operate with the indigenous Middle East churches.

A 2005 Pew Forum survey of American Evangelicals and Israel (conducted in 2003) found that compared to other Americans, white evangelical Protestants were:

- significantly more sympathetic to Israel than to the Palestinians—55 percent sympathized more with Israel, only 6 percent with the Palestinians (versus 41 percent and 13 percent, respectively, of all those surveyed).

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8 Cited in Payl Merklely, *The Politics of Christian Zionism 1891-1948*, London, Frank Cass, 1998, pp. 16-17.

9 Grace Halsell, ‘Israeli Extremists and Christian Fundamentalists: The Alliance’, *Washington Report*, December, 1988, p. 31.

- significantly more likely to say that religious beliefs were the single biggest influence in leading them to sympathize more with Israel—46 percent versus 26 percent of all those surveyed.
- significantly more likely to believe that God gave the land of Israel to the Jews—72 percent versus 44 percent of all those surveyed.
- significantly more likely to believe that Israel fulfills the biblical prophecy about Jesus' second coming—63 percent versus 36 percent of all those surveyed.<sup>10</sup>

An earlier 2004 survey found that that 'traditionalist' evangelicals—who are characterized by a high level of orthodox belief and a high level of church attendance, and who are the largest subgroup of evangelicals—are even more likely to agree that US policy should tilt towards Israel: 64 percent agreed, while 18 percent disagreed, with 18 percent expressing no opinion.

Nearly a third of Americans, around 100 million people, lean towards evangelical Christianity and of these perhaps a third embrace the Christian Zionist perspective and deeply passionate in its support for Israel.<sup>11</sup> As Jerry Falwell once boasted, 'The Bible Belt is Israel's safety net in the United States.'<sup>12</sup>

In 2017, Life Way Research conducted a survey of Evangelical Attitudes to Israel and the Peace Process.<sup>13</sup>

Research found that 80 percent believe that 'God's promise [of land] to Abraham and his descendants was for all time.' By a 46 percent to 19 percent margin, the surveyed evangelicals disagreed with the notion that Palestinians have any such 'historic right'. Notably, Life

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10 <<https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2005/04/EvangelicalsIsrael.pdf>>.

11 Paul Rogers, 'Trump, Pence, Jerusalem: The Christian Zionism connection. The political use of a religious vision spells danger for Israel, America, and the world', 14 December 2017. <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/trump-pence-jerusalem-christian-zionism-connection/>>.

12 Ibid.

13 <<http://lifewayresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Evangelical-Attitudes-Toward-Israel-Research-Study-Report.pdf>>.

Way found that 80 percent of the surveyed evangelicals believe that the modern rebirth of Israel and the return of millions of Jews to that land are a fulfillment of Bible prophecy and show ‘we are getting closer to the return of Jesus Christ.’<sup>14</sup>

The Life Way findings offer some hope, however, for Palestinians in observing a significant generational shift away from unconditional support for Israel among younger evangelicals.

Only nine percent of older respondents considered the ‘rebirth’ of Israel in 1948 as an injustice to Palestinians, while 62 percent disagreed and 28 percent said they weren’t sure. Among younger evangelicals, nineteen percent said that Israel’s creation was an injustice to Palestinians, 34 percent disagreed, and almost half weren’t sure. Such a trend may hold promise for Palestinians and allies working to shift the Christian Zionist narrative and secure Palestinian human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and beyond.<sup>15</sup>

Contemporary Israeli politicians, ever conscious of the need to nurture and maintain Christian support, willingly acknowledge their continued indebtedness. In 2012, at an event dedicating the restoration of the windmill, originally built in 1858 by Moses Montefiore in Jerusalem, Benjamin Netanyahu said,

I don’t believe that the Jewish State and Modern Zionism would have been possible without Christian Zionism. I think that the many Christian supporters of the rebirth of the Jewish State and the ingathering of the Jewish people in the 19th century made possible the rise of

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14 Tom Gjelten ‘As U.S. Jews Cool To Israel, Evangelicals Flock There As Tourists’, 25 August 2019, <<https://www.npr.org/2019/08/25/753720351/as-u-s-jews-cool-to-israel-evangelicals-flock-there-as-tourists?t=1574529777483>>.

15 Mimi Kirk, ‘Countering Christian Zionism in the Age of Trump’, 8 August 2019, <<https://merip.org/2019/08/countering-christian-zionism-in-the-age-of-trump/>>.



Jewish Zionism—modern Jewish Zionism ... We value our friends, and we never forget them, and we think that you have helped establish here a powerful memorial to our friendship and common ideals.<sup>16</sup>

Pastor John Hagee is one of the leaders of the Christian Zionist movement. He is the Founder and Senior Pastor of Cornerstone Church, a 19,000-member evangelical church in San Antonio, Texas. His weekly programmes are broadcast on 160 TV stations, 50 radio stations and eight networks into an estimated 100 million homes in 200 countries. In 2006 he founded Christians United for Israel (CUFI) admitting,

For 25 almost 26 years now, I have been pounding the evangelical community over television. The Bible is a very pro-Israel book. If a Christian admits 'I believe the Bible,' I can make him a pro-Israel supporter or they will have to denounce their faith. So, I have the Christians over a barrel, you might say.

In March 2007, Hagee spoke at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Policy Conference. He began by saying:

The sleeping giant of Christian Zionism has awakened. There are 50 million Christians standing up and applauding the State of Israel ...

As *The Jerusalem Post* pointed out, his speech did not lack clarity. He went on to warn:

It is 1938. Iran is Germany, and Ahmadinejad is the new Hitler. We must stop Iran's nuclear threat and stand boldly with Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East ... Think of our potential future together: 50 million evangelicals joining in common cause with 5 million Jewish people in America on behalf of Israel is a match made in heaven.<sup>17</sup>

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16 Benjamin Netanyahu, 28 August 2012. <<https://www.facebook.com/IsraeliPM/photos/a.155541071127313/512520212096062/>>.

17 Shelly Neese, 'Let our unconditional alliance be mutual', 17 July 2007. <<https://>

By 2012, CUFI had gained one million members; two million by 2015; five million by 2018 and claims to have seven million today, making it the largest pro-Zionist organisation in the United States, equivalent in size to the entire Jewish population in America.

Other leading Christian Zionist organisations include the International Christian Embassy (ICEJ); Bridges for Peace; Christian Friends of Israel (CFI); Jerusalem Prayer Team and Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC). There are at least 200 Christian Zionist organisations known to have been founded since 1980.

This growth in Christian Zionism in recent years forms just one part of the wider increase in the conservative evangelical movement, the fastest-growing sector within Christian churches. Donald Wagner estimates that it now numbers 100-130 million which is at least a third of the entire population of the United States (327 million).<sup>18</sup>

It is difficult to estimate the number of Christian Zionists in Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia combined but conservatively, given estimates of 100 million in the USA alone, the number globally must surely be more than double that.

It is sobering to realise that Zionism today is primarily a Christian political conviction, rather than a Jewish one, but infused with religious and apocalyptic fervour. It is a simple fact that Christian Zionists outnumber Jewish Zionists by at least ten to one.

## **THE EVANGELICAL ZIONIST POLITICAL AGENDA**

Evangelical Zionists have been active in implementing six political convictions that arise from their theology:

### **LOBBYING FOR AND PROMOTING ISRAEL**

The belief that the Jews remain God's chosen people leads Christian Zionists to seek to bless Israel in material ways. However, this also

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[www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Let-our-unconditional-alliance-be-mutual](http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Let-our-unconditional-alliance-be-mutual)>.

18 Paul Rogers, 'Christian Zionists and neocons: a heavenly marriage', 3 February 2005. <[https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article\\_2329jsp/](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/article_2329jsp/)>.

invariably results in the uncritical endorsement of, and justification for, Israel's racist and apartheid policies, in the media, among politicians and through solidarity tours to Israel.

In July 2017, Vice President Pence delivered the keynote address at the annual summit of Christians United for Israel (CUFI) in Washington, Pence was the first sitting vice president or president to speak to the Christian Zionist organization in its 13-year history. His speech marked a fundamental change in the language which the White House has historically employed to articulate the United States' relationship with Israel.

Dan Hummel of *The Washington Post* observes the significance of this speech,

Although Christian Zionism has a long history in American politics, it has never captured the bully pulpit of the White House. Past administrations often used general biblical language in reference to Israel, but never has the evangelical theology of Christian Zionism been so close to the policymaking apparatus of the executive branch. By identifying with Christian Zionism while in office, Pence risks the Trump administration's ongoing search for an 'ultimate deal' to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and erodes the U.S. claim that it can be an 'honest broker' in the Middle East.<sup>19</sup>

While other congressmen and senators have spoken at Christian Zionist events and talked about the Christian roots of their support for Israel,

never has the ideology been articulated by the White House. This is a crucial distinction, with the bulk of foreign policymaking power residing in the executive branch. Rarely has the executive branch spoken in overt religious terms about a region in which it wishes to be

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19 Dan Hummel, 'What you need to know about Mike Pence's speech to Christians United for Israel, 17 July 2017. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/07/17/what-you-need-to-know-about-mike-pences-speech-to-christians-united-for-israel/>>.

seen as impartial. But Pence will, if his long public record of Christian Zionism holds true.<sup>20</sup>

In July 2017, Vice-President Pence was once again a guest speaker at the CUFI annual summit in Washington along with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. This time however, Pence encountered some opposition from members of Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA).

They were confronted by over 100 Christian, Jewish and Muslim faith leaders and community members protesting CUFI's support for Israeli occupation. Several protesters disrupted Hagee and Pence's speeches shouting and holding banners. Tarek Abuata, director of Friends of Sabeel North American (FOSNA), stood shouting, 'Zionism is racism.' Security handcuffed Abuata and carried him out of the convention center. He continued to shout, 'People of God, wake up! Protect the Palestinian people.'

Christian and Jewish faith leaders then interrupted the US vice president, chanting, 'Israel kills children. Jews and Christians say no to Zionism.' Security dragged them outside. Rochelle Watson, FOSNA national organizer who disrupted Pence, stated, 'We have reached a point where remaining faithful requires us to take bold action by speaking truth to power.'

This counter CUFI action was inspired by a coalition including Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA), Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), and US Campaign for Palestinian Rights (USCPR). Abuata said of the action: 'We are here to bear sacred witness and hold CUFI accountable to a theology of love.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> <<https://religionnews.com/2019/07/10/faith-leaders-disrupt-u-s-vice-president-mike-pence-during-cufi-summit/>>.

Hummel concludes,

Moreover, defining Israel and the Middle East in explicitly religious terms presents a holy war framework of clashing religions in a region that is already racked by sectarian violence and extremism. The identification of the United States as a sectarian actor (as opposed to a neutral arbiter, however transparent at times) could strain relations with Muslim-majority nations or drain credibility with key allies in the region and beyond—especially given the already flagging confidence in US leadership since January. Ultimately, Pence’s appearance before CUFI signals a new era of Christian Zionist influence in the White House with the potential to leave a lasting mark on U.S. policy toward Israel.<sup>22</sup>

At the CUFI event in July, Vice President Pence insisted,

My passion for Israel springs from my Christian faith ... It’s really the greatest privilege of my life to serve as vice president to a president who cares so deeply for our most cherished ally.<sup>23</sup>

Support for Israel among evangelicals is growing as a result of increased numbers participating in biblio-political tours of the Holy Land. Drawing on research by Daniel Hummel, Tom Gjelten notes,

Not only do [US evangelicals] they outpace U.S. Jews in their support for policies that favor the Israeli government, but US evangelicals have also become the fastest-growing sector of the Israeli tourism market ... Evangelical leaders of the Christian Zionism movement, from Jerry Falwell Sr. to John Hagee, have attributed their fervent support for the state of Israel to their own Holy Land travel, according to Daniel Hummel, author of

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> <<https://www.cufi.org/mike-pence-to-cufi-i-support-israel-because-i-am-a-christian/>>.

*Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and U.S.-Israeli Relations.* ‘They say visiting Israel was a key part of their political awakening,’ Hummel says, ‘and this goes down to the rank-and-file people in their organizations.’ ‘Most of these tours are very highly controlled and curated to convey a particular sense of Israel,’ Hummel says, ‘and that’s to emphasize the Jewishness of the land, that this is the homeland of the Jewish people, that the history that matters is the history that’s in the Bible ... There is definitely an understanding on the Israeli government side that tourism is a key way to connect with American evangelicals’<sup>24</sup>

Jonathan Cook, a Nazareth-based British journalist, observes,

A recent editorial in *Haaretz* noted that Netanyahu and his officials were now ‘endeavoring to make evangelicals—who support Israel’s hawkish rejectionism regarding the Palestinians—the sole foundation of American support for Israel.’

The truth is that these Christian Zionists view the region through a single, exclusive prism: whatever aids the imminent arrival of the Messiah is welcomed. The only issue is how soon God’s ‘chosen people’ will congregate in the Promised Land. If the Palestinians stand in Israel’s way, these tens of millions of foreign Christians will be quite happy to see the native population driven out once again—as they were in 1948 and 1967.<sup>25</sup>

#### **FACILITATING THE EMIGRATION OF JEWS TO ISRAEL**

Believing contemporary Jewish people remain God’s chosen people, their return or restoration to Israel is actively encouraged, funded and

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24 Tom Gjelten, ‘As U.S. Jews Cool To Israel, Evangelicals Flock There As Tourists’, 25 August 2019, <<https://www.npr.org/2019/08/25/753720351/as-u-s-jews-cool-to-israel-evangelicals-flock-there-as-tourists?t=1574529777483>>.

25 Ibid.

facilitated by Christian agencies working in partnership with the Jewish Agency. The International Christian Embassy Jerusalem, for example, has been at the forefront of facilitating Jews from the former Soviet Union, Ukraine, Ethiopia and other countries to make Aliyah.

The Jewish Agency has asked the Christian Embassy to assist with funding for the huge influx of French Jews expected to come home to Israel this year. Nearly half of the 550,000 Jews in France escaped there from North Africa several generations ago and many still live in poorer neighbourhoods alongside Muslim immigrants. They are the most vulnerable Jews at present, and the least able to afford the expenses of moving to another country. The ICEJ will be funding aliyah seminars, ground transport, flight tickets, absorption costs and other expenses involved in the immigration process.<sup>26</sup>

#### **ADVOCATING FOR GREATER ISRAEL AND ANNEXATION OF THE SETTLEMENTS**

Christian Zionists believe that Eretz Israel, from the Nile to the Euphrates, belongs exclusively to the Jewish people, therefore all the land, at least from the Mediterranean to the Jordan must be annexed, Palestinians must be persuaded or driven from their homes and the illegal Jewish settlements expanded and consolidated.

Mustafa Abu Sneineh, writing in *Middle East Eye* notes,

The Trump administration's bombshell announcement that it no longer considers Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank illegal under international law has sent shockwaves through the region ... Some 20,000 illegal Israeli settlers also live on the plateau. Trump's decree was a gift to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of the April elections, and was signed in his presence alongside Friedman, Greenblatt and Kushner.

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26 <<https://int.icej.org/french-aliyah>>.

Returning the favour, Netanyahu announced that Israel was renaming an illegal settlement in the Golan as Trump Hill. 'All Israelis were deeply moved when President Trump made his historic decision,' Netanyahu said in a video statement.<sup>27</sup>

Jack Jenkins reports,

Mike Evans, founder of The Jerusalem Prayer Team and a member of Trump's informal group of evangelical Christian advisers, praised the move. In an interview with Religion News Service, Evans said Pompeo called him shortly after the press conference while en route to meet President Trump. 'I told (Pompeo) it was a tremendous answer to prayer from evangelicals,' he said, asking the secretary of state to express gratitude to the president ... He told RNS it reminded him of a passage from the Biblical book of Genesis in which God refers to Israel by saying, 'I will bless those who bless you, but I will curse those who curse you.' 'In our opinion, it's recognizing the Bible as legal.'<sup>28</sup>

Evangelical Zionists have also been at the forefront of funding and lobbying for the illegal Jewish colonies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Christian Friends of Israeli Communities (CFOIC) was founded in 1995 in response to the Oslo Peace Accords. On their website they claim,

Christians around the world were deeply troubled by Israel's major territorial concessions and felt compelled to stand with the people of Judea and Samaria. CFOIC Heartland provides a much-needed vehicle for Christians

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27 Mustafa Abu Sneh, 'Trump's gifts to Israel: Jerusalem, the Golan and now the settlements', 19 November 2019, <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/trumps-gifts-israels-netanyahu-jerusalem-west-bank-settlements-and-golan-heights>>.

28 Jack Jenkins, 'Trump advisor calls Pompeo's West Bank decision an answered prayer' Religion News Service, 19 November 2019, <<https://www.ncronline.org/news/world/trump-advisor-calls-pompeos-west-bank-decision-answered-prayer>>.



to become better informed about the Jewish communities in the heartland of Biblical Israel, to visit these areas and to provide practical support for vital community needs. CFOIC Heartland enables Christians to connect with the Jewish communities (settlements) in the heart of Biblical Israel. Judea and Samaria (the ‘West Bank’) are not occupied territory. These communities are the birthplace of the Jewish people ... Through CFOIC Heartland, thousands of Christians from around the world have become valuable friends and supporters of the pioneers of Biblical Israel. Churches, ministries and individuals have visited the communities and biblical sites of Judea and Samaria and have connected directly with the people living there. They have provided financial support for community projects and have made a real difference for those living in the communities of Judea and Samaria.<sup>29</sup>

Jonathan Cook reports how evangelicals are developing ever-closer ties with Israeli Jewish religious extremists, especially in the settlements.

Recent initiatives have included online and face-to-face Bible studies programmes run by Orthodox Jews, often settlers, targeted specifically at evangelical Christians. The tutorials are designed to bolster the settlers’ narrative, as well as demonising Muslims and, by extension, Palestinians.

The most popular course offered by Root Source, one such venture, is titled ‘Islam—Insights and Deceptions’. It uses the Old and New Testaments to make the case that Islam ‘is extremely dangerous’. A few months ago, Haaretz, Israel’s leading liberal newspaper, published an investigation into the growing flow of evangelical volunteers and money into the West Bank’s illegal settlements—the chief obstacle to achieving a two-state solution.

One US organisation alone, Hayovel, has brought more than 1,700 Christian volunteers over the past 10 years to

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29 <<https://www.cfoic.com/background-information/>>.

help in a settlement close to Nablus, in the heart of the West Bank. An increasing number of similar initiatives have been aided by new rules introduced last year by the Israeli government to pay Christian Zionist groups such as Hayovel to advocate abroad for the settlements.

It is much harder to know exactly how much evangelical money is pouring into the settlements, because of a lack of transparency regarding US donations made by churches and charities. But the Haaretz investigation estimates that over the past decade, as much as \$65m has flowed in. Ariel, a settler town sitting in the very centre of the West Bank, received \$8 million for a sports centre from John Hagee Ministries a decade ago.<sup>30</sup>

### RECOGNIZING JERUSALEM AS THE EXCLUSIVE CAPITAL OF ISRAEL

Jerusalem is regarded by Christian Zionists as the eternal and exclusive capital of the Jews, and must not be shared with the Palestinians. Christian Zionists have for decades, lobbied the US Administration to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem to ensure the city is recognised as the exclusive capital of Israel.

Julian Borger observes,

Trump's order to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv—over the objections of his foreign policy and national security team—is a striking example of evangelical clout ... the orchestration of the embassy opening ceremony last May, reflected the audience Trump was trying hardest to appease. The two pastors given the prime speaking slots were both ardent Christian Zionists: Robert Jeffress, a Dallas pastor on record as saying Jews, like Muslims and Mormons, are bound for hell; and John Hagee, a televangelist and founder of Christians United for Israel (Cufi), who once said that Hitler and the Holocaust were

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<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Cook, 'How Evangelical Christians risk setting the Middle East on fire', 8 July 2019, <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/how-evangelical-christians-risk-setting-middle-east-fire>>.

part of God's plan to get Jews back to Israel, to pave the way for the Rapture. For many evangelicals, the move cemented Trump's status as the new Cyrus, who oversaw the Jews return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple.<sup>31</sup>

Robert Jeffress explains the religious justification for moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem has been the object of affection of both Jews and Christians down through history and the touchstone of prophecy. But most importantly, God gave Jerusalem—and the rest of the Holy Land—to the Jewish people.<sup>32</sup>

Mimi Kirk notes,

... the Trump administration very purposefully chose Jeffress and Hagee for the occasion. The pastors—and their white evangelical followers, who comprise a significant portion of Trump's base with 81 percent having voted for him in 2016—had lobbied the president hard to move the embassy. In an interview with the far-right site Breitbart, Hagee related that he had told Trump: 'The moment that you [move the embassy], I believe that you will step into political immortality.'<sup>33</sup>

An editorial in *Haaretz* entitled 'Israel's Unholy and Transient Alliance with US Evangelicals', published in May 2018, warned that this alliance was short-sighted,

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31 Julian Borger, 'Brought to Jesus': the evangelical grip on the Trump administration', 11 January 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-supporthttp>>.

32 Barry Kimbrough, Is Trump's Jerusalem Declaration a Prophecy Fulfilled? 14 December 2017, <<http://religiousliberty.tv/trumps-jerusalem-declaration-prophecy-fulfilled.html>>.

33 Mimi Kirk, 'Countering Christian Zionism in the Age of Trump', 8 August 2019, <<https://merip.org/2019/08/countering-christian-zionism-in-the-age-of-trump/>>.

US President Donald Trump's decision to relocate the American Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem was intended first and foremost to reward evangelical Christians for their enthusiastic support for him during and after his election campaign. The participation in Monday's dedication ceremony of two extremist, controversial evangelical leaders, both of whom have made disparaging comments about Jews in the past, highlights this unholy alliance ...

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman recently joined his Israeli counterpart, Ron Dermer, in endeavoring to make evangelicals—who support Israel's hawkish rejectionism regarding the Palestinians—the sole foundation of American support for Israel. This partnership further erodes Israel's standing in its traditional power centers—above all US Jews, who view evangelicals as a concrete threat to their values.

This dangerous wager poses a double hazard: On one hand, Israel is distancing itself from supporters it may need as soon as November, in the event the Democrats win control of the US Senate or the House of Representatives. On the other hand, nothing lasts forever: Polls show that younger evangelicals oppose blind support for Israel. A responsible Israeli government would change its policy, extend a hand to forces it has neglected and weaning itself of exclusive dependence on messianic Christians.<sup>34</sup>

Despite Trump's demise, Christian Zionists are now focussing on pressuring other nations to move their embassies to Jerusalem.

### **SUPPORTING THE REBUILDING OF THE JEWISH TEMPLE**

Christian Zionists offer varying degrees of support for organisations such as the Temple Mount Faithful who are committed to

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<sup>34</sup> *Haaretz* editorial, 'Israel's Unholy and Transient Alliance With US Evangelicals', 18 May 2018, <<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/israel-s-unholy-and-transient-alliance-with-u-s-evangelicals-1.6097404>>.

destroying the Dome of the Rock and rebuilding the Jewish Temple on the Haram al-Sharif ('Noble Sanctuary'). In February 2014, *The Independent* newspaper published a headline, 'Mounting tension: Israel's Knesset debates proposal to enforce its sovereignty at Al-Aqsa Mosque—a move seen as 'an extreme provocation to Muslims worldwide'.

The Arab-Israeli conflict took on an increasingly religious hue when the Jordanian parliament voted unanimously to expel Israel's ambassador in Amman after Israeli legislators held an unprecedented debate on Tuesday evening over a proposal to enforce Israeli sovereignty at one of Jerusalem's holiest sites, currently administered by Jordan, and to allow Jewish prayer there.<sup>35</sup>

Gershon Salomon is the controversial figurehead of the movement and founder of The Temple Faithful. Speaking as a guest of the ICEJ, at the Christian Zionist Congress in 1998, Salomon insisted:

The mission of the present generation is to liberate the Temple Mount and to remove—I repeat, to remove—the defiling abomination there ... the Jewish people will not be stopped at the gates leading to the Temple Mount ... We will fly our Israeli flag over the Temple Mount, which will be minus its Dome of the Rock and its mosques and will have only our Israeli flag and our Temple. This is what our generation must accomplish.

In a subsequent interview with Sam Kiley in *The Times* newspaper, Salomon insisted that the Islamic shrine must be destroyed:

The Israeli Government must do it. We must have a war. There will be many nations against us but God will be our general. I am sure this is a test, that God is expecting us to move the Dome with no fear from other nations.

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<sup>35</sup> Ben Lynfield, *Independent Newspaper*, 27 February 2014, and <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/violence-will-continue-for-as-long-as-access-to-al-aqsa-mosque-is-curtailed-9844899.html>>.

The Messiah will not come by himself; we should bring Him by fighting.<sup>36</sup>

David Reagan is the founder and director of the Texas-based Lamb and Lion Ministries, whose weekly TV show can be accessed by over 110 million Americans. Barry Kimbrough cites Reagan as saying:

Evangelical Christians in America generally agree that most likely there will be a war against Israel which the scriptures call the 'war of annihilation' in which all the Muslim nations which have a common border with Israel, who are named in Psalm 83, will attack Israel and Israel will defeat them. Then the Arab world will go into a panic and cry out for Russia to come to their aid. And the Russians will come down with a specified group of Muslim nations, countries like Persia (Iran) and Turkey and they will be destroyed on the mountains of Israel.<sup>37</sup>

Many Christians see the move of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem in recognition of exclusive Israeli sovereignty as a step toward a new temple being built there.

Kade Hawkins is the CEO and founder of *Prophecy News Watch* which specializes in biblical prophecy associated with current global events and changing political platforms. In an article, 'Trump and The Third Temple', Hawkins speculated,

If President Trump really has a similar calling to King Cyrus, could it be that God would use this real estate developer turned President to facilitate the greatest property development of modern time—the rebuilding of the Temple?' The President is compared to ancient King Cyrus because the Persian ruler helped re-establish

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<sup>36</sup> Sam Kiley, 'The righteous will survive and the rest will perish', *The Times*, 13 December 1999, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Barry Kimbrough, Is Trump's Jerusalem Declaration a Prophecy Fulfilled? 14 December 2017, <<http://religiouliberty.tv/trumps-jerusalem-declaration-prophecy-fulfilled.html>>.

the Jews in their homeland after they were captive 70 years in Babylon.<sup>38</sup>

Thankfully, this particular ‘prophecy’ did not come true. However, John Hagee and Christians United for Israel appeared so upset by the continued presence of the Islamic Dome of the Rock dominating the view of Jerusalem, they simply airbrushed it out of their website logo. The iconic Western Wall is visible as is the garden on top but there is no Dome of the Rock, no Al-Aqsa Mosque. They have simply vanished.<sup>39</sup>

### *Anxious for Armageddon*

Christian Zionists invariably have a pessimistic view of the future. Many are convinced that there will be an apocalyptic war of Armageddon in the imminent future. They are deeply sceptical of a lasting peace between Jews and Arabs, oppose the peace process and are highly critical of the UN.

The tightening of the evangelical grip on the administration has also been reflected in a growing hostility to the UN, often portrayed as a sinister and godless organisation. Since the US ambassador, Nikki Haley, announced her departure in October and Pompeo took more direct control, the US mission has become increasingly combative ... the United States locked into a holy war against the forces of evil who they see as embodied by Iran.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, to advocate an Israeli compromise implicit in the ‘Two State Solution’ is seen as a rejection of God’s promises to Israel and therefore to support her enemies. Within the Christian Zionist

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38 <[https://www.prophecynewswatch.com/article.cfm?recent\\_news\\_id=1015#VQz5cQrsmLae7rAs.99](https://www.prophecynewswatch.com/article.cfm?recent_news_id=1015#VQz5cQrsmLae7rAs.99)>. See also <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-trump-is-playing-with-fire-at-the-al-aqsa-mosque-1.7573662>>.

39 Christians United for Israel, <<http://www.cufi.org>>.

40 Julian Borger, ‘Brought to Jesus’: the evangelical grip on the Trump administration’, 11 January 2019, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/11/trump-administration-evangelical-influence-support>>.

worldview, Palestinians are regarded as temporary alien residents in the land who emigrated to Israel from the surrounding Arab nations for economic reasons after Israel had become prosperous.

A fear of and deep-seated hatred of Islam also pervades their apocalyptic theology.

In May 2018, as Trump was pulling the US out of the Iran deal, Heather Timmons, writing for *Quartz*,<sup>41</sup> observed that ‘Trump’s foreign policy looks a lot like Rapture Christians’ plan to welcome the apocalypse’. In an interview with Bill Moyers, John Hagee insisted,

We want you to recognize that Iran is a clear and present danger to the United States of America and Israel. And ... that it’s time for our country to consider a military pre-emptive strike against Iran if they will not yield to diplomacy.<sup>41</sup>

In July 2019 the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ‘spoke via satellite with Pastor John Hagee at the CUFI (Christians United for Israel) conference in Washington DC’ about their mutual concerns regarding the Iranian nuclear threat. Netanyahu said,

So it’s so important that President Trump decided boldly to leave this bad deal, and he decided to restore sanctions. And Israel is deeply grateful for that, because this is vital for Israel’s security, for the security of the region, for the security of the United States, for the security of the world. Now Iran is trying to lash out to reduce the pressure. They attack tankers, they down American drones, they’re firing missiles at their neighbors. It’s important to respond to these actions not by reducing the pressure, but by increasing the pressure. We should stand up to Iran’s aggression now. And Europe should back the sanctions instituted by President Trump. We certainly did.<sup>42</sup>

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41 Bill Moyers Journal <[http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/10/an\\_evangelical\\_christian\\_for\\_p\\_1.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/blog/2007/10/an_evangelical_christian_for_p_1.html)>.

42 <<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2019/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-speaks-with-Pastor-John-Hagee-at-the-CUFI-Conference-in-Washington-8-July-2019.aspx>>.



In the view of evangelical Zionists, the Bible is God's Word and his unconditional promises made to the Jewish people supersede international law. Morgan Strong concludes,

The Republican Party leans heavily on the Christian Zionists for both cash, and votes. They have a profound effect on the direction of the party, even if the party now seems to be more Theocratic than political. The Christian Zionists are most likely to vote; they number over twenty million, and are generous contributors. They are the base of this new Republican theocracy. They do not want peace with the Palestinians. The Palestinians have no place in Biblical Israel. The Christian Zionists want them gone to purify the nascent Kingdom of Israel and allow their eternity of bliss in paradise.<sup>43</sup>

These are six distinctive elements that comprise the political agenda of evangelical Zionism: lobbying political leaders, especially the US Congress and Senate on behalf of Israel; facilitating Jews to make Aliyah to Israel; advocating for greater Israel and expanding the settlements; recognising Jerusalem as the exclusive capital of Israel; supporting the Temple Movement and rebuilding the Jewish Temple; and opposing the peace process and Palestinian rights.

Tragically, Christian Zionism, as a modern theological and political movement, embraces the most extreme ideological positions of Zionism. It has become deeply detrimental to a just peace between Palestine and Israel. It propagates a worldview in which the Christian message is reduced to an ideology of empire, colonialism and militarism. In its extreme form, it places an emphasis on apocalyptic events leading to the end of history rather than living Christ's love and justice today.

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43 Morgan Strong, 'How Christian Zionists got their man into the White House' 29 January 2019, <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/big-story/how-christian-zionists-got-their-man-white-house>>.

**A RESPONSE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST CHURCH**

In April 2004, the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Centre in Jerusalem arranged a ground breaking conference on the theme of Christian Zionism. I helped to draft the closing conference declaration repudiating Christian Zionism. In 2006, this statement was subsequently endorsed by four of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem; His Beatitude Patriarch Michel Sabbah, Latin Patriarch, Jerusalem; Archbishop Swerios Malki Mourad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem; Bishop Riah Abu El-Assal, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East; and Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

*The Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism*

We categorically reject Christian Zionist doctrines as a false teaching that corrupts the biblical message of love, justice and reconciliation.

We further reject the contemporary alliance of Christian Zionist leaders and organisations with elements in the governments of Israel and the United States that are presently imposing their unilateral pre-emptive borders and domination over Palestine. This inevitably leads to unending cycles of violence that undermine the security of all peoples of the Middle East and the rest of world.

We reject the teachings of Christian Zionism that facilitate and support these policies as they advance racial exclusivity and perpetual war rather than the gospel of universal love, redemption and reconciliation taught by Jesus Christ. Rather than condemn the world to the doom of Armageddon we call upon everyone to liberate themselves from ideologies of militarism and occupation. Instead, let them pursue the healing of the nations!

We call upon Christians in Churches on every continent to pray for the Palestinian and Israeli people, both of whom are suffering as victims of occupation and militarism. These discriminative actions are turning Palestine into impoverished ghettos surrounded by exclusive Israeli settlements. The establishment of the illegal settlements and the construction of the Separation

Wall on confiscated Palestinian land undermines the viability of a Palestinian state and peace and security in the entire region.’

The patriarchs concluded, ‘God demands that justice be done. No enduring peace, security or reconciliation is possible without the foundation of justice. The demands of justice will not disappear. The struggle for justice must be pursued diligently and persistently but non-violently.’

The prophet Micah asks, ‘What does the Lord require of you, to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.’ (Micah 6:8).<sup>44</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Christian Zionism is now the largest, most controversial and probably most destructive organised lobby within Christianity today. It bears primary responsibility for perpetuating tensions in the Middle East, justifying Israel’s apartheid colonialist agenda, inciting military aggression toward surrounding nations and thwarting the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

The closing chapter of the New Testament takes us back to the imagery of the Garden of Eden and the removal of the curse arising from the Fall:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ... On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2)

Surely this is what Jesus had in mind when he instructed his followers to act as ambassadors of peace and reconciliation. Let us work together to bring about justice, peace and reconciliation—then may God’s kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

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44 <<https://imeu.org/article/the-jerusalem-declaration-on-christian-zionism>>.

LOUIS MASSIGNON AND IRAQ:  
MYSTICISM AND CONVERSION IN THE  
CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER  
WITH ISLAM AND THE MUSLIM WORLD\*

*Ian Latham†*

Baghdad: there, leader of an official archaeological mission, but ascetic life, disguised, under protection (amân) of an Arab family of Muslim nobles; dressed vaguely like a Turkish officer on leave, desert crossing in search of a ruin between Karbala and Najaf (al-Okhaydir); caught in a trap (preparations for Turkish Revolution, 1908), arrested as a spy, struck, threatened with execution, attempt at suicide through holy horror of myself, sudden self-recollection, eyes shut before an inner fire that judged me and burnt my heart, certainty of a pure, ineffable, creative Presence, suspending my sentence at the prayer of invisible beings, visitors to my prison, whose names struck my thoughts: the first name, my mother (then praying in Lourdes), the fifth, the name of Charles de Foucauld. Saved by my hosts, at their risks: Dakhâla, Ijâla, Diyâfa. Return, amid a thousand obstacles, to France.<sup>1</sup>

So declared Louis Massignon, in the course of a public conference, in Paris in 1959. He was then aged 76, at the end of a long life devoted to Islamic studies and Christian-Islamic dialogue. But he was referring to

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\* Ian Latham (Little Brother of Jesus) LBJ (†2007) presented this paper at Heythrop College, University of London at the conference on 'The Life and Thought of Louis Massignon' 2006. [The transliteration retains the style used by Massignon (ed.)]

1 From a conference given in Paris, 18 March 1908, quoted in a long article 'Voyage en Mésopotamie et conversion de Louis Massignon en 1908', written by Daniel Massignon, son of Louis Massignon, concerning his father's conversion in Iraq in 1908, and published in *Islamo-Christiana* vol.14 (1988) pp. 127-199 [abbreviated as *Voyage*]: p. 129.

an incident in his youth, which took place in central Iraq in 1908. It was a mysterious incident, which Massignon himself had difficulty in expressing, and which others have struggled to understand and evaluate. It is good to go back to that period in his life, and to examine closely the evidence for the ‘event’ itself, together with the events that led up to it and that followed from it.

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I’m beginning to work fairly steadily [ ... ] on a critical study of the martyrdom of a 10th-century Baghdad mystic, about whom innumerable stupidities have been recounted. In reality, he was such a noble character, and the account of his martyrdom has an intensity of colour and a tragic movement that fires me with enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup>

So wrote the young—he was 23—Louis Massignon to his father from Cairo on the 29 April 1907. He had recently left France for Egypt to work at the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology. But his real interest, as he told his father, lay elsewhere. A keen student of classical Arabic, an ardent enthusiast for everything Islamic, a man in unsettled research of his personal destiny, the young Massignon had discovered the dramatic life and death of the Muslim mystic Hallāj—in full, Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallāj (244/858-309/922)—who was executed on a gibbet in Baghdad and who had declared:

Two prostrations: that’s enough for the Prayer of desire—but the ablution that validates them must be made in blood.<sup>3</sup>

This word of Hallāj echoed in Massignon, as he noted in his journal (24 March 1907). He had given up any explicit religious belief and moral imperative, yet felt an instinctive empathy with this newly found Islamic mystic and martyr whose life, in Arabic, he had just read. This

2 Letter of Louis Massignon to his father, Fernand Massignon, Cairo, 29 April 1907: *Voyage* p. 190.

3 *Voyage*, p. 190, quoting Massignon’s Journal [original in Arabic in *tadhkīrat al-amliyyā* (‘Memorial of the Saints’)].

attraction towards Hallâj, soon to be an all-absorbing passion, became, as will appear, the dominant thread in Massignon's life, the key to his personal destiny and wide-ranging influence.

But how, exactly, did this self-discovery come about? And what, exactly, was the role of Hallâj in his life?

Massignon received permission, from the French Institute of Oriental Archaeology in Egypt, to carry out an archaeological mission in 'Mesopotamia', as it was then named, in the region around Baghdad. While waiting to obtain the official authorisation of the sultan, Massignon left Marseille by boat, and arrived in Basra on 8 December 1908. After a week in Basra, he took the riverboat along the Tigris to Baghdad where he landed four days later, on the nineteenth.

His first steps in Baghdad were, in the eyes of his fellow Europeans, distinctly odd.

[He chose] to live in an Arab quarter, to dress in an Arab way and to adopt Arab customs [ ... ] [Further] he insisted on working flat-out gathering documents for his thesis on [ ... ] Hallâj.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, he kept in touch with the European colony, but his choice of living with, and as, the people of the country was a shock, and for some even a sign of mental disturbance (the wearing of the fez particularly irritated the French Consul!). And, thought his archaeological superiors, why was he wasting time in Baghdad, instead of starting out on his archaeological mission while the weather was cool? 'This poor Massignon is a young crackpot, I was mistaken in supporting him', wrote a senior French archaeologist to the French Consul<sup>5</sup>. He even spent time studying Turkish, learning to play the Baghdad lute, and recording local proverbs and customs! And worst of all, people began to say:

There goes the spy, on his way from Zobeïdeh's tomb  
[next to that of Hallâj] to the souq [the market].

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<sup>4</sup> *Voyage*, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> Letter of Général Léon de Beylié to Consul Rouet, 7 March 1908 (Baghdad archives): quoted *Voyage* p. 137.

They noted his unusual dress, seen as an attempt at camouflage, and his heavy and complex bag of scientific equipment for recording inscriptions, like a burglar's bag.<sup>6</sup> And this was reported to the *Wali*, the governor of Baghdad, by two rival German archaeologists.

For not only was Massignon personally 'disturbed', as many saw it, but as everyone knew, the Ottoman empire was in a state of disintegration. In particular, the movement 'Union and Progress' was preparing the way for a liberalisation of the regime. In fact, many of Massignon's new friends belonged, including the two cousins Alusi, who were his official 'guarantors'. Apart from other sources of political 'sickness', both internal and external, it is important to emphasise the interventionist role of the European powers. Both publicly, through their consulates and cultural missions, and secretly through various undercover agents, the French, Germans, English, Austrians, Italians and Russians were all 'angling' in these troubled waters for their own national interests. And of course, as always in such situations, there were double agents and a variety of dubious characters seeking only their own good.<sup>7</sup>

Massignon finally set out on his authorised archaeological mission. Considerably reducing his original, overly ambitious, plans, he decided to do a round trip southwards to examine various ancient sites, some so far unrecorded scientifically. With the collaboration of the Baghdad governor's assistant secretary, all the local authorities on his proposed route were duly informed; and with the help of the French consul and his Muslim friends, he formed a caravan of some twelve men, including a major-domo, Weli, and four gendarmes, led by a sergeant, Sadjoun.

Leaving Baghdad on 22 March 1908 (it was already hot), Massignon visited a large number of ruined sites in the regions of Karbala and Najaf (two Shi'a holy places), and in particular investigated a vast Sasanid castle, al-Ukhaydir. Because of the heat, his party travelled mainly by night, to avoid sunstroke. Once he was raided by a Bedouin band; he was forced to avoid the area to the west of Najaf because of local 'insurgency'; and he frequently had to circumvent seasonal floods along the Euphrates and the nearby oases. But he was regularly well received by the local authorities, and his archaeological recordings went well.

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6 Ibid., p. 138.

7 Ibid., p. 133-134.

He had, however, been cautioned by the French consul.

At the risk that you will mock my counsels of prudence,  
I advise you to cease wearing *iqal* and *abas* and to adopt  
European headgear. It's your best protection!

The consul was well aware that Massignon's dress, 'vaguely like that of a Turkish officer on leave' (as Massignon himself described it),<sup>8</sup> together with his exploratory wanderings, would 'make him suspect'.<sup>9</sup> This was doubly true in that place and at that time. For Massignon was travelling in Shi'a territory, and the Shi'a were always liable to rebel against the Sunni Turkish rule. Further, unknown to Massignon, the Minister for Justice, Nazim Bey, had just escaped a terrorist attack in the region, whether at the hands of some members of the Shi'a community, or from the so-called 'plotters' of the liberal Union and Progress party.

And in fact his success came to a sudden end. Arrived at Bghelah on the Tigris (some 150 km south of Baghdad), all went dramatically wrong. After bathing in the river, 'where I was nearly carried away'<sup>10</sup> (he was not a prudent man!), Massignon discovered that his major-domo had been spreading rumours about his 'effeminate manners'. Challenged, the major-domo left in anger, and carried off the cash-box! Two days later, the 30 May, at Kut, some 50 km to the south along the Tigris, he reported the incident to the town's Mayor, disclosing the nature of the rumours being spread. He acted, as he admits, 'naively', the more so as he insisted on appearing with his Arab *keffiyah*!<sup>11</sup> Advised to make a formal complaint, Massignon saw his major-domo and another servant arrested for theft.

Now, without available money, he approached two Chaldean Christians, local agents for the Ottoman bank, to cash a cheque. But they refused, alleging doubts on his identity (he was still in Arab headdress), and declaring:

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8 Ibid., p. 141, quoting a talk by Massignon of 1959 (cf. L. Massignon, *Parole Donnée*, Paris: Julliard 1962, pp. 66-67).

9 Ibid., p. 141.

10 Ibid., p. 142, quoting 'Notes for his spiritual director', written in 1922 (in short, *Notes*).

11 Ibid., p. 143. *Notes*.



You are a dead man. We can give you nothing.<sup>12</sup>

Massignon persuaded the two men to give him a small sum in exchange for some rifles, and that evening, on revisiting the mayor, was 'requested' to abandon his escort and return alone, with one servant, on the river-boat to Baghdad. He had received exactly the boat fare! It was, as Massignon saw it, a pre-arranged 'trap'.<sup>13</sup>

The four-day boat journey soon proved to be eventful. We have two accounts: that of Massignon himself, written only for his spiritual director some 14 years later (though based on notes in his logbook or journal at the time of the events); and that composed of a series of contemporary documents from the ship's captain, the French consul, an army doctor on board and later two doctors of the Baghdad civil hospital, together with two brief contemporary notes from Massignon himself. The two versions, one as seen from the 'inside' (Massignon's personal story recorded some years later), and the other as noted by 'external' participants (their contemporary observations, judgements and official reports), differ considerably. The best approach, perhaps, is to examine first what is common, and then to look at the two interpretations.

The basic facts, allowing for differences of detail, are not in doubt. Massignon boarded the ship on the morning of 1 May. He was the only European aboard, and, travelling first class, was separated from his faithful servant Sadjoun. Hearing himself accused of being a spy by some Turkish officers in the same cabin, he wrote a note to the captain and went to see him, handing over his revolver and affirming his innocence. During the night, a guard was placed and the next day he was forbidden to move. Having asked to go to the toilet, and noticing that the boat was alongside a barge moored to the quay, he tried to escape but was soon recaptured and then tied with cords. The following night, he asked to have his right arm freed for comfort, and attempted to kill himself with a long knife left on his person. But the cut was not deep, and the doctor on board bandaged the wound. In the morning (of the 3rd), Massignon was taken again to see the captain,

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12 Ibid., p. 143. *Notes*. As his Daniel records, this phrase would 'haunt him till the end of his life.' (Ibid., pp. 157/8).

13 Ibid., p. 143. *Notes*.

and that night he 'kept his eyes closed',<sup>14</sup> remembering no more until the ship landed at Baghdad on the morning of the 5th. He was then taken to the civil hospital, on the grounds of suffering severe mental disturbance, where he developed an intense fever, and seemed, both to himself and others, to be in danger of death (night of 7th-8th). He was able, however, to leave the hospital three days later, and began riding about the city! He was equally able to make decisions and plan his return to France, deciding to travel overland via Aleppo to Beirut in spite of the intense heat and the risk of being stopped or robbed en route. And on reaching France by ship, he was able to resume all his normal activities.

Both accounts agree that Massignon was seriously disturbed and acting in an unusual way; for example, he asked for cigarettes, but proceeded to swallow two after lighting them! His attempted, but failed, suicide was equally odd, and his notes to the captain could well be seen as signs of mental derangement.

The differences appear above all in describing the motivation for his unusual behaviour and the causes of his illness. But the surviving evidence, although surprisingly plentiful, remains far from easy to interpret. There are the problems of language: the original texts in Turkish and Arabic are sometimes only known in uncertain French translations or resumes of the originals. And much depends on the various intentions behind the official reports and exchanges, which clearly govern their presentation of events.

It is impossible to deal with all the complex detail. It seems best to select the key witnesses. Exchanges between the mayor of Kut and the French consul confirm Massignon's curious story of his relations with the two Christians who would normally have honoured his cheque on the Ottoman bank, but who refused. The consular accounts show convincingly that the two men acted under pressure. It remains uncertain why the mayor, at first agreeable, changed his attitude. He cannot seriously have doubted Massignon's identity, but, given his unusual presentation, his connections with persons commonly thought to be linked to the new, revolutionary, party, and his original personality, he may well have thought him to be 'a spy, an agitator in disguise', as Massignon's son suggests.<sup>15</sup> It must be admitted that

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 147. *Notes*.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

Massignon's behaviour was frequently imprudent, at times bizarre, and liable to be 'naïve', as he himself admitted.

The captain of the boat provided two reports: the first, the day after landing, an oral report to the French consul (accompanied by his Austrian counterpart); the second, a fortnight later, a longer written account for the governor of Baghdad. In both reports, the captain remarked on the 'normal state' of Massignon on boarding and on his 'lack of ill will against anybody'.<sup>16</sup> But he also, in both cases, referred at length to his 'mental troubles'<sup>17</sup> while on board. The first report outlines two episodes in which Massignon expressed the wish to be killed or to kill himself with a revolver, and a failed attempt at suicide with a knife. The second report insists rather on 'certain dullness and incoherence in his words': 'he spoke many words having no sense in Arabic, English and French,' and his written cards, in Arabic, 'did not convey much to me.'

More precise than that of the captain is an account provided by the Doctor Essad, the military doctor on board, whom the captain summoned to treat Massignon's self-inflicted wound and who continued to care for him while on the ship. He declared:

His [Massignon's] excitation and delirium increased, so that he threw off the bandages we had applied, tore and threw off his jacket and then his shirt. His face became redder and redder, his eyes congested, his state of excitement was such that he hurled himself against the passengers and crew: all this proved that his mental state had become deranged and that he had become mad. He did not stop shouting 'I want to die, leave me alone'.<sup>18</sup>

After recording a half-hour period of calm, the doctor described further acts that seemed to him to confirm his verdict of 'mental derangement'. Whether one accepts this conclusion or not, there is no reason to doubt the carefully noted acts of abnormal behaviour.

On arrival at the Baghdad civil hospital, Massignon was examined by two doctors, Dr Nizammeddine and Dr Gourdj. They affirm:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 164 and 166.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 164 and 165.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

On arrival at the hospital, he [Massignon] had a congested face and eyes, pulse 120, respiration 30 a minute, fever 38,5. These symptoms were accompanied by psychic troubles, agitations and delirium [ ... ] we tied him to the bed [ ... ] In the evening, his physical and mental state improved, and he replied to questions up to a point.<sup>19</sup>

At first, the two doctors, together with the doctor Essad, declared, in a note to the French consul, that they ‘were convinced that M. Massignon had suffered a cerebral congestion caused by sunstroke and travel fatigue.’ But two weeks later, the same two doctors affirm, this time in an official report to the Governor, that:

In spite of M. Massignon’s satisfactory state today, his attempted suicide and his general state of violent excitation at the time of entering the Hospital, cause us to think of a form of mania, which occurred under the influence of moral and physical fatigue [ ... ], which is most probably chronic.<sup>20</sup>

A fourth doctor, Dr Lanzoni concluded by saying ‘the patient is affected by paranoia, with delirium of persecution and attempted suicide.’<sup>21</sup> This diagnostic relied much on Massignon’s reported psychological behaviour: for example, quoting his adoption of Arab life-style, and his refusal to follow the advice of the French consul and of his father (both wished him to return to France by boat, rather than overland).

To these testimonies of the captain and the doctors, we can add that of two brief notes hand-written by Massignon himself and passed by him to the captain while on board. Both are written in literary Arabic, mixed with some spoken expressions in the local Iraqi dialect. The first is as follows:

To the captain of the boat *al-Burhaniye*,—I beg you, in the absence of a reply to the other question, to explain to me:

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

1° if you have from the government a formal order or the possibility of a choice between two things;

2° if I may myself give the signal to fire. Then I will give you my revolver.

Greet my friends. God knows and the First Minister knows that I have not come for this affair. My death is of no profit for your country and 'if you shed my blood', in all justice, the ransom is too heavy. Greetings.<sup>22</sup>

Receiving no reply, Massignon wrote a second note with only small variations, and handed it personally to the captain (the first note had been delivered by a servant).

The captain later declared that he failed to understand the meaning of these missives, and he did not reply.

Looking at these elements of the dossier, a verdict of severe, even if temporary, 'paranoia' (to quote Dr. Lanzoni), would seem the obvious conclusion. In fact, one might go further, and think that this paranoia was 'chronic' (Dr Nizammeddine and Dr Gourdjji).<sup>23</sup> In that case one would be obliged to consider that Massignon's various accounts of his 'conversion', which he always affirmed began while he was involved in these strange incidents on the boat-trip from Kut to Baghdad, were based upon an untrustworthy foundation. Was not his highly emotive character, combined with the undoubtedly dramatic events to which he was submitted, enough to explain his intense emotional shock at the time, and the consequent fabulation of his creative imagination, which he later expressed in a symbolic, poetic-style, language? In other words, one might well suppose that Massignon was unconsciously, and in all good faith, giving an objective status to a purely subjective, intramental, phenomenon.

To answer this obvious objection, we need first to examine, briefly, possible explanations of Massignon's reported behaviour. Why do the reports differ? And are the alleged 'signs of madness' correctly interpreted?

The reports differ, clearly, in function of the perspectives and intentions of the various participants. For example, the ship's captain displays a friendly attitude towards his passenger, both softening his

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 169-170.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 172 and 174.

account of Massignon's emotional state, and omitting any mention of his efforts to escape. This last was probably due to a desire not to mention the grounding of his ship in an official report that his company had to present to the governor of Baghdad! More importantly, the captain was the uncle of the governor's assistant, Reouf Tchadirdji, who was a key member of the revolutionary 'Union and Progress' movement. Any mention of the alleged 'spy' role of Massignon, known to the governor as a friend of Tchardirdji, would be most compromising, and could well explain why the captain claimed to have found Massignon's notes incomprehensible.

Again, the strongly-worded second report of the two hospital doctors and that of Dr Lanzoni, which declared that Massignon suffered from 'mania' and 'paranoia', and which went well beyond the earlier medical reports, although being further from the events, could be explained on the basis of external pressure. Both the governor's assistant and the French consul had an interest in showing that Massignon was 'mentally irresponsible', in order to remove him rapidly from the scene and so avoid any questioning by the sultan's police on the eve of an internal revolution. This is confirmed by Massignon's son Daniel:

My father always told me that the doctors were asked to pass him off as mad, in order to avoid him being interrogated by the Turkish police, which could have led to his own incrimination, and to the troubling of his friends, conspirators, just two months before the revolution.<sup>24</sup>

But perhaps the key evidence is not an oral testimony or an interpretation of written account, but an undisputed fact: Massignon's rapid recovery.

[He] was able to undertake the hard return journey [of 24 days] to Aleppo [from Baghdad] only twelve days after leaving hospital and in the intense heat of June [ ... ] And a month after arriving in France (only three months after

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 174 and 181.

the ‘events’), he won one of the most important successes of his scientific career.<sup>25</sup>

This refers to Massignon’s presentation of a paper on the ‘Muslim Saints of Baghdad’ to an international Congress of Orientalists in Copenhagen (13-22 August, 1908). It was a success. More, it was the origin of his international reputation in Islamology. And it was part of a period of intense intellectual work. Clearly, Massignon was not ‘chronically’ affected.

It remains, however, that he may well have been temporarily ‘disturbed’. Were not his actions undeniably ‘abnormal’? Two points can be made. Massignon’s character was ‘accentuatedly passionate’: hyperactive, profoundly reflexive and strongly emotive.<sup>26</sup> It is possible that the severe emotive shocks to which he was subjected were sufficient to produce the physical signs of intense stress noted by the doctors and the abnormal actions, such as the attempted suicide and the violent efforts to escape. Possible, but not more ...

At this point everything depends on Massignon’s own personal testimony. The key text is the *Notes on my conversion*, which Massignon wrote at the request of his spiritual director. Fr Anastase, an Iraqi Carmelite priest from Baghdad, had accompanied Massignon on his return journey from Baghdad to Beirut in June 1908, and had continued with him to visit his family in France. The two men, linked by a common passion for the Arabic language and by common spiritual bonds, kept in close touch until Fr Anastase’s death in 1947.<sup>27</sup>

According to these *Notes*, it is clear that Massignon saw himself as being taken for a spy and consequently in danger—immediate danger—of being put to death. He had been told before embarking, ‘You are a dead man’, and once on board, while resting behind a curtain, he received one of his fellow passengers, a Turkish officer, who whispered in his ear ‘with a threat of death before the end of the night’, saying that ‘he knew that I was disguised under a false name, that I was a spy, and that I had been involved in the recent attempt on the life of the

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25 Ibid., p. 181.

26 Ibid., p. 180, quoting a standard French work on *character analysis*: *Traité pratique d’analyse de caractères* by Gaston Berger (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1958).

27 *Bulletin de l’Association des Amis de Louis Massignon*, N° 14, June 2003, p. 41 [in short, *Bulletin*].

President of the Reform Commission,<sup>28</sup> adding that his servants in prison had so confessed.

It was, declared Massignon, on learning of this threat that he presented his first hand-written card to the captain. It was, in his eyes, a cryptic request to take an active part in the execution he anticipated: cryptic, to avoid compromising the captain; a request to be 'able to give the signal for firing', to satisfy his own sense of honour. Such an approach belonged to a different cultural tradition, which the captain was unlikely to understand. And the classical Arabic used, with the odd phrase in dialect, although formally correct, was couched in a French cultural idiom. We can see again something of the emotive 'naivety' of Massignon's approach. But we can also observe the 'finesse' of his Arabic script, no different from that of his manuscript transcriptions in the following years, as his son Daniel remarks. In such fraught circumstances, this seems a good sign of Massignon's mental balance at this critical moment, in fact of a 'man in full possession of his intellectual faculties'.<sup>29</sup>

But can we go further and say that Massignon is a reliable witness? For the mysterious 'Visitation of the Stranger' that he speaks of, while situated within the context of verifiable events, is by its nature an 'inner', hidden reality, yet claiming to come from 'outside'.

Massignon as a young man had shared his agnostic father's humanist admiration for Joan of Arc: they admired particularly the courage and fidelity of her 'witness' to her 'voices', in the face of her judges, and until her death by fire. In fact the young Massignon, together with his friend Henri Maspero, risked their careers by publicly protesting against an author who defamed her: both were refused their '*agrégation*' (right to teach in a Lycée), and both were sent away (by Henri's father, Gaston Maspero). Louis Massignon went to Egypt, where he discovered another 'witness', Hallâj.<sup>30</sup>

For, Massignon discovered, Hallâj had, like Joan of Arc, witnessed until death. Tied and tortured on a gibbet in the centre of Baghdad, he had continued to proclaim his own 'oneness' with the One God: *Ana 'l Haqq* ('I [am] the Truth'). While being carried on a stretcher from the boat to the Hospital, as they were passing the place of Hallâj's

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<sup>28</sup> *Voyage*, p. 145.

<sup>29</sup> *Voyage*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>30</sup> *Voyage*, pp.182-3 and 188.



tomb, he felt the presence of Hallâj; and later, suffering intense fever, he muttered repeatedly ‘Haqq’.<sup>31</sup>

Two nights later, feeling *in articulo mortis*, as he later (in 1922) wrote:

I tried in vain to say [ ... ] that I felt solicited to witness GOD (ashad Allah), in the name of the whole world, at that precise moment [It was to me, as I saw it, that was transmitted the heritage of all the saints, the order to witness God in the name of all. ‘Here I am, I witness for all’ (note added two years later)].<sup>32</sup>

This sense of being summoned to ‘witness God’ precedes Massignon’s Christian belief: it is the taking up of Hallâj’s act of witness: an act made ‘with all the saints’, and ‘in the name of all [humanity]’. Massignon’s explicit recognition of Jesus will only intensify this initial profession, but now in union with the One he has come to believe is pre-eminently *the Witness*.<sup>33</sup>

Massignon’s own witness to the truth of his conversion dates from the time of the ‘event’ itself. He spoke of it, first, to the priest, Fr Anastase, who accompanied him for some three months after he left the Baghdad Hospital. Fr Anastase, for whom he later wrote a full account, was a direct witness of the concluding part of the process of conversion, together with its immediate consequences: he both witnessed the external events, and was the first confidant of Massignon’s inner self-disclosure.<sup>34</sup> Being himself an Iraqi, and a great lover of the Arabic language, this ‘faithful companion of my desert crossing in 1908’,<sup>35</sup> was able to understand the human background of Massignon’s spiritual experience, and yet, at the same time, to have a critical regard to its nature. For he mistrusted

31 Ibid., p. 148: n. 77. The expression *al-Haqq* (The Truth) is a name of God, seen under the aspect of the ‘One who witnesses, in all Truth, to Himself’. Human testimony to God as One is ‘the human replica of the divine self-witness’. And, by extension, all authentic human witness shares in this same truthfulness.

32 Ibid., p. 148 and n. 81 (quoting the lengthy report for Fr. Anastase, written in 1922, on the basis of a draft in 1916).

33 Ibid., p. 183 (cf. Rev 1: 5; Jn 8: 18; Mk 14: 62 etc.).

34 Jean-Marie Mérioux, OP, *La reconnaissance de Massignon envers L’Iraq*, pp. 434-443, Mossoul, 25 March 1977. Mérioux details the long relationship between Louis Massignon and Fr Anastase, until the latter’s death in 1947.

35 Ibid., p. 435: quoting Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*, vol. III, p. 402.

Massignon's attraction for Hallâj and the Islamic mystics; he had a sound training in spiritual discernment in the tradition of his Carmelite Order; and he had known and judged Massignon's impetuous and extravagant nature soon after his arrival in Baghdad. He was not a man to allow any compromise or 'grey areas': 'Pray for this young man who has abandoned the right [way of] life (24 February 1908)'; 'the patient expresses the desire to return to the truth in a clear and decisive way, and I have found that all is sincere in him (end of May 1908).'<sup>36</sup>

Massignon's father is the next witness. His mother, devout and prayerful, was ready, perhaps too ready, to believe. His father, Fernand Massignon, a well-known sculptor, was 'an upright agnostic, respectful of the other',<sup>37</sup> but his son's rapid change from being equally agnostic, a free-thinker and lover of life, to becoming an ardent believer and ascetic, was too much! It was almost like 'an intellectual collapse'! Knowing his son's temperament, he, not unnaturally, hesitated. But finally, after much discussion, he 'finished by recognizing the authenticity of his son's new vocation and admiration for the mystic Hallâj'.<sup>38</sup> Their common, long-standing admiration for Joan of Arc aided their mutual understanding.

Other witnesses can easily be found; for example, the exchange, much of it by letter, with the poet Paul Claudel goes back to the autumn of 1908, and is the first written account of Massignon's experience in and around Baghdad.<sup>39</sup>

We do not, then, have to rely on the two published accounts that date from Massignon's last years (in 1955 and 1959, when he was 72 and 76),<sup>40</sup> nor exclusively on his notes for Fr Anastase of 1922, though this document is the most complete and clear.

What is the chief characteristic of this experience? It is contained, perhaps, in the five adjectives that Massignon uses to 'describe' it—or rather to indicate its essential 'otherness': 'interior, unheard-of, executing, supernatural, unspeakable'.<sup>41</sup> Two words indicate the

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 436-437.

<sup>37</sup> *Voyage*, p. 182.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>39</sup> *Reconnaissance*, p. 435 cf. n.3: 'Les Grandes Correspondances': *Claudel-Massignon 1908-1914* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1973).

<sup>40</sup> *Voyage*, p. 128 & pp. 142-152.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 147: 'Peu après le coup de couteau manqué, j'avais subi un autre coup: intérieur, inouï;

impossibility of describing it: it is, literally, other than what can be humanly expressed in words, being un-heard and un-speakable. Its source is perceived as above-nature, other than the objects of normal experience; yet it penetrates within, as a 'blow' that executes. In what manner? As the following words indicate, the 'blow' of execution is both 'a being judged' (struck, above all, by the knowledge of having judged others 'so liberally'), 'almost a damnation' in fact, and yet 'a liberation', leading to the 'certainty that I would return [alive] to Paris.'

It is important to notice that there is no mention of God, though, as the two later accounts specify, there is an implied 'Presence': 'certainty of a Presence pure, ineffable, creative' (according to the short account of 1959); 'the Stranger who visited me [ ... ] all doors closed' (longer account of 1955). But in both cases, the 'Presence' is nameless: 'ineffable' (1959), 'no Name subsisting in my memory (not even mine)' (1955).<sup>42</sup>

In spite of an attempted suicide, following two attempts at escape, and being bound hand and foot, Massignon declared that he was able that evening, when taken before the captain, to 'reply to their questions on my identity (after looking at the clock, which seemed to me to mark a solemn hour)'. He added, 'one of them, seen end of May in Baghdad, told me that I spoke like "the son of a king"'.<sup>43</sup> There is evidence here of confidence and mental clarity, following a time of confusion and despair: 'I decided to do away with myself.'<sup>44</sup>

We can check Massignon's own expressions of witness, and the accounts of those witnessing to the validity of that witness, but in the nature of the case, the reality of 'that' to which witness is born is beyond the normal means of verification. We can only appeal to a moral probability, to be accepted, or refused, in function of our judgement on the character of the witness (and, ultimately, on the possibility of an awareness of a 'Presence' that is 'other').

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*suppliant, surnaturel, indicible*. This is from the *Notes on my conversion* prepared for Fr Anastase, of 1922 (but preliminary versions go back to 1916).

42 Ibid., p. 129, for the 'short account' [1959] (beginning: 'Baghdad' and ending 'return to France': only a short paragraph of some ten lines: also published in Louis Massignon, *Parole donnée*, 3rd ed., Paris, 1983, pp. 66-67). See *Voyage*, pp.195-196, for the 'longer account' [1955] (beginning: 'The Stranger who visited me' and ending 'of us two, say, 'who is the lover'': also published in *L'idée de Dieu*, Art nouveau, no 90, Paris, January 1955, pp. 72-74).

43 Ibid., p. 147.

44 Ibid., p. 146.

What 'Presence'? Speaking of his first night in the Baghdad hospital, suffering from an intense fever, Massignon wrote:

Temptation to say '*Ana 'l Haqq*', 'I am the creative Truth', word attributed to Hallâj, which I took then *in a monist sense* [emphasis added].<sup>45</sup>

This shows that Massignon had, at this point, no clear idea of 'what' the Presence experienced was. Monism entails an ontological one-ness of the self and the other (which seems to be implied in the words already quoted: 'No name remained in my memory—not even my own').

Schematically, we can distinguish three stages in the process of Massignon's conversion. The first, on the boat, consists in what Massignon later called the *Visit of the Stranger*. It is this powerfully experienced but unnamed, and so far unknown, 'Presence'.

Then, in hospital, as Massignon recalled, he was 'taken for the second time into the supernatural'.<sup>46</sup> The passage continues: 'I feel warned that I am going to die: spiritual dawn increasing, serene clearness, inviting me to renounce everything.' He feels called, in particular, to renounce holding on to a 'well-beloved name' whom he thinks may have betrayed him, adding: 'I abandon him (this creature) to God.' There is here, clearly, a new step: the recognition of God as Creator. An apparently trivial observation the next morning concludes surprisingly: 'The doves [ ... ] sing a song which speaks to my heart, filling it with a supernatural consolation.' In a note, Massignon later added: 'From my note of 1 October 1908: '*haqq, haqq,—sodog, sodog*', 'it is true, certainly' (the pigeons '*haqqi*'). This seemed to him to be a confirmation, through a sign, of the truth of his experience of the preceding night. And it surely contains an implied reference to Hallâj, *Haqq* ('Truth') being his favourite name for God. On returning to Baghdad, Hallâj becomes, as he was before but in a new way, a key influence: a living influence in favour of the True and Living God. For Massignon now begins to be aware of God as God: it is an 'awareness of His sacred solitude',<sup>47</sup> a sense of God as essentially 'the One-and-Only'.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 148: notes on conversion for Fr Anastase; cf. p. 195: longer account.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 195: notes. The French '*esseulement*', literally 'solitude', is used by Massignon

The third and final stage is much more simple. Leaving the hospital and preparing to travel with a doctor and Fr Anastase to Aleppo, Massignon was disgusted at intercepting a telegram from the father stating 'conversion begun'. In fact Fr. Anastase used this means to persuade his Carmelite superior, who had at first refused, to allow him to accompany Massignon. For his part, Massignon seized the opportunity to 'make him promise never to speak to me of religion during the journey'. For, he affirmed, 'I had never spoken to anyone of the state of my soul: [I was a] slave of God, without being admitted to pray to Him in any form other than a here-and-now obedience.'<sup>48</sup>

But at the end of the journey, it was different. Instead of the recent dramatic and ambiguous events, the final happening is clear and simple. In his logbook, on 25 June 1908, Massignon noted:<sup>49</sup>

Confession. Understood a little the two notebooks of my mother (26 June) ... daily meditations, mainly from Bossuet (also from Fénelon, St François de Sales).

The next day:

At Baalbek, after the Holy Sacrifice at the rising of the sun, in the little courtyard, under the apricot tree of the convent, I had my heart renewed and my eyes became fresh as those of a child ... It was truly the dawn of a new life (Copenhagen, 19 August 1908).

The drama of suspicion and arrest, of intense fever and strange words, of symbolic language and doubtful meaning—all this is past. Quiet normality and peace have returned. And two words are enough to say all: Confession ... the Holy Sacrifice. There is no need to say more. And the scene, sunrise under an apricot tree, is the fitting sign of this 'new life'.

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in its root sense, '*seul*', to indicate the 'otherness' of God as the 'one-and-only' absolute existent.

48 Ibid., p. 151.

49 Ibid., pp. 192-193.

Massignon remained a man of ‘passion’, with (in the eyes of others) extravagant gestures,<sup>50</sup> but he had ‘discovered’<sup>51</sup> the living and true God, whom he recognised in Jesus crucified and risen, present for him in the sacraments of the Catholic Church. As his son, Daniel, remarks, his whole life from then on was given, with passion, to ‘the Stranger who had visited him’, and to the mission that he received from Him:

I had to offer myself in the name of all to pay their debt  
[together] with my own (July 1908).

We have here, again, a mark of Massignon’s extravagance, but in a new key. Is it possible to ‘pay the debt of all’? By ‘debt’, he clearly means the debt entailed by his own faults and the faults of others in the sight of God. For embracing Christianity, Massignon felt impelled to go the extreme limits: to be, with Jesus, an intercessor by offering his life for the redemption of all. In this he was fulfilling the role he had already seen exemplified in Hallâj.

The authenticity and character of Massignon’s conversion can only, in the last resort, be judged by its results. Could not his own witness be a self-deception, involuntary no doubt, but due to excessive stress leading to ‘mental disturbance’ and even ‘madness’, as his doctors reported? And are not his contemporary and later notes, and, more so, his long-delayed published texts, a product of his creative imagination re-interpreting long-past events?

Two points can be made in reply. Firstly, Massignon’s conversion was a process. His brief contemporary notes, and those written only for his spiritual director (based largely on these at-the-time jottings), clearly show that he begins simply with a sense of a ‘monist’ *Presence*, indistinguishable from his own self. Only later does he realise the creative ‘otherness’ of God as a distinct reality. And only at the end, in the simplicity of confession and communion, does he truly ‘discover’ the full personal character of God in the living presence of Jesus who heals his past and gives him the food of new life.

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50 Ibid., p. 193, n. 149. The Dr. Iskenderian, who was accompanying Massignon and Fr. Anastase, reported to the French Consul in Baghdad: *Fairly serious crisis in Beirut—crisis of devotion, prayer ten times a day...* So the doctor saw it!

51 Ibid., p. 131. ‘*God is not an invention, but a discovery*’. This felicitous phrase was written in reply to a request by Jacques Maritain, and published in *Ce que je sais de Dieu* (‘What I know of God’), Paris, 1926, (ed.) F Divoire.

The original nature of this process, in each of its parts and as a whole, is perhaps obscured, rather than clarified, by the dramatic-poetic language which colours the expression of even his most simple acts of witness. The extreme form of this mode of expression is in the well-known final text, the *Visitation of the Stranger*, which his son Daniel describes as ‘an élan towards God, a most humble act of adoration, conforming with Louis Massignon’s poetic ideal.’<sup>52</sup> This consists in ‘revealing oneself through allusions to the cultural substratum of the language’, and supremely in ‘leading us though it (supreme imperishable beauty) to have access, by a sort of contact, with God.’ While there is a marked distinction between the plain style and intention to describe of the notes, as compared with the poetic élan of the *Visitation*, there is, to my mind, an influence (surely inevitable, given Massignon’s character), and so a certain coloration, of these early writings, by this dramatic-poetic style. This does not detract from their value as personal evidence of both external events and inner realities. But it obliges us to dig out the substance, buried, and so hidden, beneath the linguistic veils.<sup>53</sup>

This ‘substance’ is validated, above all, by its ‘fruits’. This is the simple, but certain, Gospel criterion.<sup>54</sup> It is the basis of the judgement of the Carmelite doctor, St John of the Cross, which can be resumed as: reject *a priori* all supposed signs of divine intervention in the human mind. For, he argues, we can easily be deceived, and at best certainty is impossible. But, he adds, the experience if authentic will of itself work its intended effect.<sup>55</sup>

Massignon’s insistence, amid all the poetic allusions and subtle symbolism, that his experiences were in themselves ‘ineffable’, is already an indication in their favour. But more significant are the multiple, and life-long, fruits.

These fruits are commonly seen under the heading of three main, inter-related, themes: hospitality, substitution, and compassion. We

52 Ibid., p. 188 and n. 139.

53 Jacques Keryell, *Jardin Donné; Louis Massignon à la recherche de l’Absolu* (Paris-Fribourg: Editions Saint-Paul, 1993), p. 24: ‘Massignon was born a poet [...] It was this poetic experience which turned him first towards the seduction of the world and its beauty, then predisposed him obscurely and slowly towards the experience of the depths of God, which is gift, pure grace’.

54 Mt 7:20.

55 *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, bk. 2, ch.11, para. 5: ‘Such representations and feelings must always be rejected. Even though some may be from God, their rejection will not prevent the fruit God wishes to communicate through them.’

could add: witness and dialogue. They are the ‘fundamental themes of his spiritual life, which he continually enriched until his death.’<sup>56</sup> Perhaps it would be better to speak of the fundamental attitudes underlying all his activities. For Massignon’s spirituality was far from being an isolated inner world: it fed on contemporary events and relationships, and it was always practically and socially expressed.

‘Saved by my hosts at their risks and perils’.<sup>57</sup> It was the hospitality of the Alusi family in Baghdad that Massignon had in mind. They were his ‘guarantors’ when he chose to live in a Muslim quarter, his protectors in his open-to-suspicion work of topographical surveys, his friends with whom he could converse freely, his means of introduction to the cultivated Muslim society of Baghdad, and his aid in setting out on his desert journeying. Above all, they stood by him when accused of spying, they prayed over him when in hospital, and they mobilised an escort to ensure his safe return. Throughout, they represented for him the ideal of the pious Muslim. ‘Conservatives in religion (strict Hanbalites)’, suspicious of the mystics (but ready to help Massignon in his research on Hallāj), open to more liberal tendencies in politics (but keen supporters of the traditionalist Wahhabite movement in Saudi Arabia), Shokri Alusi and his cousin Ali formed with Massignon ‘a profound intellectual friendship, maintained by regular correspondence until their death.’<sup>58</sup>

A similar ‘profound intellectual friendship’ developed with the long-dead, but for Massignon still ‘living’, Hallāj. Massignon had asked to come to Baghdad because there he hoped to find traces of this famous but disputed mystic. On arriving, he frequently visited his tomb, as well as searching for all possible information on his life and recorded words. When returning, a sick man, he was struck, repeatedly, by Hallāj’s search for God as *Haqq* (Truth). Most probably, if not certainly, he experienced Hallāj as an ‘intercessor’, as one of those, living and departed, whose prayer ‘suspended his sentence’ and ‘supported him’ on his journey of faith.<sup>59</sup>

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56 *Voyage*, p. 193.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 193; these are the last words of the ‘short account’ of conversion.

58 *Bulletin*, pp. 35-36.

59 *Voyage*, p. 129 cf. p. 148-149, esp. n. 75: ‘My note of 4 July 1908 (Journal) says: ‘the beloved dead’, my aunt, Dulac, Huysmans especially and Hallāj [...]. Classification: Hallāj [...]. This seems to indicate that Massignon classified Hallāj as the ‘first’ of the dead who had ‘helped him’.



For Massignon's conception of hospitality covered the 'beloved dead' as well as the living. Both, in their own way, had received him as their 'guest' in Baghdad. As such, in line with Muslim hospitality, he was welcomed as an honorary member of the community, different but 'protected' in the name of God. Massignon remained faithful, for his part, to the bond thus created, keeping up a regular contact with the Alusi family, and revisiting regularly the tomb of Hallâj until the end of his life.

Later, the roles will be reversed. Massignon will welcome North African Muslim workers in Paris, offering them evening classes in French, supporting their claims for residence, speaking for them to an often hostile public, and encouraging the practice of their religion in their new 'foreign' (outside the *dar al-Islam*, the 'house of Islam') environment.<sup>60</sup> As his friends the Alusi had done for him, he did this for others, 'at his own risks and perils.'<sup>61</sup>

As the guest of the other, Massignon felt summoned to share the destiny of that other. Before his conversion (though this was close and already, maybe, germinating), he noted:

Woe to the one who has not flamed with the flame of enthusiasm since the clear dawn of youth ... as if one should gain the salvation of all lives, as if the ascension of justice and the destiny of the world depended on the efforts of one alone and should spring forth from one's hands.<sup>62</sup>

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60 As the Iranian Shi'a scholar Shari'ati, then a pupil of Massignon in Paris, recalls: 'He was sitting there [on the steps of the Paris mosque]..., with some unhappy Algerian Arabs who had, in colonialist France, forgotten even their religion and their language; and he taught them the Qur'an' (quoted by Anthony O'Mahony, 'Mysticism and Politics: Louis Massignon, Shi'a Islam, Iran and 'Ali Shari'ati—a Muslim-Christian encounter', *Lectures in Islamic Studies*, vol. 2, chap. 7, London, 1998).

61 *Voyage*, p. 128 n.3. Aged 75, while speaking on Charles de Foucauld, 'a brother who left for the desert', he was attacked. The reason: his support for Foucauld's defence of the equal rights of Algerian Muslims within the 'greater France'. This scandalised certain 'right-wing' Catholics, particularly in this tense period of independence struggle.

62 *Voyage*, p. 190, quoting a page of his personal notebook, dated 30 October 1907 (while preparing his trip to Baghdad).

So typical of Massignon—enthusiastic, extravagant, poetic—these lines foreshadow his great (and, maybe, dominant) concept of ‘substitution’. This initial call, as we have seen, became more explicit in Hospital: I must offer myself in the name of all to pay their debt together with mine.<sup>63</sup> It was completed by a complimentary idea that followed in the wake of the final stage of his ‘new life’:

Then, an intuition, on the mental horizon, of an effort  
of coordinated traction, drawing the whole world towards  
God—a perception of the forward journey of the Church,  
lifting up all the good wills, together, towards God ...<sup>64</sup>

For Massignon, always, and increasingly, felt the urge to join the common effort of all humanity towards its final goal, and to give his life unreservedly for that end. Having discovered something of this so-far unknown ‘goal’, and the one ‘person’ who in his eyes effectively achieved it, Jesus the Messiah, he was irresistibly attracted to do the same. The concept of ‘substitution’ summarised for him this intention, and will lead, later, to the founding of the *Badaliya* (Arabic for ‘substitution’). His specific desire was to express his human solidarity with his Muslim friends through the union of his life as ‘one’ with theirs, but with his own distinctive contribution as a Christian, through participation in the one redemptive sacrifice of Christ offered for all.<sup>65</sup>

We can look at Massignon’s ideals of compassion and witness in the context of his approach to dialogue. Islamic-Christian dialogue is now commonplace, but Massignon was a pioneer, and remains a ‘prophet’ in this field. He discovered Islam as a living faith through Hallāj and through his friends the Alusi, and this led him to the fullness of faith in Christ and the Catholic Church. Others, as Charles de Foucauld, had followed this path. But the originality of Massignon was to continue to penetrate Islam ‘from within’, as a ‘guest and friend’, and to see the Christian mystery through Islam, in particular through Hallāj. Did not Hallāj see himself as the

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63 Ibid., p. 191.

64 Ibid., p. 192.

65 Massignon’s concept of ‘substitution’, if taken in the strict sense, that of ‘taking the place of another’, is perhaps inappropriate, and the concept of ‘solidarity’ would be preferable, but the profound reality of his lived intention remains.

‘substitute’ for his people, as the ‘intercessor’ for Baghdad? And was not Hallāj a model of ‘compassion’, and of ‘witness’? The lived and intellectual interaction between his Christian faith and his Islamic solidarity marks the whole of Massignon’s way of dialogue. He reads Christianity in the mirror of Islam, and sees Islam as tending, unconsciously, towards fulfilment in Jesus as the Word.

Massignon’s conversion led to a deep and lifelong link with the people of Iraq, and with their history, particularly in the period following the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1917.<sup>66</sup> The French government gave him diplomatic status in that year, and did so again after the Second World War, in 1945. He became friendly with the Emir Faysal during the discussions leading up to the ‘redistribution’ of the Middle East between 1917 and 1921, and retained close links with him after he was made the first king of an independent Iraq as Faysal I (1921-1933). He met the regent Abdullah in 1945, and was present at the coronation of the young Faysal II in 1953. But the level of Massignon’s involvement was principally that of personal friendship, solidarity with the deprived and, perhaps above all, that of inter-cultural understanding.

With Mahmoud Shokri al-Alusi, and with his cousin Ali b. No’mān, Massignon developed, as we have seen, a ‘deep intellectual friendship’,<sup>67</sup> maintained by a regular correspondence until Shokri’s death in 1924. With Emir Faysal b. Husayn, later King Faysal I, his friendship was more on the political level, but founded on a deep respect for his intelligence and nobility, his open repayment of confidence with confidence, his Arabic sense of honour and keeping one’s word in the face of international double-dealing by the English and French (to Massignon’s disgust).<sup>68</sup> Remembering the life of Fr Anastase-Marie, the Carmelite priest and ardent Arabic linguist, who became his spiritual adviser and intimate friend, Massignon recalls particularly his role as the ‘companion of my desert crossing’.<sup>69</sup> These long-lasting friendships are but the first of many: how many Iraqi students profited from his friendly support

66 *Bulletin*: ‘Dossier’ pp. 16-17; ‘Principaux séjours’, p. 18.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 35 (quoting *Opera Minora*, vol. III, p. 387).

68 *Ibid.*, p. 39 (quoting *Op. Min.*, vol. III, pp. 414-417).

69 *Ibid.*, p. 14 (quoting *Op. Min.*, vol. III, p. 402). Given Massignon’s allusive style, this moment of physical companionship is probably seen as a sign of a lifelong spiritual friendship.

and stimulation while he was professor at the College de France, in Paris, for some forty years!

Throughout his life, and more particularly in his later years, Massignon constantly intervened in favour of the 'Right of Asylum' and of 'Zones of Security'. He had in mind all those affected by war and conflict: the wounded, hospital personnel, the civil population, and particularly 'the 'Displaced Persons', those wounded by expatriation and despair'.<sup>70</sup> And following a catastrophic flood of the river Tigris in the Baghdad area, Massignon did all he could to encourage aid from the French government and, what he had most at heart, personal gifts from ordinary French people to the suffering people of Iraq, so that 'the people of Iraq should know that they have personal friends in France, friends who will not forget the hospitality generously given by the most humble'.<sup>71</sup>

The friendship offered was gratuitous, but this did not exclude an inter-cultural intention. Massignon had a profound conviction in the 'Primacy of a Cultural Solution in East-West Relations'. In this respect, his immediate aim was to counteract what he saw as an excessive British influence in the development of modern Iraq, and a corresponding increase of French cultural influence. Apart from personal and patriotic reasons (Massignon was 'ousted' by Colonel Lawrence in 1917 from a key role in the Sykes-Picot talks with the Emir Faysal, and he had ardent belief in France's 'supreme international vocation'),<sup>72</sup> Massignon considered the British culture as 'mercenary' and 'pragmatic', centred on commercial and utilitarian values, and favoured the more 'open' French culture with its greater emphasis, as he saw it, on the ideals of 'justice' and 'clarity'. More significantly, he compared and opposed the modern western 'technocratic' culture with the ancient Arabic culture with all its literary, social and religious values, a 'clash' exacerbated by the material and psychological effects of the past and present colonising-colonised imbalance, and by the persistent 'domineering' attitude of supposed western 'superiority'. Such judgements are clearly rhetorical in character, lacking in equity and precision, but they surely point towards that radical inability of so many 'westerners', then and now, to enter into the mental

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70 Ibid., p. 72 (from *Op. Min.*, vol. III, pp. 551-552).

71 Ibid., pp. 73-75 (unpublished letters from the *Archives Louis Massignon*).

72 Ibid., pp. 67-71 (extracts from *Op. Min.*, pp. 208-223).

horizons of a culture that is 'other', and to accept that 'other' as an equal partner in dialogue.

Massignon is far from neglecting the importance of economic clashes, political and religious rivalries and conflicting international interventions (all so evident in the history of modern Iraq), but he always returns to the key importance of the 'cultural'. The appeal for 'Zones of Security' in case of conflict includes a paragraph on the need for such zones 'for works of art, important historical monuments, museums and archives'.<sup>73</sup> And the desire to see the French government and individual French persons participate in aid to flood victims was, as we have seen, largely motivated by the wish to create a deeper level of intercultural friendship.<sup>74</sup> More particularly, Massignon saw language as the main expression of a given culture; hence his constant insistence on the need, both by Arabic speakers, Muslim or Christian, and by their friends, to encourage a revival of serious Arabic studies.<sup>75</sup>

Like his friend, the philosopher Jacques Maritain, but in terms of his own linguistic approach and Islamic studies, Massignon saw culture as the sphere in which human beings express their true identity as persons in community.<sup>76</sup> His detailed historical studies of Baghdad in the 4th/10th century, in the time of her glory, were not just scholarly works on a long-past civilisation. They were intended also to indicate the 'super-historical physiognomies' of cities and communities that would inspire, and so give hope, to those living in the present:

So for each person, each city, each community, there develops its definitive, super-historical physiognomy.<sup>77</sup>

In this context, Massignon recalls two of the ancient names of Baghdad: 'The God-given', 'City of Peace': a peace, however, that often passes through the birthpangs by which 'these Babylons crumble for the new Jerusalems to arise'. For, as the whole of this long and

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 61-66.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, *Religion et Culture*, Paris, 1930; English translation *Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 52 (from 'Le Mirage byzantin dans le miroir bagdadien d'il ya 1,000 ans', *Opera Minora*, pp. 126-141).

complex article indicates, Massignon always understands culture as the concrete human mediator, on the socio-historical level, of the ‘*Presence of the Stranger*’.

The growing and dangerous volume of Displaced Persons shows us that [ ... ] there is that dynamic and immaterial geography of the zones of human suffering, which refuses to accept injustice [ ... ], but which cries out its supernatural hope for one-knows-not-what, with the voice of an Unexpected Stranger outside our laws, of a divine Host who will not allow himself to be treated as a political hostage, nor as a convict submitting to the established authorities, religious or not.<sup>78</sup>

And in every historical period, this hidden ‘Presence’ seems to become visibly, and in some cases, as with Hallāj, dramatically, personified. As the great Ghazali affirmed:

In every age there are men who tend towards God and of whom God will not deprive the world: they are the pegs of the terrestrial tent, for their benediction draws down the divine mercy on the peoples of the earth’ (1908).<sup>79</sup>

Is not Massignon himself another of these God-given ‘pegs’? To quote a certain Mr N Bammate:

We met, by chance, Louis Massignon and I, at Baghdad airport. I asked if I could help ... He hadn’t announced his arrival, he had no means of transport, he was without luggage. He told me that his first move would be to go to the tomb of al-Hallāj. I asked him if I might perhaps arrange some transport for him, but he replied with a quiet smile, as it were looking within and above himself, saying gently:  
‘There are places where one can only go on foot and in all humility.’

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-52 (from *Le Mirage byzantin*).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 46 (from *Op. Min.*, vol. III pp. 94-101).

And I saw him go off, taking the long route from the airport, in the blazing sun, upright, very upright, in his black serge suit.<sup>80</sup>

The long list<sup>81</sup> of Massignon's cultural activities in Baghdad includes, on each occasion, a visit to the tomb of Hallaj. Was it only in memory of a dead man who had in the past helped him personally? Or was it to invoke a living saint in favour of the people of Iraq? Certainly Massignon was grateful to Hallaj as a witness to 'Truth', but certainly also he recognised him as the protector of Baghdad, and as one who speaks, in challenge and encouragement, to the whole Muslim world, and, beyond, to all who search, in this time of ruin and pain, for the ways of 'Peace'.

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Perhaps the best conclusion is to quote in full the symbolic words in which Louis Massignon tries to 'express the inexpressible', and to indicate the 'sweep of his spiritual journey'.<sup>82</sup>

The Stranger who visited me, one May evening, before the Tâq on the river Tigris, in the cabin that was my prison, and the rope tied tightly after two attempts at escape, came in, all doors closed. He caught fire in my heart that the knife had missed, cauterising my despair that He cleaved open, like the phosphorescence of a fish rising up from the bottom of the waters of the abyss. My inner mirror had disclosed Him to me, masked under my own features—exhausted explorer of his desert crossing, betrayed in the eyes of his hosts by his burglar's bag of scientific equipment, and still attempting to disconcert his judges with a final make-up, disguised by touches of jasmine on the lips and Arabic kohl around the eyes,—before my mirror grew dark with His conflagration. No

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80 Ibid., p. 76 (Source: *Universal Congress of Believers*, 'Louis Massignon: Conference of Mr N Bammate', 28 October 1963, p. 4).

81 Ibid., p. 19. List of principal works, from 1908-1962, in relation to Iraq.

82 *Voyage*, pp. 128 and 195 for these comments by his son Daniel; the text itself is on p. 195 (see above n. 52).

name then remained in my memory (not even my own) that could be cried out to Him, to deliver me from His stratagem, and escape His trap. Nothing at all: only the avowal of His sacred solitude: recognition of my primordial unworthiness, diaphanous shroud between us two, intangibly feminine veil of silence: which disarms Him; and which is iridescent with His coming: by the force of His creative word.

The Stranger who took me as I was, in the day of His wrath, inert in His hand like the small sand lizard, overthrew, little by little, all my acquired reflexes, all my precautions, and my human respect. By a reversal of values, He transformed my relative tranquillity as a possessor into the poverty of a beggar-woman. By a 'finalizing' turning-back of the effects towards the causes, of the after-signs towards the archetypes, such as most human beings only experience when dying. And that is my excuse for not proposing any more, here, to look in the biographies of the mystics for a technical vocabulary that would be artificial for 'entering into the presence' of One whom no Name a-priori dares to evoke, neither 'Thee', nor 'Me', nor 'Him', nor 'Us', and if I transcribe a cry, imperfect certainly, but deeply moving, of Rûmi (n° 143), where the essential, insatiable, and transfiguring divine Desire wells up from the subsoil of our silent and naked adoration: at night.

'This Someone, whose beauty makes the Angels jealous,  
Came at break of day, and He looked into my heart;  
He wept, and I wept, until the coming of the dawn,  
Then He asked me: of us two, say, 'who is the lover'?



# LOUIS MASSIGNON AND CHARLES DE FOUCAULD

*Hugues Didier*

Charles de Foucauld<sup>1</sup> (1858-1916) was older than Louis Massignon (1883-1962). The former lived in the heyday of the Third Republic, between the disaster of 1870-71 and the great carnage of the First World War, and died before its true extent was revealed. The latter experienced the rise of Soviet communism and German National Socialism, the Second World War, Auschwitz and Hiroshima, the collapse of the British and French colonial empires, the nuclear rivalry between East and West, and the first Algerian war.

In 1870-1871, the French army was ignominiously put to flight by the Prussian army. The administration of Emperor Napoleon III collapsed. Rioters from the extreme left seized Paris ('la Commune de Paris') The right-wing republican provisional government quelled the Paris Commune in a blood bath and sued for peace with Prussia. Symbolically German unity was proclaimed in the famous *Galerie des Glaces* in the Palace of Versailles. France also lost part of the homeland: all Alsace and the northern part of Lorraine. Initially, the new republican regime had been conservative and very close to traditional Catholic and monarchist circles, but afterwards it became truly and radically 'republican', with the result that the part of Nation who could be presumed to be catholic was gradually marginalized and expelled from the centres of power and from high-ranking offices of state. During the last years of the nineteenth

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was originally published in French as 'Louis Massignon et Charles de Foucauld' in Jacques Keryell (ed.), *Louis Massignon et ses contemporains*, Éditions Karthala, Paris, 1997, pp. 93-109, this English version was revised and extended by the author in 2021. Hugues Didier, is author of a widely regarded introduction to the life and times of Charles de Foucauld which since its publication in 1993 has been updated and reprinted on numerous occasions *Petite vie de Charles de Foucauld*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1993.

and the first years of the twentieth centuries drastic secularizing measures were undertaken.

During the so called Belle Époque, the French were continuously on the brink of civil, ideological, religious and political conflict. The radical republicans looked on the Catholic Church as unpatriotic. The religious and devout reacted against this campaign of defamation by outdoing them on nationalist themes. The unique point of national agreement was the raging thirst for revenge on Germany by regaining Alsace-Lorraine. It is taboo in France to say that this internal unrest had been one of the determining factors leading to the First World War. Taboo also to suggest that the underhand and somewhat hypocritical political and religious discrimination against the Catholic majority of the French nation was, during the Third Republic (1871-1939), and even later, an indirect, but real and decisive factor in the Moslem problem in France. Theoretically, the three *départements* of Algeria were considered as belonging to the Homeland, in the same way as Brittany or Provence, for example. But if the followers of Catholicism were second class citizens, the believers of Islam were non-citizens, French nationals without civil rights, *nationaux français sans droits civiques*. Just as were French women until 1946 ... . This historical foreword is essential for understanding the link between Charles de Foucauld, Louis Massignon and the French-Algerian conflict.

The difference in age and era is not sufficient to define Massignon simply as one among many of Charles de Foucauld's disciples. Massignon was certainly Foucauld's friend and wanted to follow in his footsteps, but not in all of them, taking stock of the lived experience of his elder in a way which was paradoxically both enthusiastic and critical. He often reproached himself for having been disloyal to him. And often, he wanted to correct or improve his spiritual work, or at least take it further. He made the following admission to Mary Kahil in 1954: 'Father Voillaume and Sister Madeleine see Foucauld from a practical aspect for the word today whereas I—who have not defended him enough but who, despite my unworthiness, was appointed his executor—see him such as I have to *complete* him in the *Badaliyya where we love in his place, more than him*, our Muslim brothers.'<sup>2</sup> The two men were thus different, even fundamentally so, *with respect to Islam and the Muslims*.

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2 Louis Massignon, *L'hospitalité sacrée*, Jacques Kerryel (ed.), Nouvelle Cité, Paris, 1987, p. 290.

Given the importance of this subject for both of them and all of us, it is difficult to take this admission lightly. All men and women who during the twentieth century have claimed to draw their inspiration from Charles de Foucauld, chose a path which was often very different from the *Badaliyya*; they did not necessarily recognise Massignon as their guide and adviser: several paths started off in Tamanrasset.

A simple sodality of the Greek Melkite rite, aiming to 'manifest Christ in Islam',<sup>3</sup> the *Badaliyya* draw its inspiration from the writings of Father Foucauld, using the pierced heart of 'Aïssa ibn Maryam' as its motto.<sup>4</sup> Massignon did not want it to be purely Foucauld-esque, however, as in his eyes the reference to Francis of Assisi took precedence.<sup>5</sup> There was no question of uniting it with the 'Foucauld Association'.<sup>6</sup> And yet the *Badaliyya* aims to enter into the mystery of Jesus who was put to death for the salvation of humankind, such as it was actualised or localised by Charles de Foucauld through his violent death in 1916: 'The *Badaliyya* consists, in imitation of our unique Friend (i.e. Jesus Christ) in dying stripped and naked as on the day of our birth, an anathema, if need be, for our Arab and non-Arab Muslim friends.'<sup>7</sup> One might raise the following objections: did Charles de Foucauld really die a martyr, was his death similar to that of the King of Martyrs? For Massignon, the significance of this painful death seems clear or devoid of any ambiguity. And this significance profoundly and firmly links their lives, despite a few differences regarding Islam and the Muslims. In Massignon's eyes, this death even erased their old disagreement, something little talked about but nevertheless fundamental.

For most of his friends and acquaintances, and according to the wording of the notice of his death, Charles de Foucauld did indeed die a martyr, a martyr to two causes that were sacred to them: 'O you

3 *L'hospitalité sacrée*, p. 380.

4 *L'hospitalité sacrée*, p. 312, p. 378: 'Lecture spirituelle faite de préférence dans les Écrits du Père de Foucauld'.

5 J-F Six, *L'aventure de l'amour de Dieu* (80 unpublished letters from Charles de Foucauld to Louis Massignon), Seuil, Paris, pp. 286-287.

6 *L'hospitalité sacrée*, p. 255.

7 *L'hospitalité sacrée*, p. 321, pp. 341-342 '... vœu spontané de vivre et de mourir en terre d'Islam, auprès des âmes musulmanes et à leur service spirituel, comme otages, répondant à leur place ...' Central to Christianity, the idea of sacrificial sacrifice or of redemption is absurd, not to say monstrous, for Islam. V-M Monteil, *Le lincoln de feu*, Vegapress, Paris, 1987, p. 258.

who were his friends ... Remember in your prayers Father Charles of Jesus, Viscount de Foucauld, who was assassinated in Tamanrasset in the hatred of God and of France ... <sup>8</sup> This phrase, which was heroic but in a sense also banal, could be badly misinterpreted at the beginning of this twenty first century. It is crucial to understand it in the political and religious context of the Great War. The finger is pointed not at Sermi Ag Thora, the man who fired a bullet through his head, but at the archenemies of God and of France, the Germans, the 'Boches' ... . The announcement of his death thus adds his name to the unending list of the heroes and martyrs of 1914 to 1918.

All of this is not so far-fetched: in fact the motley group which attacked the border of Tamanrasset in December 1916 was armed and instructed by an European officer of whom it was not known for a long time whether he was a Turk or a German. The man belonged to the army of the Second Reich: his trail was picked up following the end of the conflict. For Laperrine it was clear that the revolt of Aïr was secretly led by 'the Boches'.<sup>9</sup> Charles de Foucauld had volunteered for the fight in Europe, as did the French missionaries and religious who were spread out all over the world. He was told to remain in the Hoggar. He there considered himself to be mobilised locally<sup>10</sup> and, following the example of all the French—both civil and military—living in Maghreb, decided to maintain order and stamp out uprisings in the context of the fight against the Germans and their Fatherland, even onto death.

Strange though this may appear today, it is very natural to 'Alsace-ise' the death of Charles de Foucauld. France considered itself to be something of a martyr nation, a Christ-nation, which was unjustly robbed of Alsace-Lorraine in 1871 and whose very existence was threatened in 1914. Despite the rupture that was created through a series of secularisations, the French, be they Catholic, Protestant, Jew or Freemason, clerical or anticlerical, were practically unanimous in their view of the war against Germany as a holy war, a crusade.<sup>11</sup> In their

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8 G Gorrée, *Les amitiés sahariennes du Père de Foucauld*, 2 vols., F Moncho, Rabat, 1941, vol. I, p. 164.

9 G Gorrée, M Thiout, *Laperrine*, B Arthaud, Grenoble, 1948, p. 168. Foucauld had precise information regarding the risk he ran: see the entry of 6 September 1916 in *Cahiers Charles de Foucauld*, no. 6, Paris, 1947, p. 74.

10 Marguerite Castillon du Perron, *Charles de Foucauld*, Gresson, Paris, 1982, p. 476.

11 Cited in Marguerite Castillon du Perron, *Charles de Foucauld*: 'C'est bien une croisade que cette guerre, croisade pour la liberté du monde menacé, pour la civilisation

mind all the national, cultural and religious antagonisms seemed to take second place in the face of this supreme confrontation, or seemed to them to be of a subordinate nature. Concerning the Muslims and Islam, their question can be summarised as a fearful, 'With us against Germanic barbarity or against us together with Germanic barbarity?' Massignon probably gave in to this anti-German obsession less than others. But he toyed with the idea of a German-Turkish alliance, the connivance of a certain pan-Islamicism with pan-Germanism: 'In the war of races which Germany wanted to start in 1914, it counted particularly on the help of the nationalistic movements among the Muslim populations that were subjected to Russia, England and France.'<sup>12</sup> Today, we have often completely forgotten the ambitious Muslim policy pursued during the Second Reich: in times of war, the activities of Charles de Foucauld in the Hoggar or that of Louis Massignon with the Arabs in the Orient only had meaning in relation to this very policy.<sup>13</sup>

Nowadays, when the French are put under pressure to enter into a definitive marriage with Germany in the context of European integration, the letters sent from Tamanrasset by this man of God, just like the sermons or political speeches from this period, carry a very strange resonance. Germany was the enemy not just of France and the civilised world, but even of God: a centuries long demise of Germany was what was sought.<sup>14</sup> As for its tool within the Muslim world, (i.e. the Ottoman Empire), let it be destroyed!<sup>15</sup> These documents explain the active political and military role played by Charles de Foucauld in the Hoggar, the presence of arms. But did he feel himself to be less biased in this war than the priests and religious in the trenches, from Switzerland to the North Sea? Moreover, he was an officer by training, a person from Strasbourg, an Alsatian, hence a 'natural' victim of the Germans. The words which turn the hermit who was assassinated on

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... ' Foucauld to Massignon in J.-F. Six *L'aventure de l'amour de Dieu*, letter of 15 September 1916, p. 212: 'Jésus ... sauveur même par les armes et les combats car la présente guerre est une croisade contre le paganisme et la barbarie allemands'.

12 Louis Massignon, *Opera Minora*, vol. 1, p. 275 (1920).

13 C Destremau, J Moncelon, *Massignon*, Plon, Paris, 1994, pp. 133-182.

14 Letter of 21 October 1914, R. Bazin, *Charles de Foucauld*, Plon, Paris, 1921, pp. 429-430.

15 *L'aventure de l'amour de Dieu*, p. 195, letter of 6 December 1915: '... la destruction de la Turquie, question de *Devoir* et d'*Honneur*'.

the 2 December 1916 into a victim of those who hate both France and God does not seem in any way exaggerated or strange: the French soldiers in the First World War who died in action were presented in the same manner. Annette Becker has admirably highlighted how their sacrifice was identified with that of Jesus Christ on the Cross.<sup>16</sup> And yet—this is an essential fact—Louis Massignon refused to join what seemed to be a proven opinion concerning the death suffered by his friend. Instead he withdrew him from the battlefield of 1914-1918. Far from ‘alsace-ising’ him like everybody else, like the death of the multitude, he deliberately *islamicised* him.<sup>17</sup>

For Louis Massignon, Charles de Foucauld died *for* Islam and *for* the Muslims, spilling his blood in the redemptory fashion of Jesus: ‘in spite of his military “Berberism” I felt that he was predestined to Islam, that his death was for its sake.’<sup>18</sup> It seems to me that the most important word in this phrase is ‘I felt’. Massignon let himself be guided by his spiritual intuition, judging the material facts to be secondary or perhaps not being in a position to know them all. One sentence in fact quite clearly states that the arms found at Foucauld’s fortress or *bordj* were only a holy stratagem which allowed him to assuage his aspiration to martyrdom. He thus gave his enemies ‘plenary dispensation to shed his blood’. The seeds of the entire *Badaliyya* are there: ‘It is death as a substitute.’<sup>19</sup> It would seem that Massignon confused the situation which Charles de Foucauld effectively found himself in—‘guilty’, it is true, of having weapons, but incapable of ensuring his defence—with his desire to die as a martyr. However everything suggested: the *bordj* was fortified, the weapons were destined to be used! The defence of the Hoggar against the Senoussists and the Germans-Turks, who could push the Touareg to rebellion, was by no means a matter of indifference to him. Foucauld could well have died with a weapon in his hands instead of being assassinated. And he would have done it *out of duty*, like so

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16 A Becker, *La guerre et la foi (de la mort à la mémoire, 1914-1930)*, A Colin, Paris, 1994, pp. 51-53

17 Louis Massignon, *Mardis de Dar Es-Salaam*, J Vrin, Paris, Centre d’Études Dar el-Salam, Cairo, 1959. p. 61: ‘Foucauld n’a pas eu tout de suite cette vocation de victime et d’intercesseur, je dirai de saint ‘islamisé par sa mort’, même pour eux ...’

18 Cited in *Jésus Caritas*, no. 84 (1951), pp. 17-20.

19 Louis Massignon, *Parole donnée*, Seuil, Paris, 1959. p. 71. Destemau, Moncelon, *Massignon* p. 323.

many other Frenchmen during the Great War. In slightly different circumstances, or a few days or weeks later, death would have struck him differently and one would have had to use the words of Charles Péguy: 'Happy are those who died in a just war. Happy the mature ears and the harvested crop'.

Being a disciple of Jesus, Foucauld desired to die as an immolated victim, without defence, for the salvation of sinners. But as a Frenchman, he also wanted, or at least accepted, death as a fighter, either in Europe or on another front, for example in Africa, for the salvation of France. Both these aspirations, shared by many of the Catholics elite of the period, for whom the love of France was a religious duty, belong to the domain of the sacred.<sup>20</sup> They can be combined more or less well, in circumstances where they would not normally be expected. In truth, Foucauld experienced neither kind of death, neither that of the Christian martyr nor that on the field of honour, however different it may have appeared to his friends. Massignon, who clearly remembered the confusion which governed the death of his friend, projected into it what gave meaning to his own life, his offering to Islam, the mysticism of the *Badaliyya*. Without the superimposition of the disciple's meaning of life on the master's death, this death, this life run the risk of being lost in the indecipherable, even in meaninglessness. Massignon and the *Badaliyya* produce this meaning or at least accomplish it: 'I have to complete it.' But even before rescuing them from meaninglessness or from being indecipherable, they safeguarded their memory, rescued them from oblivion. Massignon was the one who initiated the biography written by René Bazin, and who ensured that the *Directoire* was reprinted. He passed on the flame.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore very natural that before God he should have felt responsible for the *memory of Foucauld* and that he was concerned by the distortions to his spiritual heritage by some, or by the thinking about it which had developed.<sup>22</sup>

Massignon attached less importance than others, certainly less than Foucauld, to the syncretism between French national sentiment and

20 A Becker, *La guerre et la foi*, p. 34.

21 *L'aventure ...*, pp. 253-254 and 323-326.

22 *L'hospitalité sacrée*, p. 296 (1955 ed.): '... mon rôle d'héritier de Foucauld, d'éditeur de son *Directoire*. J'ai senti que l'enseignement, la pensée primitive de Foucauld, risquaient d'être modernisés par les organisateurs qui ont toute la confiance du Vatican.'

Catholic religious sentiment.<sup>23</sup> Although he saw it when it was truly there, he was less ready than others to see the hand of Germany in the turbulence of the Muslim world during the Great War. He was thus quite sceptical with regard to the *Zeitgeist*, and was therefore unsatisfied with the meaning generally attributed to the death of his friend: for Massignon, Foucauld shed his blood less for God and for France, for his own, than for others, *for Muslims*. Naturally it was easy to find men who persistently pulled Foucauld in the opposite direction, towards the accentuation of an amalgamation of the patriotic and religious. Pierre Nord would be an example.<sup>24</sup> Besides, this amalgamation took on a particular vigour between the end of the Second World War and that of the Algerian War. Given the orientation of Pope Pius XII and the Vatican on the colonial question, the insistence by some or many to make Charles de Foucauld into the ‘saint of colonialism’ or ‘saint of colonialization’<sup>25</sup> was counterproductive and probably contributed to him not being raised to the altars. For Massignon these men monstrously distorted the face of the spiritual master from whom he drew his inspiration. But for them it seemed obvious that the man who wanted to organise the defence of the French Hoggar in 1915 would have wanted to keep Algeria French between 1954 and 1962, had he still been alive.

The conflict of interpretation between the ‘tenants of French Algeria’, men mixing different political persuasions with theological perspectives on the one hand, and Massignon and his friends who for their part also constituted a broad mix, on the other, became extremely violent. On 17 February 1958 at the diocesan student house, the conference table was taken by storm. Massignon was beaten: he was to lose the use of one of his eyes. The precious notebook with letters sent to him by Foucauld, was torn out of his hands, trampled upon and thrown into the hall. Massignon, who aspired to martyrdom through fidelity to Christ just like Foucauld did, believed, and hoped that his end had come. He had already received death threats: partisans of French Algeria wanted him dead. He thus escaped death in what he was subsequently to call ‘*probation foucauldienne*’, that is to say a Foucauld-style

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<sup>23</sup> Destremau, Moncelon, *Massignon*, p. 132.

<sup>24</sup> P Nord, *Charles de Foucauld, Français d'Afrique*, Paris, 1959. And many other authors ...

<sup>25</sup> *L'hospitalité sacrée*, p. 260; Destremau, Moncelon, *Massignon*, p. 279.



spiritual testing.<sup>26</sup> For his aggressors, and even for some people greatly opposed to violence present that day, Massignon was an imposter who had absolutely no right to pretend to continue or inherit Foucauld's heritage. Their proof? Algeria and the Muslims.

Obviously, one might refuse to question whether the ideas of both men on Algeria are complementary or contradict each other, pointing out that they did not live at the same time and did not experience the same events. No one can make the dead speak and find out what de Gaulle would do today, what Father Foucauld would have done in 1958 ... But in this case, the most striking element of Algerian history between 1870 and 1945 or 1954 is by no means the large number of unexpected events, but the massive immobility of a socio-political system *sui generis*. Is it necessary to remind readers that Algeria was never French in the same sense as Brittany, Corsica or even Martinique have been French for many years? Is not the fact that in 1848 the Algerian territory was annexed to France, but *not its inhabitants*, a prefiguration of the situation in Transjordan and Gaza as regards Israel after 1967? That the ambivalent status of 'French nationals without civic rights' which the Muslims of Algeria were granted (1865) make them, in fact, both subjects and foreigners. The expression 'French Algeria' was thus both equivocal and deceitful: it indicated *in reality* a bi-national territory such as Cyprus or Ottoman Bulgaria, a society founded on ethnic and denominational separation, the *very opposite of France*, a nation forged by a State that obstinately ignored the mother tongue or original religion of its citizens. More than some, but less than others, Charles de Foucauld understood the unjust and precarious nature of a 'French Algeria'. The texts in which he criticises this strange political and social system and announces its probable end<sup>27</sup> do not show extraordinary prophetic powers. They must be compared with the gloomy writings of journalists reports or parliamentary enquiries which flourished between 1880 and 1914 with regard to Algeria. The French were so little assured of themselves that many experts predicted the demise of their domination in North Africa as soon as the first shot of the European war was fired.<sup>28</sup>

26 *L'aventure ...*, pp. 302-307.

27 J-F Six, *Itinéraire spirituel de Charles de Foucauld*, Seuil, Paris, 1958, p. 331. Letters of 1907 and 1908.

28 See *Revue indigène* 1913, p. 602; or Georges Clemenceau in *L'homme libre* of 24 July

Looking at these documents on Algeria, one has to note that Foucauld, like so many military men in the African army, felt quite a strong antipathy towards those who still called themselves ‘civilians’, not yet ‘Europeans’ or ‘Pieds-Noirs’. But there is nowhere any mention of a call for an end to French domination or the accession of Algeria to independence. Was he a colonialist or an anti-colonialist? It all depends on what one understands by the term ‘colony’: if it is the system which was in place in the Algeria of his time and also during the lifetime of his friend Massignon, then the hermit of the Hoggar was an ‘anti-colonialist’. But if ‘colony’ is understood in the Republican meaning of the word, i.e. as a quasi-province or *département d’Outre-Mer*, then Foucauld can be termed a colonialist. He considered that the *integration* of Algeria (or of all colonies in general) was an end worth seeking. But this could not be achieved in the foreseeable future. Before seriously contemplating their *integration*, the Muslims in North Africa first of all had to be introduced to *progress*.<sup>29</sup> For France this was an imperative moral duty as much as a historical necessity. This would take time: centuries ... Centuries of *cohabitation* between the French and the Maghrebians. Yet in Foucauld’s eyes, as in the eyes of many other experts or decision-makers of his time, the real Algeria turned its back on this fraternal (or utopian) project. The Algeria of the *French of Algeria* was the only Algeria to exist, and perhaps the only one which could exist.

The vociferous and brutal young men who attacked Massignon on 17 February 1958 would not have known what to make of these nuances or distinctions. Like Foucauld, like many other generous (but perhaps not very realistic?) spirits, Massignon believed a *shared life* between French and Muslim Algerians to be possible and something to be desired. Essentially, the continuity between Foucauld and Massignon was complete. Although the latter accused himself of having adhered, like Foucauld, to the *Berber myth*<sup>30</sup>—which consisted in relying on the original language and civilisation of North Africa against Arabism and against Islam—he was an *integrationist* like him (more than him?).

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1913: ‘Nul n’ignore qu’en cas de guerre nous aurions sur les bras une formidable insurrection en Algérie et au Maroc, sans parler de la Tunisie’. The same pessimism was already detectable in François Charveriat, *Huit jours à travers la Kabylie*, Plon, Nourrit et Cie., Paris, 1889.

29 Castillon du Perron, *Charles de Foucauld*, p. 491.

30 Massignon’s *mea culpa* in Destremau, Moncelon, *Massignon*, pp. 239-240.

No separation in sight! In 1946, Massignon wrote, 'The solution is assimilation.'<sup>31</sup> A noble soul could only imagine French-Algerian integration as a mutual one: 'We have to introduce Arabic as the second national language in Algeria if we want to remain "among ourselves" there.'<sup>32</sup> In 1958, during a meeting of the *Badaliyya* he naturally evoked 'the North African vocation (of France), especially in Algeria and in the Sahara'.<sup>33</sup> Being against the torture inflicted on the Algerian nationalists therefore did not mean agreement with the goals pursued by them. Massignon supported the Algerian policy of General de Gaulle without realising in time that the founder of the Fifth Republic did not aim to grant the Muslim Algerians access to freedom and dignity or even their reconciliation with France, but the separation of both countries, the end to a joint life that was judged harmful and impossible.<sup>34</sup> De Gaulle was not interested in a Mediterranean cohabitation nor in Muslim-Christian dialogue.<sup>35</sup> It is unlikely that Father de Foucauld would have applauded from the heavens above the divorce between France and Algeria in 1962. The desolation felt by Massignon during the last years of his life probably comes from the feeling of having been overtaken by a profound, and, to human eyes, irreparable evolution, one totally contrary to what constituted the meaning of his life, and also that of Father de Foucauld.<sup>36</sup>

His '*probation foucauldienne*' of 17 February 1958 thus placed suffering Algeria at the heart of Massignon's loyalty towards his elder. The young people who attacked him and tore the precious folder containing the letters from him, an almost sacramental sign of his vocation as executor, obviously did not know what they were doing, nor did they

31 Massignon, p. 362.

32 *La parole donnée*, p. 139 (1955 edn.).

33 In V-M Monteil, *Le lincent du feu*, p. 127.

34 Massignon came late to an understanding of the true intentions of de Gaulle: Massignon, p. 387 and 391.

35 In this respect the '*badiths*' of de Gaulle are filled with anti-Arab sentiment and distrust of all things Mediterranean. See, for example, Massignon, p. 388.

36 J Waardenburg, *L'Islam dans le miroir de l'Occident*, Mouton, Paris, 1962, writes 'En ce qui concerne la politique musulmane que Massignon avait envisagée pour la France, elle ne peut pas encore être traitée scientifiquement'. Now that the time has passed, can we not go so far as to suggest that Massignon was exasperated by the fundamental point of agreement between French public opinion and the Algerian nationalists: a refusal to live together, the desire to erect a border between the two countries?

know the nature or degree of the Frenchness that the central Maghreb temporarily possessed. On this subject, on which they were definitively less in disagreement than one would believe, Foucauld and Massignon fundamentally agreed despite living at different times, despite the lesser degree of sacralisation of French national sentiment in the case of the latter, despite his abjuring *Berberism* and ultimately siding with Gandhi's non-violent stance. Massignon nearly died 'for' French Algeria and morally agonised very painfully over it,<sup>37</sup> in the same way as, according to him, Father de Foucauld shed his blood on 2 December 1916, 'for Islam and the Muslims, as a substitutionary victim: an unexpected extension of the *Badaliyya*, or its Franco-Christian counterpart.

As was mentioned earlier, the transformation from the hermit of Tamanrasset to the bleeding sacrificial victim in this supreme moment was also, for his disciple, his 'Islamicisation'. This means that their ancient disagreements on Islam and the Muslims finally became void. What of it, then? It can be said straight away that we will never know the last word of history for a largely material reason: Massignon was an Islamicist by profession and left behind many documents which allow us to discover his views on Muslim religion and Muslim-Christian relations. By contrast, in the case of Father de Foucauld these subjects were never dealt with in any systematic way: they are mentioned here and there in passing, in his letters. This difference is made even more difficult by the difference in character between the two men: Massignon loved to make confidences, to reveal himself, even to the point of sometimes embarrassing his interlocutor. De Foucauld was reserved or meagre of words, if not silent on quite a large number of his experiences. A comparison between the accounts of their conversion, in order to discover the role of Muslims and Islam in it, very clearly shows the contrast between them. *Visitation de l'Étranger* can rightly pass as the most sublime, or one of the most sublime texts left behind by Massignon.<sup>38</sup> One does not tire of reading and rereading it and finding new and more profound meanings. Foucauld, who showed his great talent as a writer both in his book on Morocco and in his letters, only left behind two diffident accounts on the same subject.<sup>39</sup>

37 Massignon, pp. 401-403. *Hospitalité sacrée*, pp. 299-300.

38 J Keryell, *Jardin donné: Louis Massignon à la recherche de L'Absolu*, St Paul, Paris, 1993, pp. 190-191; *L'aventure ...*, pp. 42-43.

39 J-F Six, *Itinéraire spirituel ...*, pp. 55-58.

To use the words of Jean-François Six, it is certainly right to say that 'both encountered Islam when they were agnostic and have been marked by it throughout their lives: Islam seduced them at first, after which they detached themselves from it in some way and converted to the Christian faith.'<sup>40</sup> But what exactly in Islam? And through which paths, which instances occurrences? Islam was at the same time a world, a civilisation, a law, a faith and a religion, and the paths which lead or can lead to it are necessarily many. In speaking of these paths in the singular therefore, as a unique reality, which is perceptible at all times, a place or circumstance of the same kind, runs the risk of leading one astray or leaving one in the lurch. A relatively precise fact emerges however: like so many other men during the 'Belle Époque', Massignon and Foucauld were perhaps not aesthetes, but certainly men who were very sensitive to beauty. They thus perceived *Islam as an art*, as a religion that was founded on and merged with an aestheticism.<sup>41</sup> The following sentence by Jean-François Six thus reads like a tautology: 'Islam first of all seduced them'. It is indeed a religion or a world which, by its constitution, radically, is a place of beauty, a seduction.

*Seduction:* 'Islamism is extremely seductive. It has seduced me excessively', Charles de Foucauld confessed 15 years after his conversion.<sup>42</sup> At the beginning of his spiritual evolution, most likely on his return from his Moroccan exploration (1883-84), he effectively felt a greater affinity, as far as religion was concerned, to the Maghrebien subjects of France than to his own religion: 'Less than any other, the religion of my childhood seemed acceptable to me with its 1 = 3 that I could not resolve to question; I liked Islamism very much, the simplicity of its dogma, its moral simplicity ...'.<sup>43</sup> According to the interpretation of some of his friends, Laperrine in particular, he even wanted to become Muslim.<sup>44</sup> But it is a fact that he never pronounced the *shahada*! Nevertheless he certainly accepted that he would find himself at times, and perhaps lastingly, in an ambiguous between-

40 *L'aventure* ..., p. 11.

41 For a proper understanding of this it is necessary to live, or to have lived in the land of Islam: Hugues Didier, *Petite Vie de Charles de Foucauld*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1996, pp. 55-58.

42 *L'aventure* ..., p. 20 (1920 ed.).

43 In D and R Barrat, *Charles de Foucauld et la fraternité*, Seuil, Paris, 1958, p. 35.

44 *Itinéraire spirituel*, ... p. 70 (1901 ed.).

two-worlds, between-two-religions, an accusation of mortal sin in the confessional later on: 'Words uttered when travelling, making believe that I was a Muslim.'<sup>45</sup> In the beginning he had to overcome two obstacles, one within Christianity and the other outside: 'At times, the miracles of the Gospels seemed unbelievable to me; sometimes I wanted to include passages from the Koran in my prayers.'<sup>46</sup> Jean-François Six comments on the mysterious 'I wanted' as follows: 'Whether it was a temptation or whether he really did it, we do not know.' It is difficult, however, to leave it at that, as it really is a key stage in the process of conversion, and a key point of difference or convergence between him and Massignon. The question is: did Charles de Foucauld really pray with the Koran, in the Koran? One naturally thinks of the short suras, and, more particularly of the first sura, *al-Fatiha*. If yes, his practice was a moment like that, later, of Massignon and his *Badaliyya*, with the consent of Pope Pius XII<sup>47</sup> this clearly demonstrates how much ground was covered in half a century, as Foucauld accuses himself in terms of sin or temptation.

When he evoked Charles de Foucauld, he was never for him a 'director of conscience' in the sense in which this term was normally understood during this time. Massignon is a child of his time. He only knew the Foucauld of his last few years, a man deeply immersed in his enormous work on the Touareg languages, which he also calls with a touch of irony his 'military Berberism', with his later attitude towards Islam, which was quite cold and distant if not hostile, more so at any rate than in earlier times (during the years 1888-1900), i.e. infinitely less friendly than before his conversion. The 24 letters by Charles de Foucauld to Massignon and the five meetings on 21-22 February 1909, 21 and 27 February 1911, 23 June and 1 September 1913<sup>48</sup> did not constitute a continuation of the equivalent of that communal life outside of which, in Catholicism as in all the world religions, it is very difficult if not impossible to establish a relationship of spiritual director and disciple. By not moving to the Hoggar near Father de Foucauld, as suggested by the latter and urged by Claudel,

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45 Already afflicting him with remorse in 1897: p. 44.

46 *Itinéraire spirituel* ..., p. 70 (1901 ed.).

47 *Le linceul du feu*, p. 259; *L'hospitalité sacrée*, pp. 298-299, approval given by Mgr J-B Montini to a Ramadan-style fast.

48 *Le linceul du feu*, p. 52.

Massignon deprived both himself and us of the opportunity to get to know him better. It was a fortunate 'mistake' nevertheless, as it is very unlikely that Massignon would have been able to deploy his genius and charisma at Tamanrasset ...

The thesis on Hallaj 'saved' Massignon and deprived Foucauld of a companion and a successor. Following the hermit's advice, he first had to finish and defend his thesis.<sup>49</sup> *Classical Arabic* (but is that really another subject than Hallaj or the Koran?) also 'saved' him: Berber studies did not attract him, and it seemed impossible to him to prefer the language of some nomads in the Sahara to the 'liturgical language of Islam', the common good of a great part of the human race.<sup>50</sup> Between classical Arabic and Berber there obviously occurred a disjunction or a decisive misunderstanding. Hallaj and the language of the *Dād* were for Massignon the place where he found Christ: he could not renounce it. He put it as follows: 'How could I explain all this to Foucauld who had hardly meditated on the Arabic Koran, preferred Berber to Arabic, even though his last words were "baghi nmut", that is, "I will (or want to) die" in Arabic.'<sup>51</sup> Although he was *Islamicised* through his violent death, Foucauld had not entered Islam 'axially'.<sup>52</sup> The fault of classical Arabic, the fault of the Koran, obviously. Just as regrettable in the eyes of Massignon was the fact that Foucauld was self-taught in linguistics, and the only intellectual training he possessed was that 'of a specialised civil servant from the Arab Desk'.<sup>53</sup>

Although this did not harm their profound friendship, the two men were unable to understand each other regarding a question that was linguistic, aesthetic, symbolical and thus also religious: the articulation (linkage-connection-relationship?) of classical Arabic with the other world languages, more particularly Berber. Was this the incomprehension between a military man and a university man? One might be tempted to think so if the antagonism between army and

49 *L'aventure* ..., p. 120 (1912 ed.).

50 Clarification by Daniel Massignon: Paul Claudel-Daniel Massignon, *Correspondance*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1973, p. 226.

51 *Parole donnée*, p. 67 (1959 ed.).

52 Guy Harpigny, *Islam et christianisme selon Louis Massignon*, Centre d'histoire des religions, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1981, p. 68.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 68. A variety of opinions by Massignon on Foucauld as a scholar: 'intellectuel libre' (*L'aventure*, p. 310), 'homme de science positive' (*ibid.* p. 66), *Parole donnée*, p. 292: (je lui dois) 'la méthode de d'investigation sociologique de l'Islam'.

university in French society had been a characteristic of their era, of the good years of the Third Republic. But this is not the case. Many graduates from Saint-Cyr (the French military academy) would have become university men by choice and tendency if their patriotic duty had not turned their gaze to the blue line of the Vosges between 1871 and 1914. Such was the case of Charles de Foucauld. Nevertheless it is also true, as General Henry de Castries wrote in the last years of the nineteenth century, that 'Islam today is studied by two categories of people: by Orientalists of erudition, and by those whom I will call the Arabic specialists of Algeria, for want of a better expression.'<sup>54</sup> Massignon belonged to the first category, Foucauld to the second. But to talk of it in those terms would be to forget the communication which existed between the two categories at the time, i.e. between the army and the university. Massignon was first at the Collège de France between 1919 and 1924 as supply lecturer for Alfred Le Châtelier, the founder of Ouargla, entirely a product of the Arab Desk.<sup>55</sup>

Besides, Foucauld's intellectual and linguistic training, which was perhaps underestimated by Massignon, was not negligible. It is impossible to consider him self-taught: rather, he was taught by competent teachers at the Société Géographique d'Alger before his departure to Morocco. He was not someone who ignored classical Arabic, the Koran and Islamic studies<sup>56</sup> in order to study only the Maghreb and Berber Arabic dialects, but a convert who *for religious reasons* ceased to cultivate the disciplines in which Massignon was to excel. However, everything suggests that the latter was completely unaware of this aspect of the biography of Foucauld.

This intellectual renunciation has to be understood in terms of the thirst for abjection and humility which led him as far as La Trappe and Nazareth, but also of the strong desire he felt to embrace Islam. Charles de Foucauld betrayed the extent of the temptation which he felt without stopping to describe it when he said, concerning Abbé Huvelin, 'Just as I looked for a good thaleb (sic) to teach me Arabic, I looked for a well-informed priest to provide me with information

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54 Henri de Castries, *L'Islam: impressions et études*, A Colin, Paris, 1896, p. 7.

55 Harpigny, *Islam et christianisme* ..., p. 210.

56 *Cahiers Charles de Foucauld*, no. 6 (1947), p. 127, testimony of Oscar McCarthy in 1883: 'Depuis son retour à Alger, à la fin de 1881, il n'a cessé de se préparer à ce long voyage par les études les plus suivies sur la langue arabe vulgaire et littérale et sur le berbère ...'.



on the Catholic religion.<sup>57</sup> Read superficially by someone who has never lived in the Maghreb, this sentence means, 'Because he lived there, he sought to speak the language of the country.' This is not true, however: the French learned *dialectal Arabic* when they learned the language, in the market-place, at the barracks, with their neighbours or their servants, or in the arms of a prostitute. It is indeed *classical Arabic* that a good *talib* taught him. As a proof of this is a sentence written in 1888, explaining to a friend that he had spent his time in Paris 'reading Arabic and studying in outline the regions of the Levant'.<sup>58</sup> Between 1884 and 1888 he had thus acquired a level of competence which enabled him to read Arabic the whole day long. Most probably he lost it subsequently, as without regular practice, classical Arabic like all other language, or perhaps more than other languages, gets forgotten. Without making the biographical detour that we have just made one cannot understand the profound meaning of the sentence, 'Islamism is extremely seductive. It has seduced me excessively.' The perception of Islam *as an art* cannot emerge from a simple view as a tourist on the whiteness of the dwellings or the veils of the women, or of the order of those praying in a mosque. It presupposes a knowledge of the unity which is constituted by Arabic scripture, Arabic as a language, its holy book and its psalmody, an approach of the mystery or the sacrament (I use the word cautiously) of the *I'jaz al-Qur'an*, the inimitability of the Koran. And how could one learn classical Arabic without going through the Koran, without feeling the urge to chant at least the *Fatiba*? 'I *wanted* to include passages from the Koran in my prayers', thus very likely means, 'I could not help but include ...'. Like Massignon and before him, whatever the latter might have said about this, Foucauld had entered into Islam 'axially', but took a completely different path subsequently.

It is not possible to say that Father de Foucauld did not try to understand Islam, that he had a poor opinion of it, or that it had little significance in his life. Louis Gardet was not wrong to write that 'Charles de Jésus is not a master of Islamic studies.'<sup>59</sup> But it would be more accurate to say that he did not allow himself to be one, just as at a certain moment of his life, his conversion, he fled Islam just as it is

57 *Itineraire spirituel*, p. 57.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 78.

59 In *Mardis de Dar Es-Salaam*, p. 131.

appropriate to flee a temptation, in proportion to its beauty, and then classical Arabic without which the Koran has no spark, without which there are also neither Islamic studies or an Islamic scholar. Foucauld's theology of Islam is the notebook which only contains blank pages in Béni-Abbès or in Tamanrasset, the most unpublishable of his works, and a cancelled theological appointment with Massignon. What does it matter, in a sense, if his first prayer was said in Arabic, as was that of his disciple and friend much later, if he thought afterwards that it was not valid.

What kept Foucauld from converting to Islam and made him even see it as a temptation and reject it? A few remarks in his letters allow us to reply without hesitation: the disjunction between the beautiful and the good among the Muslims, or the all too well unrecognised disagreement between the faith of Islam and its morals. He hated the *shari'a*. His love of Berberism has to be understood not only in relation to the dream of so many French people in the Maghreb, of pulling down the wall which isolated them from the Muslim masses by turning to the Berbers. In his eyes it was in itself a point very much in favour of the Touaregs, that they had 'the faith of Islam without its customs'.<sup>60</sup> A document dated from 1905 illustrates this contrast between faith and morals in the most brutal fashion imaginable: 'the three concupiscences—sense, pride, avarice—reign in most souls; the outside of this Muslim word is *seductive*—seductive like people who are made-up and dressed in flashy rags that one can see from far; when one sees them from near, they are horrible' (sic).<sup>61</sup> Behind this very abrupt judgement one can hear the muted echo of the ups and downs of the path which lead him from the 'good *talib*' to the confessional of Abbé Huvelin. The echo, too, of the words of apostle Paul in the first chapter of the Letter to the Corinthians (13,1): 'If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.' Massignon was able to express this dual movement of attraction and revulsion towards Islam which was felt by Foucauld in more affable or courteous terms, 'In Morocco, in

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60 *L'aventure*, p. 62.

61 Castillon du Perron, *Charles de Foucauld*, p. 404. Massignon perhaps said the same in a far less abrupt manner to Mary Kahil in 1934: '... les musulmans n'ont que la foi, celle d'Abraham (ils disent dans chaque prière à la 'Fatiha') puisqu'ils n'ont ni la charité théologale ni l'espérance messianique.' *L'hospitalité sacrée*, p. 188.

the Arab desert ... he found himself in the presence of Islam, and ... the contact with this dominating faith, which burns the believer to cinders under the inaccessible sun of divine unity, brought back the sun of divine unity, brought back *in reaction* his incredulity towards Christian doctrine, which proclaims the *pre-eminence of charity over faith*. And his gaze, going beyond the empty *mihrab* in the naked mosque, stopped at the sacrifice offered in the white, imageless nave of the Cistercian (Abbey).<sup>62</sup>

To deceive is to fail. Massignon *failed* Charles de Jésus by not going to live with him in the Hoggar, as the latter thought that he recognised in the young man a companion and a successor. Foucauld, in turn, deceived Massignon by not understanding the decisive role played by both Hallaj and the language of the *Dād* in the supernatural Visitation of the Stranger. Between them there was something lacking: in its own way, long after the immolation of 1916, the *Badaliyya* functioned partly to fill this lack. I can see it in Henry de Castries, a common relation. This military man of high culture and an elevated spirituality was to be the man who provided Father de Foucauld with a copy of the work of the young Orientalist on Leo Africanus.<sup>63</sup> This was a fundamental act of mediation, as it was thanks to him that in the disarray of his Baghdad night Massignon was able to invoke the name of Foucauld. The almost complete lack of a Foucauld-esque theology of Islam created an asymmetry between the two men, or a discontinuity in their spiritual transmission. Although we cannot write it today in his stead, we are entitled to guess the broad outlines of it through the book by Henry de Castries. Father de Foucauld had recognised himself in it and had provided him with more than a symbolical imprimatur: 'You re-establish the truth.' 'Your book *is not a profane book*: by teaching me to better know the Muslims whom I love with all my heart it will make me better able to do good to them, which is my very ardent desire.'<sup>64</sup>

Taking up ideas which had already been expressed by the Abbé de Broglie in 1886,<sup>65</sup> Castries identified Islam with the faith of Abraham

62 Massignon, 26 February 1917: *Bulletin des Amitiés Charles de Foucauld*, no. 111 (1993), p. 14.

63 Destremau, Moncelon, *Massignon*, p. 40.

64 Letters to Henri de Castries (8 July and 11 August 1901).

65 Abbe de Broglie, *Problèmes et conclusions de l'histoire des religions*, Putois-Cretté, Paris, 1885, pp. 216-241, 'islamisme'. Though he declares his hostility to *sharia* and to a morality based on imitating Muhammad, the author accepts the sincerity of

and with a providential deployment of the divine Word. In it, we can almost find the seeds of some of Massignon's thoughts. This Christian soldier had received Islam in the depths of his soul as an imperious reminder. His great book begins with the account of a prayer on the sand:<sup>66</sup>

He cried with a grave voice, 'Master, it is the hour of the *asser*.' Immediately my troopers, who believed themselves to be sufficiently authorised by this simple cry, dismounted and got ready for the prayer of the *asser* together, the communal prayer, the most pleasing to God both in Islam and in Christianity.

I moved away: I would have liked to disappear in a hole! I could see those wide burnouses bend down together in a superb gesture at the ritual prostrations; I heard, reverting to a more audible tone, the invocation, *Allah Akbar!* God is the greatest! and this attribute of divinity took in my mind a meaning that all the metaphysical demonstrations of theodicy had never managed to give it. I was seized by an unspeakable feeling of unease, both from shame and from anger. I could feel that in this moment of prayer these Arab troopers, who were so servile a moment ago, were conscious of gaining back their superiority over me. I would have wanted to shout to them that I, too, believed, that I knew how to pray, how to adore.

They were so much in harmony with this grandiose landscape, these men who were majestically draped in their woollen garments! ... I alone in this Saharan vastness, I was disparate with my tight military uniform, a ridiculous mould of the human form, an almost indecent

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the latter and of his immediate successors, the basic identity between the Muslim act of faith and that of Abraham, and the inclusion of Islam in the history of salvation. Worth reading for an interesting perspective which relativises the novelty of Vatican II ... .

66 Henri de Castries, *L'Islam*, p. 3-6; cited in *Lettres de Charles de Foucauld à Henry de Castries*, Grasset, 1938. 'Dans son article 'Louis Massignon et Hubert Lyautey', André le Révérend fait très justement remarquer la 'parenté' entre Henry de Castries, Charles de Foucauld, Hubert Lyautey, et Louis Massignon.' Jacques Keryell, *Jardin donné*, p. 88.

garment ... So they stood face to face, those descendants of the two sons of Noah: they, the sons of Shem proud of their faith, adoring the God of their fathers, the God who had visited the tent of Abraham; I, the Aryan, son of Japhet, the one who extends through conquest.

When I was back in my *bordj*, I tried to put down my impressions on paper that I felt more and more attracted by the beauty of Islam. It seemed to me that for the first time, in this nomadic desert life, I had really seen men give homage to the divinity. My thoughts went to those Christian temples where most often only women are at prayer, and I felt indignant towards this irreligiosity of the men of the Occident'.

UNIVERSAL AND LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON  
RELIGIOUS FREEDOM  
IN THE MUSLIM WORLD:  
JOHN PAUL II AND PIERRE CLAVERIE

*Isabel Olizar*

John Paul II was committed to the promotion of religious freedom in the Muslim World.<sup>1</sup> Papal diplomacy was an important aspect of this as John Paul II pursued diplomatic agreements and diplomatic relations between the Holy See and states in the Muslim World, and as he engaged with political leaders. These diplomatic relations also helped facilitate John Paul II's many Apostolic Journeys to states in the Muslim World, important opportunities to engage with political leaders.

John Paul II's Apostolic Journeys were, however, primarily spiritual, and provided opportunities to speak to Muslims directly. His 1985 Casablanca Address is perhaps the most important example of this. Here, John Paul II affirmed the Church's commitment to dialogue with Muslims, as articulated at the Second Vatican Council, but also articulated a theologically grounded defence of religious freedom in respectful dialogue with Muslims.

John Paul II was aware of the difficulties faced by many Christians in the Muslim World. He offered them encouragement, seeing their very presence, and their witness, as important for the development of just societies and authentic religious freedom in the Muslim World. The Algerian Catholic Church offers an example of such presence. Between 1994 and 1996, against the background of a bloody civil war, 19 religious were killed, having chosen to remain in Algeria despite threats to their lives. The Bishop of Oran, Pierre Claverie, OP, was

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1 I use here 'Muslim World' to describe the geographic, political and cultural entity in some way shaped by Islam. It was a term used by Louis Massignon. See Anthony O'Mahony, 'Eastern Christianity and Jesuit Scholarship on Arabic and Islam' in *Philosophy, Theology and the Jesuit Tradition: 'The Eye of Love'*, (eds) Anna Abram, Peter Gallagher, and Michael Kirwan (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 159-273, 180.

the last of these to be killed, having offered a forthright and public defence of religious freedom, proposing a God of love, and setting out a vision of Algeria in which there was space for ‘humanity in the plural’.<sup>2</sup>

### PAPAL DIPLOMACY

Through the diplomacy of the Holy See John Paul II sought to defend religious freedom in the Muslim World. During his papacy, five diplomatic agreements were made between the Holy See and states in the Muslim World.<sup>3</sup> These agreements, following the tradition of nineteenth-century concordats, sought to establish and protect a legally defined space to allow the Church to undertake her mission. Peter Petkoff writes of these ‘There is no sense of a clash of civilizations or doctrinal orthodoxies but a notion that religious freedom can be negotiated on mutual terms and any such consensus may be protected by the very pragmatic mechanisms of international law.’<sup>4</sup>

John Paul II also continued the practice of his predecessors and expanded the number of diplomatic relations with states in the Muslim World.<sup>5</sup> Ungo Sacco argues that John Paul II did so ‘In order to increase his possibilities of dialogue, with the intention, among other

2 This is the English title of an essay written by Pierre Claverie. Reprinted in Jean-Jacques Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out: Pierre Claverie of Algeria* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 258-261. The original French essay ‘Humanité plurielle’ appeared in *Nouveaux Cahiers du Sud*, January 1996, and was reprinted by *le Monde*, August 4-5 1996, after the assassination of Claverie.

3 Morocco in 1983, Ivory Coast in 1989 and 1992, Kazakhstan in 1998, the PLO in 2000 and Albania in 2002. McEachern gives detailed accounts of each of these agreements in relation to the question of religious freedom. Jaclyn O’Brien McEachern, ‘Diplomatic Activity in Service of Papal Teaching: The Promotion of Religious Freedom in Relations with Selected Islamic States During the Pontificate of John Paul II’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, The Catholic University of America, 2010).

4 Peter Petkoff, ‘Legal Perspectives and Religious Perspectives of Religious Rights under International Law in the Vatican Concordats (1963-2004)’, *Law and Justice—Christian Law Review* 158 (2007), 30-53 (47-48).

5 Mali 1979, Togo 1981, Guinea 1986, Guinea-Bissau 1986, Chad 1988, Albania 1991, Bahrain 2000, Azerbaijan 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina 1992, Kazakhstan 1992, Kyrgyzstan 1992, Uzbekistan 1992, Jordan 1994, Tajikistan 1996, Turkmenistan 1996, Libya 1997, Yemen 1998, Djibouti 2000, Qatar 2002. See <https://holyseemission.org/contents/mission/diplomatic-relations-of-the-holy-see.php>.

things, of obtaining statutes of religious freedom in Islamic or mainly Islamic countries, intended as barriers to religious totalitarianism'.<sup>6</sup> The significant number of diplomats from the Muslim World accredited to the Holy See enabled John Paul II to speak to them directly about challenges to religious freedom in the Muslim World, through his Annual Addresses to the Diplomatic Corps,<sup>7</sup> but also to individual ambassadors on their presentation of credentials.<sup>8</sup>

John Paul II engaged with political leaders from the Muslim World, with more than fifty formal meetings with Muslim leaders.<sup>9</sup> His many Apostolic Journeys to the Muslim World provided important opportunities to address political leaders and call for religious freedom.<sup>10</sup> One notable example is John Paul II's address to General Omar Al-Bashir, President of Sudan, in 1993. John Paul II had insisted on including Sudan in his pilgrimage to Benin and Uganda as he

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6 Ungo Columbo Sacco, *John Paul II and World Politics: Twenty Years of Search for a New Approach 1978-1998* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999) 41.

7 For examples of this, see John Paul II's 1990, 1999 and 2002 Addresses to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See.

8 See for example the evolution of John Paul II's addresses to new Indonesian ambassadors: in 1991 he suggested to the new ambassador that Indonesia could play a positive role in promoting religious freedom. John Paul II, 'To the Ambassador of Indonesia', in Francesco Gioia, (ed.) *Interreligious Dialogue. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963-2005)* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006) 501. Address given November 7, 1991; but in 1996 he noted the emergence of 'certain distorted interpretations of religion and the dangers of religious intolerance'. John Paul II, 'To the Ambassador of Indonesia', in *ibid.*, 635. Address given 23 December 1996.

9 Simonetta Calderini, 'Reponse to Chapter 8 Professor Christian Troll's Paper John Paul II and Islam', in *The Legacy of John Paul II*, ed. Gerald O'Collins and Michael A. Hayes (London: Burns & Oates, a Continuum Imprint, 2008) 219-27 (221).

10 John Paul II visited the majority of the member states of the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation: Turkey (1979), Ivory Coast (1980 and 1990), Pakistan (1981), Nigeria (1982 and 1998), Gabon (1982), Togo (1985, although Togo only joined OIC in 1997), Ivory Coast (1985, although Ivory Coast joined OIC in 2001), Cameroon (1985 and 1995), Morocco (1985), Bangladesh (1986), Indonesia (1989), Guinea-Bissau (1990), Mali (1990), Chad (1990), Guinea (1992), Senegal (1992), Gambia (1992), Benin (1993), Uganda (1993), Sudan (1993), Albania (1993), Tunisia (1996), Lebanon (1997), Egypt (2000), Jordan (2000), Syria (2001), Kazakhstan (2001), Azerbaijan (2002). He also addressed the President of the Palestinian Autonomous Territories in Bethlehem in 2000. John Paul II also visited Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1997. While a majority Muslim country, it is an observer to, not member of, the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation.



‘thought it his duty to defend persecuted Christians.’<sup>11</sup> In his meeting with Al-Bashir he said:

the freedom of individuals and communities *to profess and practise their religion* is an essential element for peaceful human coexistence. Freedom of conscience and freedom to seek the truth and to act according to one’s personal religious beliefs are so fundamentally human that any effort to restrict them almost inevitably leads to bitter conflict.<sup>12</sup>

### PAPAL WITNESS TO HUMAN DIGNITY IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

John Paul II’s Apostolic Journeys enabled him to address political authorities, but above they were a means to exercise his global spiritual and moral authority, a role John Paul II understood as including speaking to Muslims. As John Paul II said in his 1982 address to Muslim religious leaders in Kaduna, Nigeria, ‘I have come to Nigeria to visit my brothers and sisters of the Catholic Church, but my journey would be incomplete without this meeting. Be assured therefore that I am very pleased at this opportunity to express to you my sentiments of fraternal respect and esteem.’<sup>13</sup>

John Paul II’s 1985 Casablanca Address, given to 80,000 young Muslims in a football stadium, is one to which he attached ‘exceptional importance’ and John Paul II often referred back to it.<sup>14</sup> John Paul II

11 Weigel recounts that some bishops thought ‘it inappropriate to greet government leaders whose hands were dripping in blood. Others feared an outbreak of anti-Christian violence by Muslim activists’ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 2001), 676.

12 John Paul II, *Meeting with General Omar Hassan Ahmed Al-Bashir President of the Republic of the Sudan: Address of His Holiness John Paul II*, February 10, 1993, section 5. Vatican website. <[https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1993/february/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19930210\\_presidente-sudan.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1993/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19930210_presidente-sudan.html)>.

13 John Paul II, *Address of John Paul II to the Muslim Religious Leaders, Kaduna, Nigeria*, February 14, 1982, section 2. Vatican website. <[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_19820214\\_musulmani-nigeria.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/february/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820214_musulmani-nigeria.html). section 1>..

14 Christian W Troll, SJ, ‘John Paul II and Islam’, in *The Legacy of John Paul II*, ed. Gerald O’Collins and Michael A. Hayes (London: Burns & Oates, a Continuum Imprint, 2008) 203-18, 211.

was invited to make an address by King Hasan II of Morocco.<sup>15</sup> King Hasan, concerned by the rise of fundamentalism in Morocco, saw in John Paul II someone who could help educate the Muslim youth of his state.<sup>16</sup> He said, 'Your Holiness, yours is not only a religious responsibility but an educational and moral one as well. I am certain that tens of thousands of Moroccans, especially youth, would be most happy if you spoke to them about moral standards, and relationships affecting individuals, communities, nations, and religions.'<sup>17</sup>

In the address, John Paul II explained the role in which he had come. 'I am today the Bishop of Rome, called to be, among his brethren in the world, the witness of the Christian faith and the guarantee of the unity of all the members of the Church.'<sup>18</sup> But he made it clear he was also witnessing as a Christian, and a teacher: 'it is as a believer that I come to you today. It is quite simply that I would like to give here today the witness of that which I believe, of that which I wish for the well-being of the people, my brothers, and of the people, my brothers [*sic*], and of that which, from experience, I consider to be useful for all.'<sup>19</sup>

John Paul II's address was an opportunity to communicate the Church's commitment to dialogue with Muslims, as articulated in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*.<sup>20</sup> He repeated, albeit in more emphatic terms, the Council's

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Maurice Borrmans gives background and commentary to this address in 'Le discours de Jean-Paul II aux jeunes de Casablanca', *Seminarium* (1986) 44-72 (45).

15 King Hassan personally invited John Paul II to visit during his 1981 visit to the Vatican. He was the first head of an Islamic state to visit John Paul II, with the intention of discussing peace in the Middle East. McEachern, 'Diplomatic Activity in Service of Papal Teaching: The Promotion of Religious Freedom in Relations with Selected Islamic States During the Pontificate of John Paul II', 275.

There followed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Holy See and Morocco, through the 1983-84 exchange of diplomatic notes between John Paul II and King Hassan.

16 Georges C Anawati, OP, 'L'aspect culturel du dialogue Islamo-Chrétien', *Seminarium* 26 (1986) 144-162 (144-5).

17 McEachern, 'Diplomatic Activity in Service of Papal Teaching', 275. Citing 'Historical Meeting in Morocco', *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition (Vatican City), September 9, 1985.

18 John Paul II, *Address of His Holiness John Paul II to Young Muslims*, section 1.

19 Ibid.

20 This teaching is set out in one sentence of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated 21 November 1964; and two paragraphs in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, promulgated 28 October 1965.

central theological statement, 'For us, Abraham is a very model of faith in God, of submission to his will and of confidence in his goodness. We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection.'<sup>21</sup> He repeated *Nostra Aetate's* recognition of what is shared between Christians and Muslims:

I believe that we, Christians and Muslims, must recognize with joy the religious values that we have in common, and give thanks to God for them. Both of us believe in one God the only God, who is all Justice and all Mercy; we believe in the importance of prayer, of fasting, of almsgiving, of repentance and of pardon; we believe that God will be a merciful judge to us at the end of time, and we hope that after the resurrection he will be satisfied with us and we know that we will be satisfied with him.<sup>22</sup>

John Paul II also emphasized the Church's commitment to dialogue and cooperation with Muslims, 'I believe that, today, God invites us to change our old practices. We must respect each other, and also we must stimulate each other in good works on the path of God.'<sup>23</sup> He referred back to *Nostra Aetate* to assert that the Church 'desires that Christians and Muslims together "promote harmony for all men, social justice, moral values, peace, liberty".'<sup>24</sup>

While the conciliar teaching on dialogue with Muslims is articulated in this address, so too is the conciliar teaching upholding the civil right to religious freedom.<sup>25</sup> The 1965 Declaration on Religious Freedom,

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21 John Paul II, *Address of His Holiness John Paul II to Young Muslims*, section 1. See Unsworth for a discussion on the more emphatic nature of the language used here. Andrew Unsworth, 'A Historical and Textual-Critical Analysis of the Magisterial Documents of the Catholic Church on Islam: Toward a Hetero-Descriptive Account of Muslim Belief and Practice' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Heythrop College, University of London, 2007), 229.

22 John Paul II, *Address of His Holiness John Paul II to Young Muslims*, section 10.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 3.

25 Borrmans suggests, the Address articulates a message of Christian humanism. Borrmans, 'Le discours de Jean-Paul II aux jeunes de Casablanca', 48. He refers in particular to paragraphs 5,7,8 and 9. Borrmans argues, also constant, but discreet, references to *Dignitatis Humanae*. 'Jean-Paul II fait une constant mais discrète référence

*Dignitatis Humanae*, did not simply echo existing secular arguments for religious freedom, rather it ‘set forth the basic principles of a positive theology of religious freedom quite different from the liberalism of the Enlightenment.’<sup>26</sup> Thus, John Paul II’s defence of religious freedom is found not in a particular understanding of the state, but rather in articulating the nature of God, the nature of the person, and the relationship between truth and freedom.

It is God which founds the teaching of the address. Maurice Borrmans notes that the name of God is repeated 65 times.<sup>27</sup> John Paul II said, ‘His holy law guides our life’ and ‘Yes, God asks that we should listen to his voice’.<sup>28</sup> Having described in positive terms the shared ways in which Christians and Muslims understand God, he also drew attention to mistaken ways in which God is understood. He said ‘God can never be used for our purposes, for he is above all.’<sup>29</sup> In his final prayer he says ‘Do not permit that in invoking Your Name we should ever justify the human disorders’.<sup>30</sup>

John Paul II described the nature of the person in relation to God. John Paul II drew on both to the Christian tradition of *Imago Dei*, and the Qur’anic tradition of man as God’s representative, or caliph, as a foundation for an understanding of human dignity.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore we must also *respect, love and help every human being*, because he is a creature of God and, in a certain

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à la Déclaration conciliaire *Dignitatis Humanae*. Ibid., 51.

26 Avery Dulles SJ, ‘John Paul II on Religious Freedom: Themes from Vatican II’, *The Thomist* 65 (2001) 161-78 (162-163.) There was significant debate at the Council on how the right to religious freedom should be grounded. On the one hand, a juridical argument, with strong echoes of the American Constitution; on the other, an argument emphasising the necessary relationship between truth and freedom. See Schindler, David L, and Nicholas J Healy Jr. *Freedom, Truth and Human Dignity: The Second Vatican Council’s Declaration on Religious Freedom. A New Translation, Redaction History, and Interpretation of Dignitatis Humanae*. Grand Rapids, Michigan and Cambridge UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015.

27 Borrmans, ‘Le discours de Jean-Paul II aux jeunes de Casablanca’, 56.

28 John Paul II, *Address of His Holiness John Paul II to Young Muslims*, section 2.

29 Ibid., section 4.

30 Ibid., section 11.

31 John Paul II had previously presented an argument for human dignity drawing on Biblical and Quranic ideas in his address in Ankara, in which he quoted from the Qur’an directly. John Paul II, ‘To the Catholic Community of Ankara’, in Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 258. See also John Paul II, *Address of John Paul II to the Muslim Religious Leaders, Kaduna, Nigeria*.

sense, his image and his representative, because he is the road leading to God, and because he does not fully fulfil himself unless he knows God, unless he accepts him with all his heart, and unless he obeys him to the extent of the ways of perfection.

...

Furthermore, this obedience to God and this love for man should lead us *to respect man's rights*, these rights which are the expression of God's will and the demands of human nature such as it was created by God.<sup>32</sup>

At the heart of the conciliar debates on religious freedom, and reflected in *Dignitatis Humanae*, was the ontological relationship between truth and freedom, which come together in human conscience. John Paul II spoke of this to his Muslim audience:

This witness of faith, which is vital for us and which can never tolerate either infidelity to God or indifference to the truth, is made with respect for the other religious traditions, because everyone hopes to be respected for what he is in fact, and for what he conscientiously believes. We desire that all may reach the fullness of the divine truth, but no one can do that except through the free adherence of conscience, protected from exterior compulsions which would be unworthy of the free homage of reason and of heart which is characteristic of human dignity. There, is the true meaning of religious liberty, which at the same time respects God and man. It is the sincere veneration of such worshippers that God awaits, of worshippers in spirit and in truth.<sup>33</sup>

John Paul II also drew on *Nostra Aetate* to argue for religious freedom. Referring to the Council he recalled, 'It published a *document on dialogue between the religions* ("Nostra Aetate"). It affirms that all men, especially those of living faith, should respect each other, should rise above all discrimination, should live in harmony and serve the

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32 John Paul II, *Address of His Holiness John Paul II to Young Muslims*, section 5.

33 Ibid., section 4.

universal brotherhood.<sup>34</sup> John Paul II made an appeal for religious freedom based on such reciprocal respect. He said, ‘respect and dialogue require reciprocity in all spheres, especially in that which concerns basic freedoms, more particularly religious freedom.’<sup>35</sup>

Borrmans suggests that John Paul II was aware that the Casablanca speech, given 20 years after the texts of Vatican II on dialogue, was like a new commentary on the Council teaching in the light of the new, and sometimes tense, situations of the time.<sup>36</sup> If this is the case, then it is clear that John Paul II saw particular importance in the teaching of *Dignitatis Humanae* as part of the Church’s dialogue with Muslims. As Richard Sudworth argues, this address as an example of John Paul II’s ‘intention of extending grace while being prepared to offer challenge to Muslims.’<sup>37</sup>

## CHRISTIAN PRESENCE IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

### *A papal presence*

Through his travels John Paul II gave a global presence to the Petrine Office. This presence was a means to pursue diplomatic relations, and to speak directly to Muslims, but it was also a means to support Christians living in the Muslim World. In his 1990 Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio*, he wrote ‘I have travelled all over the world in order “to proclaim the Gospel, to ‘strengthen the brothers’ in the faith, to console the Church, to meet people.”’<sup>38</sup> He was acutely sensitive to the challenges faced by Christian communities living in the Muslim World, perhaps as a consequence of his own experiences as a member of the Church living under first Nazi and then Communist oppression. Jaclyn McEachern argues that ‘While the pope sought to ensure the survival of all religious minorities in the world, they focussed

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34 Ibid., section 3.

35 Ibid., section 5.

36 Borrmans, ‘Le discours de Jean-Paul II aux jeunes de Casablanca’, 70.

37 Richard Sudworth, *Encountering Islam: Christian-Muslim Relations in the Public Square* (London: SCM Press, 2017), 45-46.

38 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio. On the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*, December 7, 1990, section 55. Vatican website <[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html)>. Section 63.

particularly on ensuring the survival of Christian minorities in Islamic majority countries. The Holy See promoted religious freedom in these regions by demonstrating solidarity, challenging fundamentalism, and demanding reciprocity.<sup>39</sup>

John Paul II's addresses to Christians in the Muslim World were an important means to 'strengthen', 'console' and 'meet' these members of the Church. Kayitakiba identifies five themes in these addresses.<sup>40</sup> The witness to faith, hope and love; esteem; an attitude of friendship; cooperation for the common good; and the formation of faith.<sup>41</sup> This was evident in John Paul II's homily to Christians at the Charles de Foucauld centre, shortly before his Casablanca Address. Here he reflected upon the distinctiveness of the Christian faith, on their daily witness, and on the qualities of love.<sup>42</sup>

John Paul II recognised the difficulties faced by Christians in the Muslim World. It is apparently these Christians to whom John Paul II referred to in his 2001 Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. 'In many regions Christians are, or are becoming, a "little flock" (*Lk* 12:32). This presents them with the challenge, often in isolated and difficult situations, to bear stronger witness to the distinguishing elements of their own identity.'<sup>43</sup>

In his 1990 address to the Bishops of Mali, John Paul II recognised these difficulties, while encouraging both dialogue with Muslims and the defence of religious freedom.

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39 McEachern, 'Diplomatic Activity in Service of Papal Teaching', 54.

40 Kayitakiba drew on three forms of John Paul II's addresses: his homilies to Catholics living among Muslims; discourses to bishops during his apostolic journeys and *ad limina* visits; his interventions on Lebanon and on his wider addresses to multi-faith groups and in *Redemptor Hominis*. He lists them on page 83. Médard Kayitakiba, 'Chrétiens et Musulmans aujourd'hui face à face le pape Jean Paul II s'adresse aux Catholiques', *Seminarium* (1986) 83-94.

41 Ibid., 84.

42 John Paul II, *Messe à l'institut 'Charles De Foucauld': Homélie du pape Jean-Paul II*, 19 August 1985, section 4. Vatican website <[https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/homilies/1985/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19850819\\_casablanca.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/homilies/1985/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19850819_casablanca.html)>.

43 *Novo Millennio Ineunte. Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope John Paul II to the Bishops, Clergy and Lay Faithful at the Close of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000*, January 6, 2001, section 55. Vatican Website <[http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/2001/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_20010106\\_novo-millennio-ineunte.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_20010106_novo-millennio-ineunte.html)>. Section 36.

On the basis of the monotheism of Abraham, to which they refer, Muslims are bearers of authentic religious values which we must learn to recognize and respect. It is true that dialogue with them is not always easy, nor is it desired by all, and it is often difficult to find a common language and representative spokesman. Here, Christian generosity must learn to be realistic and courageous at the same time. What is more, in certain countries one often has to confront strong reservations about the idea of respecting the principle of mutuality in the recognition of the rights of both ideas to freedom of conscience and of worship. Dialogue also is called upon to raise hard questions in the search for justice.<sup>44</sup>

John Paul II saw Christian presence in the Muslim World as vital for defending the person and for building just and peaceful societies. In his 1997 Post-Synodal Exhortation for Lebanon he wrote,

Participating in the transformation of the world requires, primarily, a conversion of heart and a struggle for justice in a spirit of charity and fellowship. For the Christian this is also part of preaching the Gospel, because Christians are to be known by the performance of good works. The Church ought unceasingly to contribute to this task by her defence of the dignity of the person, “living in the midst of society,” and her teaching which “reveals man to himself (CA 54). Especially at critical moments in their history, people turn with confidence to the Church for counsel, support and assistance.<sup>45</sup>

John Paul II, having experienced the oppression of Nazi and Communist regimes, was well aware of the possible price of such witness. There is perhaps significance that his homily at the Charles de Foucauld Centre in Casablanca concluded with reflections on St.

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44 John Paul II, ‘To the Bishops of Mali’, in Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 465-6.

45 John Paul II, ‘Post-Synodal Exhortation for Lebanon’, in Gioia, *Interreligious Dialogue*, 126.



Maximillian Kolbe, having seen his image in the congregation. He spoke of Kolbe as the patron of our times, whose giving of his life for another in Auschwitz exemplified the love of which he had been speaking.<sup>46</sup> Decades later, in Algeria, Christian witness, to Muslims, would also lead to martyrdom.

*The Catholic Church in Algeria*

In 1962 Algeria gained its independence from France. This led to the rapid departure of the 900,000 or so Christians of European descent, and the few thousand Christians of Algerian descent.<sup>47</sup> The Church, led by Cardinal Duval, had to reflect upon its role in this changed context. It sought not to be ‘an embassy Church’, but to be truly rooted in Algeria.<sup>48</sup>

Initially the Church was able to help the new state develop through its schools, hospitals and other services.<sup>49</sup> In the 1970s this role was reduced as these services were nationalised.<sup>50</sup> Jean-Jacques Pérennès writes, ‘Imperceptibly, “to live with” became the most important reason for their presence, rather than “to do things”’.<sup>51</sup> The regime sought to hold on to the support from the majority rural, and religious, population, by appealing to Islam as an aspect of the nation’s identity.<sup>52</sup> The Church was an easy target of government and media polemics, a situation which worsened from the 1980s with the growth of Islamism. A military coup in 1992 was followed by descent into civil war. In the worsening violence 19 religious were murdered between 1994 and 1996. Their biographer describes them as ‘Christian Martyrs for a Muslim People’.<sup>53</sup> They chose to remain present among Muslim friends

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46 John Paul II, *Messe à l’institut ‘Charles De Foucauld’*.

47 Martin McGee, OSB, *Christian Martyrs for a Muslim People* (New York / Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), 14.

48 Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out*, 149.

49 *Ibid.*, 63.

50 McGee, *Christian Martyrs*, 14.

51 Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out*, 90. Quoting Henri Sanson, ‘Chrétien en Algérie’, *Christus* 86 (April 1975) 211-21.

52 *Ibid.*, 84.

53 McGee gives an account of each of the lives of the nineteen killed. McGee, *Christian Martyrs*.

and neighbours even as threats were made against their lives. In 2018, they were beatified.<sup>54</sup>

Pierre Claverie, OP, was the last to be killed, assassinated with his Muslim driver in 1996. Born in French Algeria, Claverie chose to return as a priest to Algeria, where he lived out a vocation living among and in dialogue with his Muslim friends and neighbours. In 1981 he was consecrated Bishop of Oran. He increasingly took on a public role, speaking out against the violence. He wrote in 1988, 'I have firmly decided to fight so that the atmosphere of coexistence among Christians and Muslims will not deteriorate further'.<sup>55</sup> He was becoming from 1988 'a public man whose free and courageous positions received great media attention'.<sup>56</sup> By the time of his death he had become 'the de facto spokesman of the church of Algeria'.<sup>57</sup> He took on this role as part of his responsibilities as bishop:

I am in a position of responsibility, and I have always defended publicly what has seemed to me to be just and true, what fosters freedom and respect for individuals, especially for the less fortunate and minorities. I have fought for dialogue and friendship among peoples, cultures, and religions.<sup>58</sup>

Pérennès writes that what Claverie 'was engaged in was a struggle on behalf of a pluralistic society'.<sup>59</sup> Claverie's very presence in Algeria, and indeed that of all the Christians who remained, can be understood as part of this struggle. The Church's continued presence challenged the vision of the Islamists, who saw no place in Algeria not only for Christians, but for Muslims who rejected their ideology.<sup>60</sup>

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54 See *Message of Pope Francis for the Beatification of the Martyrs Msgr. Pierre Claverie, OP, Bishop of Oran, and 18 Companions (Men and Women Religious) in Algeria*. Vatican Website <[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2018/documents/papa-francesco\\_20181202\\_messaggio-beatificazione-algeria.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2018/documents/papa-francesco_20181202_messaggio-beatificazione-algeria.html)>.

55 Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out*, 142. Quoting a letter May 1988.

56 Ibid., 153. Pérennès highlights in particular the importance of Claverie's 'biting editorials' in the publication of the Diocese of Oran, *Le Lien*. Ibid., 131.

57 Ibid., 239.

58 Ibid., 192-93. Quoting Claverie's May 1994 Editorial in *Le Lien*.

59 Ibid., 143.

60 'She is a sign that pluralism is possible in Maghrebian society and that beyond simple tolerance, a common future is foreseeable. It is thus that she is seen by

Claverie saw a vital role for the Church and her teaching in the times of violence and suffering. He wrote,

We have more need than ever for men of reconciliation. But a new covenant cannot be struck at any price. It is not enough to say “love one another” and to act as though differences and fear were nonexistent. Nor is it enough to condemn violence ... At a moment when each human grouping, each people, each culture and religion is under pressure from others and strongly tempted to turn in upon itself or exalt itself alone against all others, the church can and should propose the means of universal coexistence.<sup>61</sup>

The Church’s teaching on the unity of humanity, on the dignity of the person, on the possibility of coexistence, of love for all people, as expressed in *Nostra Aetate* and *Dignitatis Humanae*, was needed in Algeria. Claverie understood this as the fundamental mission of the Church. In a 1995 interview he said:

[We do not seek] to make converts, certainly not. The history of relations between Christians and Muslims has been marked enough as it is by conflict, right from the start; our objective is to endure, in solidarity, so that mutual discovery can take place in an atmosphere of serenity. Are we evangelizing? Yes, in the sense that we propose the revelation that God is love. I know that his proposition can be rejected and misinterpreted, that I risk being persecuted on this account but I also know that this proposition is part of the essence of being a Christian. For this reason, the Church has a place wherever there are divisions, both between human groups and within each human person, wherever there are wounds, exclusion, or marginalization.<sup>62</sup>

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many. Our very presence is an invitation to society not to be too inward looking.’ McGee, *Christian Martyrs*, 130. Citing *Les églises du Maghreb en l’an 2000*, North African Bishops, published January 2000.

61 Pérennès, *A Life Poured Out*, 163.

62 Ibid., 169. Interview in *L’actualité religieuse*, no. 136 (September 1995), reprinted in *Lettres et messages*, 15.

## CONCLUSION

John Paul II and Pierre Claverie were committed to dialogue with Muslims. For both, this dialogue increasingly needed to be held together with a defence of religious freedom. The teaching of the Council provided the foundation for them to do so, in ways perhaps not envisaged by the Council. The Council's teaching provided a theological framework for dialogue and cooperation with Muslims, but its recognition of a shared humanity, and appeal for mutual respect and fraternity, became ever more important aspects of its teaching as peaceful coexistence between different faiths was threatened in parts of the Muslim World. The conciliar teaching on religious freedom was not developed with the Muslim World in mind, but rather in response to secular ideas and movements: western liberalism and communist contexts. However, the foundation of a right to religious freedom in an understanding of God, the person and truth and freedom, resulted in a theological argument for religious freedom which John Paul II and Pierre Claverie brought into dialogue with Muslims.

However, it is only by being present in the Muslim World that the Church can demonstrate its commitment to dialogue with Muslims, and can bring into this dialogue a defence of religious freedom. John Paul II's Apostolic Journeys to the Muslim World were a visible sign of the Church's presence. He used his meetings with political leaders and with Muslims to call for religious freedom and to articulate an authentic understanding of human dignity. He saw the presence of Christian communities in the Muslim World as vital, to witness to an understanding of God, the person, truth and freedom in respectful dialogue with their Muslim neighbours. John Paul II used the unique international status of the Holy See to support and protect these communities.

Pierre Claverie, and the Algerian Catholic Church, offer such an example of Christian presence in the Muslim World. Claverie chose to return to Algeria, to be part of a Church seeking its place in a Muslim country; and he chose to remain against growing violence in order to witness to an understanding of the person, and of humanity, against visions which sought to separate and exclude, and to propose an alternative vision of Algeria. In situations of exclusion or violence, Claverie and John Paul II saw in the love of neighbour a challenge to

visions of a fundamentally divided humanity; and in demonstrating an esteem for all people in their search for God, they sought to reveal an understanding of truth as something that cannot be coerced or imposed and the vital necessity of religious freedom for human dignity.

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# FROM HUNGARY TO SYRIA: APPLIED SOLIDARITY IN THE EASTERN CATHOLIC CHURCHES

*Máté Szaplóczay*

The Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, Youssef Absi, participated in the 52nd International Eucharistic Conference, which was held in the Hungarian capital, Budapest. He was also present at the meetings of the Annual Assembly of the Eastern Catholic Bishops of Europe from 4 to 8 September 2021, which was celebrated in Budapest in conjunction with the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress. The theme proposed for reflection was 'Eucharist and Synodality', around which the various conferences in the main hall developed and the reflections and debates among the Eastern Catholic bishops took place. Eastern Catholic Churches from Ukraine, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Bulgaria and Croatia, as well as Greece, southern Italy, Romania, Belarus and Armenia were present, with representatives of the Melkite Church of Antioch and of the Syrian Catholic Church in its European diaspora. The Melkite Patriarch Youssef Absi met with Hungarian President János Áder during the opening ceremony, in which Áder expressed Hungary's commitment to its relationship with the Melkite Catholic Church. In return, the Patriarch thanked the President of the Republic for the support provided by Hungary to their ecclesiastical institutions. He also visited the State Secretariat for persecuted Christians and the Hungary Helps Program, where he held meetings with officials in the Hungarian government about the Cairo crises that Syria and Lebanon are going through in particular, and ways to help ease the pain of the people of the two countries. The feast of the Nativity of the Mother of God, which concluded the meeting of the bishops, was celebrated with vespers in the Greek Catholic church in Gödöllő on the evening of 7 September and, on the next day, with the celebration of matins in the parish church on Rose Square. The Divine Liturgy on 8 September

was presided over by Patriarch Youssef Absi in St Stephen's Cathedral in Budapest. The Hungarian Metropolitan-Archbishop Fülöp Kocsis emphasized in his homily that, with the presence of Patriarch Youssef, who celebrated the Divine Liturgy and came from the much-suffered Syria, the message of the feast is even more authentic: 'Peoples, rejoice!'

This divine liturgy was a very clear expression of the fraternal relationship developed between the Eastern Catholic bishops of Syria and Hungary. In this paper—after a short introduction to the history of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church and the current situation of the Christians in Syria—the humanitarian and spiritual activities of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church will be presented, showing up how a small and distant Church can help and support her fellow Christians who are being persecuted and suffering a lot in the Middle East.

Fülöp Kocsis, the Metropolitan Archbishop of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church, said in an interview that 'Syrian Christians were quite impressed that a small and distant country is providing such valuable assistance for their communities.'<sup>1</sup> He did not exaggerate: Hungarians care about the fate of human beings who live in distant lands, and that is why Hungary has become a really important source of assistance for persecuted Christians. This Hungarian state-funded assistance was primarily distributed in the framework of the 'Hungary Helps Program', which was established to protect persecuted Christians.<sup>2</sup> Besides the activities of Hungary Helps, several national and international organisations also did their best to help persecuted Christians. The non-state actors included the Catholic Caritas,<sup>3</sup>

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1 László Ratalics, 'Európa lelkét veszítette. (Europe has lost her soul). Interview with Fülöp Kocsis, Metropolitan-Archbishop of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church' (in Hungarian), in *Haon* 21 June 2017. <<http://www.haon.hu/helyi-kozelet/kocsis-fulop-sziria-interju-2488768>> [Accessed 28/08/2021].

2 Tristan Azbej, András Kóré, Bálint P. Tóth, 'Actions Taken by the Hungarian State in the Protection of Persecuted Christian Communities', in József Kaló, Lóránd Ujházi (eds), *Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2018*, Dialóg Campus Press, Budapest, 2018, pp. 25–33.; Tristan Azbej, 'Hungarian Assistance to Iraq through the Hungary Helps Program', in (eds) József Kaló, Ferenc Peruska, Lóránd Ujházi, *Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2019*, Háttér Kiadó, Budapest, 2019, pp. 43–57.; Hungarian Government Decree 1178/2019 (IV.3.) 'on the support of the projects of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church in Syria within the framework of the Hungary Helps Program'.

3 Richárd Zagyva, 'The Possibilities and Actions of the Catholic Caritas in 2018 in Promoting Support for Christian Communities', in (eds) József Kaló, Lóránd Ujházi, *Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2018*, Dialóg Campus Press, Budapest,



the Ecumenical Relief Organisation,<sup>4</sup> the Ecumenical Council of Hungarian Churches,<sup>5</sup> the Association of Christian Intellectuals,<sup>6</sup> or the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta.<sup>7</sup>

Besides financial support, persecuted Christians also need mental and spiritual reinforcement. The following example shows that Hungarian people care about persecuted Christian communities: Sajólád, a small village with a population of circa 2,500, which is almost three thousand kilometres away from Homs, Syria, also did its bit. Mária Zsuzsanna, one of the village's schoolteachers sent the following letter to Syria on behalf of the children: 'Dear Syrian children! Sajólád is a little village somewhere in Hungary. At our Catholic School, the children have heard about your difficult fate, which was described by our Metropolitan Fülöp, at a Religious Education lesson. The lives of our students are not easy either, maybe that's why they are so compassionate about your suffering. We have prayed for you and we have all felt the presence of God, and with this moment of grace, you have given us a gift. We would just want you to know that you are not alone.'<sup>8</sup>

### THE HUNGARIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH<sup>9</sup>

In formulating their identity, Hungarian Greek Catholics looked back to the time of the founding of the state and the adoption of Christianity. They defined themselves as the heirs of the Byzantine

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2018, pp. 223–235.

4 Klára Keveházi, Gábor Bálint, 'The Iraqi Assistance of the Ecumenical Charity Service, with Special Attention to Its Activities for Iraqi Christians', pp. 235–253.

5 Vilmos Fischl, 'The Role of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches in Hungary in Aiding Persecuted Christians' in József Kaló et al., *Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2019*, pp. 263–287.

6 Péter K. Zachar, 'The Role and Responsibility of Christian Intellectuals in Aid of Persecuted Christian Communities', *ibid.*, pp. 287–297.

7 Dániel Solymári, 'Global Solidarity: Humanitarian Aid and International Development Programs of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa' in József Kaló, Lóránd Ujházi (eds), *Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2018*, pp. 253–273.

8 Message from Sajólád to Syria (*in Hungarian*). <<http://www.hd.gorogkatolikus.hu/Uzenet-Sajoladrol-Sziriba-2018-julius-31>> [Accessed 28/08/2021].

9 For a very detailed history and context of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church, see (ed.) Szilveszter Terdik, *The Light of Thy Countenance. Greek Catholics in Hungary*, Metropolitan Church Sui Iuris of Hungary, Debrecen, 2020.

Christian presence, which can be seen in the history of the Hungarian nation from the tenth century onwards. Although the significance of the Byzantine conversion and the Eastern monasteries gradually faded with the spread of the Latin rite, the presence of Byzantine Christianity in the Árpád era became a basic identification factor for the Hungarian Greek Catholics of later times.

Until the foundation of the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog in 1912, the Hungarian Greek Catholics had come a long way, the last stage of which—the decades of struggle for the establishment of the eparchy—was experienced as a calvary. In the same period, their self-interpretation was formed, which rested on three basic pillars: Byzantine rite, unity with the Holy See in Rome, and Hungarian identity. Loyalty to these three principles made their way to a calvary.

With the bull *Christifidelis Graeci* Pope St Pius X has founded the Eparchy of Hajdúdorog for the Hungarian Greek Catholics in 1912. However, the canonical situation of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church has been complicated for a century because of its subjection to a third grade ‘alien’ ordinary jurisdiction, in the person of the Latin primate of Hungary. Like many other Eastern Churches, the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church has also experienced a strong latinization process. However in the last decades—according to the *mens legislatoris* of the codicator pope—the Hungarian Greek Catholics have started to ‘take steps to return to their ancestral traditions’ (*Orientalium ecclesiarum* 6a).<sup>10</sup>

Although significant authors had previously classified the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church as an autonomous, *sui iuris* church,<sup>11</sup> yet, legally this status was only achieved in 2015, when the Holy See granted metropolitan status to Hungarian Greek Catholics. Thus, the anomalies regarding the canonical situation have been dissolved by the decision of the Holy See with the elevation of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church to metropolitan level in 2015. The decision of Pope Francis of 19 March 2015 was described in five apostolic constitutions and bulls. The Greek Catholics are Christians who follow the Byzantine rite and are in full unity with the Catholic Church. The word Greek in their name refers to the Byzantine rite, and Catholic illustrates their

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10 See Szabó Péter, *Return to the Ancestral Traditions’* (OE 6a). *Reasons and Meaning*, Östkirchliche Studien 66 : 2 pp. 256-284 (2017).

11 Péter Erdő, *Egyházjog*, Szent István Társulat, Budapest, 2003, p. 137.

unity with the Apostolic See. Currently there are approximately 262,000 Greek Catholics in Hungary.<sup>12</sup> Most of them live in three ecclesiastical districts: the Archeparchy of Hajdúdorog, the Eparchy of Miskolc and the Eparchy of Nyíregyháza. The archeparchy and the two eparchies form together the Greek Catholic Metropolia in Hungary, whose headquarters and cathedral are in Debrecen. The head of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church is Metropolitan Archbishop Fülöp Kocsis.

## CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

As in the previous centuries and millennia, merely belonging to a religious group can turn someone into a victim of persecution. According to research done by institutes monitoring religious discrimination, Christianity is the most threatened religion on Earth.<sup>13</sup> In the Middle East and North Africa, entire populations are affected by the horrors of war and violence. The decline of Christian communities in these areas has recently reached desperate levels. There are various forms of persecution of Christians, which includes cultural isolation, restrictions on the free practice of religion and official discrimination and intimidation. But the most brutal form of persecution aims to physically eliminate Christians with violent attacks.<sup>14</sup> In Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq, a territory that is the cradle of Christianity, bloody clashes have become ubiquitous in the last decade.<sup>15</sup> The starting points of these attacks are varied: although the main cause is clearly religious antagonism, yet many attacks can also be attributed to political and economic tensions. However, the goal of the aggressor is always the same. They want to hinder the practice of religion and weaken the individual or community in question. Violence itself varies widely: it can include minor physical

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12 Congregation for the Eastern Churches, *The Catholic East*, Valore Italiano, Roma, 2019, p. XV.

13 Open Doors USA, 'World Watch List 2021'. <<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/2021-world-watch-list-report>> [Accessed 28/09/2021].

14 József Kaló, 'Violent Acts Committed against Christians in 2020', in (ed.) Lóránd Ujházi, *Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2020*, Mondat, Vác, 2020, pp. 105-124.

15 Dániel Solymári, 'Globális szolidaritás—A segélynyújtás keresztény gyakorlata a Közel-Keleten és a szubszaharai Afrikában', *Valóság* March 2019, Vol. 62, No. 3, p. 80.

abuse, defacing/damaging buildings, symbols, deportation to labour or extermination camps, and finally the actual destruction of an individual or a whole community.<sup>16</sup>

### THE DIFFICULT SITUATION OF CHRISTIANS IN SYRIA

Syria has played a prominent role since early Christian times. Prosperous communities were established in Antioch, a city where followers of Christ first called themselves Christians, and in Damascus, which was mentioned 55 times in the Holy Bible (40 times in the Old, and 15 times in the New Testament).

The Jesuit Father Szabolcs Sajgó, who recently visited Syria summarised the attitude of the region's Christians the following way: 'The connection to religion, faith or a church is much deeper in the Middle East than in Europe. In the lives of Middle Eastern Christians, their church or their prayers are not separate islands, instead, they are the bases of their identity. Christians in these troubled lands are not committed to a Christian denomination, but to Christian teaching as a whole as it exists. Religion there is not a private matter, but it is a community experience.'<sup>17</sup>

In 2011, a civil war broke out in Syria. Armed clashes between protestors and the government spread quickly throughout the country. The crisis was especially acute in northern and eastern Syria. The cities of Homs and Aleppo were the first focal points of this conflict, which led to the almost complete destruction of Homs. The prosperous metropolis of Aleppo suffered severely, the eastern part of the city was almost blown into smithereens and its population shrank from the pre-war 5 million to just 2 million. In eastern Aleppo, health and hygiene services, water and electricity networks are either not operational or their capacity is severely overstretched. The number of trained medical staff is small compared to pre-conflict levels. Many of these trained professionals have perished during the conflict, others either had to leave or are currently looking for jobs which pay more

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16 József Kaló, 'Violent Acts against Christians in 2019', in (eds.) József Kaló, Ferenc Peruska, Lóránd Ujházi, *Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2019*, p. 25.

17 <[http:// www.kepmas.hu/romma-lott-negyedben-jartunk-dokumentumfilm-a-szir-keresztényekrol](http://www.kepmas.hu/romma-lott-negyedben-jartunk-dokumentumfilm-a-szir-keresztényekrol)> [Accessed 30/09/2021].

than \$30 a month. To this day, only a few hospitals have reopened in East Aleppo.<sup>18</sup>

About 8 percent of the Syrian population was Christian before the conflict, and they belonged to many different denominations, which developed here throughout history. Before the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War, the country was a peaceful, self-sufficient country, where the followers of many religions, including Christians and Muslims, lived together in relative peace, without disturbing one another. Until 2011, the relationship between Muslim and Christian religious leaders was so good that according to a popular saying: 'If you can't find the way to the Mosque, the Churchwarden will show you the way.' The centres of Christianity in Syria were located exactly in those areas of the country which suffered the most during the war, because most Christians lived in the northeast, along the Iraqi border, in and around Homs, which is not far from the border with Lebanon. The city of Homs, which has been the capital of the revolution, is 163 km from Damascus. Since the outbreak of war in 2011, Homs has become the site of major battles several times.

According to the latest edition of the CIA World Factbook, 10 percent of Syria's nearly twenty million inhabitants is Christian.<sup>19</sup> Similar data was published by recognised Syrian experts, like David W Lesch.<sup>20</sup> However, according to the 2021 version of the World Watch List, which is published by the Open Doors Foundation, the proportion of Christians in Syria is only 3.6 percent, 677,000 Christians out of a population of 18,924,000.<sup>21</sup>

#### ACTIVITIES OF THE HUNGARIAN GREEK CATHOLIC CHURCH TO HELP PERSECUTED CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Hearing the terrible news of the Syrian civil war that began in 2011, the leaders of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church felt they had to

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18 Dániel Solymári, *op.cit.*, p. 90.

19 Central Intelligence Agency, 'The World Factbook 2021'. <<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/syria/#people-and-society>> [Accessed 28/09/2021]. However they note that the Christian population may be considerably smaller as a result of Christians fleeing the country during the ongoing civil war.

20 David W Lesch, *Syria: A Modern History*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 6.

21 Open Doors USA, 'World Watch List 2021'. <<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/2021-world-watch-list-report>> [Accessed 28/09/2021], p. 22.

do their best as Christians and as an institution to help the persecuted Christians of Syria.

György Fodor, a priest of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church, is an example of how academics can help Middle Eastern Christianity. Fr Fodor is the Vice-Rector of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Dean of the University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. As an Orientalist and a member of the Association of European Arabists and Islamologists, he had frequent diplomatic and scientific contacts with the states now afflicted by the persecution of Christians. Traditionally he is the one who welcomes Middle Eastern church leaders who visit Péter Pázmány Catholic University.<sup>22</sup>

Bianka Speidl, the permanent advisor of the Greek Catholic Metropolia in Middle East matters, focused the attention of the Greek Catholic hierarchy upon a Melkite community which was in a very difficult situation. The Melkite Greek Catholic Church of Antioch is somewhat similar to the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church. They are also a particular autonomous, *sui iuris* Eastern Catholic Church within the Catholic Church, which follows the Byzantine rite. The Melkite Church is the most prestigious amongst the Catholic Churches, which follow the Byzantine tradition. It is also important that the Melkite Church is currently the only Byzantine-rite Catholic Church whose leader is a patriarch. This is because the Melkite Archbishop is the accepted successor of the Patriarchs of Antioch. Thus, besides the Jacobite and Catholic Syrians, the Antioch Orthodox, and the Catholic Maronite Archbishop, the Melkite Archbishop is the fifth patriarch of Antioch. However, the real centre of this Church is in Damascus. They have about 1.57 million believers.<sup>23</sup>

In 2017, Archbishop Kocsis sent a circular to his priests and asked them, and the Greek Catholic believers, to raise funds for a community in Syria: 'Al-Dmeine al-Sarqije is a small, ancient Christian settlement near Homs. About 2,500, mostly Catholic, people inhabit this village. Although no fighting has disturbed the peace for a few years, the post-war reconstruction is very difficult. [...] As we established

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22 Zsuzsanna Thullner, 'Az iraki káld pátriárka Budapesten: „A hitünk győzedelmeskedik a félelem felett.”', in *Magyar Kurír* 1 June 2017. <<http://www.magyarokurir.hu/hazai/az-iraki-kald-patriarka-budapest-hitunk-gyozedelmeskedik-felelem-felett>> [Accessed 28/08/2021].

23 Congregation, *ibid*.

personal contacts with the residents of the settlement, we decided that the Greek Catholic Metropolis, as far as its finances permit, would like to directly help this small community. During the negotiations, we defined what we would like to achieve. Using the funds we raise in Hungary, we would help to renovate the village church, provide electricity to the settlement, if we can, and alleviate the burden of those families who need it the most. To achieve these goals, we ask anyone who can contribute to our fundraiser to do so and we will personally deliver the funds to the residents of Al-Dmeine al-Sarqije. I would kindly ask the brethren to contribute to the donation themselves and to encourage our followers to join in. Furthermore, they should contact the wealthy people of their parishes in person, so we can raise as much money as possible.<sup>24</sup> After the distribution of this circular, a Diocesan Charity Drive was also announced directly to the faithful on the Church's websites.<sup>25</sup>

After the successful fundraiser, the Hungarian Greek Catholic Metropolitan Archbishop himself travelled to the Middle East in June 2017 to personally hand over the donations of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church to the representatives of Al-Dmeine al-Sarqije. The Charity Drive has raised ten million HUFs which was handed over in dollars, computers and a solar panel system to Father Naiim el-Gharbi and two young people from the village in Beirut. Subsequently, Archbishop Kocsis was able to obtain a visa to Syria, which was facilitated by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius II, so he could meet in person with Syrian Christians. For example, he met a family whose two children were abducted, another couple who returned home after spending four months away, because they could not live outside their country and he also visited an organisation which supported internally displaced people.

The most important experience from this visit was that Syrian Christian communities and individuals wanted to remain in peace in their homeland. Archbishop Jean-Clément Jeanbart of Aleppo expressed most strongly how others could help them. He said he appreciated the efforts of the Hungarian Government which provided support to

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24 Fülöp Kocsis: *Adománygyűjtés a szíriai keresztények megsegítésére*. A Görögkatolikus Metropólia Körlevele, No. 2017/1. pp. 6-7.

25 <<http://www.hd.gorogkatolikus.hu/Segitsuk-egyutt-a-sziriai-keresztenyeket!-2017-marcius-27>> [Accessed 29/09/2021].

persecuted Christians and prevented emigration. Archbishop Kocsis Fülöp summarised his experiences in Syria this way: 'The hardest part of the migrant crisis is not in Europe, but here in this land. Migrants who leave this region also bring with them the hopes of the preservation of a Christian future in these historic places. We must do everything we can to ensure that Christians do not leave this place or if they have done so, they should return as soon as possible.'<sup>26</sup>

The Melkite Archbishop of Homs, Jean-Abdo Arbach, also expressed the request and the desire of Middle Eastern Christians that their communities needed assistance in their homelands so that they could continue to prosper there. Because if Western Europe incentivises emigration, Christianity will certainly disappear from Jesus's homeland. A similar statement was made by Archbishop Nicolas Antiba, Patriarchal Governor of Damascus, who, through a diocesan foundation, supports those Syrian Christians who remained at home and who are in a difficult situation because of the war. The foundation uses its resources to rebuild schools, organise health care, distribute food, operate a youth centre, and to provide psychological assistance. Archbishop Antiba also requested more outside assistance when he said: 'Help us stay in our country.'<sup>27</sup>

In 2001, Pope Saint John Paul II highlighted the importance of Middle Eastern Christian communities and drew attention to their difficulties. During his papal pilgrimage, Saint John Paul II met Syrian Patriarchs and Bishops at the Greek-Melkite Patriarchate of Damascus, where he encouraged local Christians not to leave with a quote from the letter of Diognetus: 'The place that God has assigned to them is so noble that they are not allowed to desert it.' (VI, 10)<sup>28</sup>

Fülöp Kocsis shared the story of a young man whom he met on his visit to Syria. He returned to his homeland from Canada because he and his family could not fit into Canadian life. 'He tried his luck, but he had to travel thousands of miles to understand that he couldn't

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26 <<http://www.hd.gorogkatolikus.hu/Penz-es-biztatast-vitt-Sziriaba-Kocsis-Fulop-2017-junius-20>> [Accessed 29/09/2021].

27 <<http://www.fli.hu/pappnora-bibliakommentek/a-magyar-goeroegkatolikus-egyhazi-szir-keresztienyekert.html>> [Accessed 30/09/2021].

28 John Paul II, *Address of John Paul II at the Meeting with Patriarchs and Bishops of Syria at the Greek-Catholic Patriarchate of Damascus*, 6 May 2001. <[https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/may/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20010506\\_bishops-syria.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010506_bishops-syria.html)> [Accessed 28/09/2021].



live far from Syria. The whole family found safety in Canada, yet they returned to Syria. They realised that they have to suffer so that Christianity can continue to exist around the birthplace of Jesus. And if the Almighty has already ordered it that way, they will accept their suffering.<sup>29</sup>

The Hungarian state is also trying to help these efforts. The Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, emphasised that ‘between the autumn of 2016 and January 2019, Hungary allocated 7.63 billion HUF (about 25 million USD) to support the rebounding of persecuted Christian communities. The principles of the Hungarian Government remain unchanged: help must be delivered where the trouble exists, instead of importing the trouble into Europe.’<sup>30</sup> This policy was also confirmed by György Hölvényi, MEP: ‘For Hungary, solidarity is extremely important because this is the only solution which can keep people in their homelands [...] Hungary’s only goal is to help the most deprived.’<sup>31</sup>

Although it is another country, the following example of a Pakistani girl proves the same point, the desire to stay in one’s homeland. In a recent issue of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church’s *Szemlélek* magazine, an interview was published with a Pakistani student about her country and her plans.<sup>32</sup> Sybil Dilsher is currently studying at the University of Miskolc thanks to a scholarship provided through the Hungary Helps Program and lives in the local Greek Catholic dormitory. This committed Christian comes from a country which, according to the World Watch List is the fifth most dangerous place for Christians on Earth.<sup>33</sup> Even more worrying is that Pakistan has the highest rates of anti-Christian violence.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, Sybil wants to

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29 *Message of the Syrian Christians*, <<http://www.hd.gorogkatolikus.hu/A-sziriai-keresztenyek-uzenete-2017-junius-13>> [Accessed 30/09/2021].

30 MTI-Hungary Today (2019.02.26.) PM Orbán Holds Talks with Patriarch of Melkite Greek Catholic Church. [<https://hungarytoday.hu/pm-orban-holds-talks-with-patriarch-of-melkite-greek-catholic-church/>] [Accessed 30 September 2021].

31 Prime Minister’s Office, *Kiemelt cél a keresztény közösségek támogatása*. <[www.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/hirek/kiemelt-cel-a-kereszteny-kozossegek-tamogatasa](http://www.kormany.hu/hu/miniszterelnokseg/hirek/kiemelt-cel-a-kereszteny-kozossegek-tamogatasa)> [Accessed 28/09/2021].

32 Sybil Dilsher, *Isten védőszárnya alatt. Pakisztáni keresztényként a miskolci görögkatolikus diákközpontban*. Görögkatolikus Szemlélet, Vol. 7, No. 2, p. 54.

33 Open Doors USA, ‘World Watch List 2021’. <<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/2021-world-watch-list-report>> [Accessed 28/09/2021], p. 13.

34 World Watch Monitor, *Pakistan*. <[www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/pakistan](http://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/pakistan)>

return to her homeland after the completion of her studies to use the skills she acquired for the benefit of her community.

Christians cling to their faith and to their homeland, which is the cradle of Christianity and whose destiny is in their hearts. This strong link is well illustrated by a short story from John McHugo's monograph on Syria. When the author visited the al-Nasara Valley, a local told him an anecdote about the time of Nasser, who sought to strengthen Arab unity, because according to Nasser's ideology, everyone was an Arab first and religious or ethnic identities were only secondary. The story is about a valley, Wadi al-Nasara, the 'Valley of Christians', which under Nasser was officially renamed as Wadi al-Nadara, the 'Valley of Beautiful Views'. The state accomplished its goal easily, by putting an extra dot over one of the Arabic letters of the valley's name. Nevertheless, Nasser failed because the locals still call the valley Wadi al-Nasara.<sup>35</sup>

According to Kassab Adonis, 'Syrian Christians are characterised by their deep faith and strong patriotism. They call themselves 'children of hope' who don't want to leave Syria. Why? Because they love their homeland and are reluctant to live in a foreign country. Fleeing Christians think similarly. They are already beginning to return to areas liberated from Islamist groups, but most of them are waiting for the complete cessation of violence'.<sup>36</sup>

However, personal support is essential to those who want to stand up to a difficult situation and to persevere spiritually despite persecution. Metropolitan Fülöp Kocsis has repeatedly reminisced how much it meant for the Syrian Christians whom he met that a bishop of a distant country would take personal risks to deliver donations which were collected by their unknown Christian brethren. Fülöp Kocsis sums up his experience with the following words: 'Another important lesson is that my presence was not in vain, I am glad that I would not be discouraged from the trip to Syria. Because Syrian Christians desperately need a personal connection with the outside world'.<sup>37</sup>

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[Accessed 28/09/2021].

35 John McHugo: *Syria: A Recent History*, Saqi Books, London, 2014, p. 30.

36 <<http://www.kepmas.hu/tord-meg-a-keresztet-maradt-e-meg-kereszteny-sziaban-es-irakban>> [Accessed 28/09/2021].

37 László Ratalics, 'Európa lelkét veszítette. (Europe has lost her soul). Interview with Fülöp Kocsis Metropolitan-Archbishop of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church' (*in Hungarian*), in *Haon* 21 June 2017. <<http://www.haon.hu/helyi-kozelet/kocsis->

It is worth mentioning that the Greek Catholic bishops of the Visegrád Countries issued a joint statement on 25 April 2018 which pronounced that: 'As the political weight of the Visegrad Four has been significantly increasing, we, the Greek Catholic bishops of these countries also make a point of stressing the importance of helping those in need, while retaining the Christian identity of European countries. We acknowledge their (the refugees') need of being received in their dignity and of wishing to live a fully human life. However, it is also necessary to foster the possibility for them to return to their homeland and to live their own identity there.'<sup>38</sup>

That is why, the Hungarian Greek Catholic Metropolitan visited Syria again in August 2018, to hand over a \$US30,000 donation from Hungary which was collected during a second Greek Catholic charity drive. The Melkite Patriarchate spent these funds to finance children's programs, medical care for children, and the renovation of a Greek Catholic school, which was damaged in the war. After the donations were handed over, Patriarch Youssef Absi met Archbishop Kocsis. During his visit in 2018, Archbishop Kocsis also met Dr Ahmed Badreddin Hassoun, Sunni Grand Mufti of Syria to discuss Christian-Islamic dialogue and the Middle Eastern peace process. (KIRÁLY 2018a)

Atanáz Orosz, the Greek Catholic Bishop of Miskolc travelled to Syria in April 2019, at the invitation of Archbishop Jean-Clément Jeanbart of Aleppo, to attend the reconsecration of Aleppo's rebuilt cathedral. The renovation of this cathedral was partially funded by donations from Hungary. On his visit, Bishop Atanáz also carried a \$US15,000 donation, raised through another Hungarian Greek Catholic Church charity drive for the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarchate. Bishop Orosz also carried some aid for the Melkite Archdiocese of Aleppo, which was provided by the Greek Catholic Diocese of Miskolc. This visit was also important because, on behalf of Cardinal Péter Erdő and Metropolitan Fülöp Kocsis, Bishop Orosz invited personally Youssef Absi, the Patriarch of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, to be the leading celebrant of the Greek Catholic Divine Liturgy on the 2020 International Eucharistic Congress in

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fulop-sziria-interju-2488768> [Accessed 28/09/2021].

38 Declaration of the Greek Catholic Bishops of the Visegrad Four Group. <[https://www.lem.fm/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Declaration-of-the-Greek-Catholic-Bishops-of-the-Vysegrad-Four-Group\\_ENG.pdf](https://www.lem.fm/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Declaration-of-the-Greek-Catholic-Bishops-of-the-Vysegrad-Four-Group_ENG.pdf)> [Accessed 30/09/2021].

Budapest. The event, which was postponed due to the pandemic, took place 8 September 2021 in the St Stephen's Basilica, Budapest.

Fülöp Kocsis last visited Syria in August 2019 to take part in the reconsecration of Al-Dmeine's church. Although the renovation of the church's roof was completed in 2018, yet the Syrians waited with the reconsecration of the church, which was funded by Hungarian Greek Catholic support until Metropolitan Kocsis could take part in the ceremony. Archbishop Kocsis's former guide, Father Naim al Gharbi, told the Hungarian Metropolitan how the funds provided by the Greek Catholics of Hungary were disbursed in 2018. These funds were used to buy medicines for families in need, supported Christian families who were made homeless by the Syrian Civil War, organised camping trips for plenty of children, provided English language courses for older children, funded the university studies of young people who could not attend university without this financial assistance. Archbishop Fülöp also met a mother whose 18-year-old daughter had been diagnosed with cancer. Her treatment was also funded by the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church.

## CONCLUSION

What can a tiny and distant Church do to protect and help persecuted Christians? Anyone who knows the leaders of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church, Bishops Kocsis, Orosz and Szocska, is aware that these important decisions were taken after a lot of prayer under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the leaders and the faithful of the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church clearly understood St Paul's words from the First Letter to the Corinthians: 'For just as the body is one and has many members [...]. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.' (1 Cor 12:26) They translated these Bible verses into a day-to-day practice of assisting. Furthermore, this also means that in areas where Christian communities suffer persecution due to their faith, in addition to the assistance already provided, new opportunities must also be sought to help these suffering communities, since even a small donation can be extremely valuable for communities in need.

In December 2019, the people of the village Al-Dmeine wrote a

letter of thanks to their Hungarian Greek Catholic brethren whose donations enabled the renovation of their damaged church. The pastoral committee of the Parish of Al-Dmeine al-Sharqiyya, on behalf of the whole settlement, was grateful to announce to the public that the exterior renovation of their church has been completed, and the interior is being restored right now, this process is also made possible by a donation provided by the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church. As the Syrians put it, ‘the renovation of the church, which is the heart and soul of our community, fills our hearts with hope, as its symbolic and material value is invaluable to us.’ Later in their letter, they describe that from the donations they could afford to buy 300 litres of heating oil for four schools, so these educational institutions were heated during the winter. So they expressed that ‘the entire faculty, staff and students, especially the children of these four schools are grateful for the warmth which you helped to fill the buildings in this cold winter. On behalf of our entire settlement, we thank you for your help. We include you in our prayers.’<sup>39</sup>

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39 <[www.hd.gorogkatolikus.hu/A-sziriai-gorogkatolikus-testverek-koszono-levele-2019-december-26](http://www.hd.gorogkatolikus.hu/A-sziriai-gorogkatolikus-testverek-koszono-levele-2019-december-26)> [Accessed 30/09/2021].

# SOMETHING HAS IRREPARABLY BROKEN. DISPERSED CHRISTIANS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*Bianka Speidl*

## CHRISTIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

In recent decades the movement of Christians out of the Middle East is associated with the geopolitical shifts starting from 2003. However, the increasing internal conflicts in the modern states in the Middle East between 1970 and 2011 significantly impacted, often in a disproportionate manner, upon the Christian communities across the region. The so called ‘Arab Spring’, which hesitantly emerged over a decade ago brought, to the fore a number of issues—one of most pressing being the breakdown of a certain pluralist model of Arab/Middle Eastern society. This posed a distinct threat to religious minorities in the Arab Middle East. Conflicts have significantly undermined Christian political, social, and economic weight leading to weakening and impoverishment across their communities in the MENA region.

For more than a decade, Lebanon has hosted hundreds of thousands of Christian refugees from Iraq and Syria who are awaiting a positive response to their asylum claims from third countries—primarily Germany, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia—or the normalization of economic and political conditions in their homeland, as well as overall reconstruction. The research hereby presented is based on interviews performed in 2017. However, neither of these countries has showed any evidence of improvement since then. The extended stay in Lebanon had in many cases led to the exhaustion of family reserves and, as the aid of international organisations primarily focused on camps, the scattered Christian refugees most certainly missed the opportunity to receive assistance. It is notable that organised and focused international aid for Christians was not existent as such,

although they constituted nearly ten percent of all refugees; yet no international nor local organisations addressed their situation. Some churches provided education opportunities for children and distributed food packages, but this assistance fell far behind the needs.

As *Al-Nahar* newspaper reported ‘There is a great longing among all the Syrian Christians (from Aleppo) living in Lebanon to see peace return to their country so that they can return to their city and their homes, because their suffering, setbacks and tribulations cannot be tolerated by any human being.’<sup>1</sup> Often, their statement was ‘we would like to return if someone were to help us in the resumption and reconstruction of our homes.’ The past five years, however, proved otherwise and even for those who returned from the neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon have taken steps toward legal emigration. In the years prior to the civil war, Syrians had been characterised by taking employment abroad temporarily and investing their earnings in Syria. Lifelong migration was negligible in their circles. Conversely, Iraqi Christians did not express the willingness to return, primarily because of the critical security situation in Iraq, the lack of a solid central power, and the fact that the leadership has not traditionally supported and protected the minorities of the country.

### SYRIA’S CHRISTIANS IN A TRAP

Ever since the civil war erupted, Syrian Christians have been trapped in their presumed unanimous loyalty to the government, while being the weakest link in the alliances of the Ba‘ath regime. On the one hand, urban Christian elites being a privileged minority and an ally of the government, enjoyed a relatively peaceful and prosperous period. However, this resulted in a situation during the war best described by a Syrian Christian refugee in Turkey who said that ‘Syrian Christians are the most targeted with kidnappings and the kidnappers ask up to \$200,000 in ransom. Those kidnapped are mostly Christians because they are [considered] in a better economic

1 <Al-laji‘uwn al-suriyyun al-masihiyyun ila Lubnan ‘aytam’ wala man yahtamm li-amrihim, <<https://www.annahar.com/article/70455-اللاجئون-السوريون-المسيحيون-الى-لبنان-أيتام-ولا-من-يهتم-لأمرهم>> [Accessed 15/10/2021].

situation.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Christians living in the villages far from the developed centres did not enjoy the privileges of their urban brethren. Ten years into the conflict both groups are ready to leave behind their fragile status and want to migrate, because they see that the changes around them bring forward only deterioration: displacement, poverty, and the incapacity of the regime to provide them with the needed help and safety. Western countries appeal to them as social life-boats. What follows is a summary of interviews conducted in Zahlé, Lebanon, in June 2017 with three Christian refugee families from the governorates of Hama, al-Hasaka and Homs in the countryside of Syria.

*The road from the eastern countryside of Hama to the Netherlands*

We came here from Syria in 2016 with my husband and my two children. We lived in a village in the Hama Governorate. My husband always had a job so before the war we lived well. Then we heard threats from ISIS that we should get out, or they would kill us. ISIS sent some people to the village and gave us one week to leave. So the men left our home. When the time they gave us was over, they fired at the windows of the houses and our homes were destroyed. My husband used to work as a driver in a factory, his salary was very good, now he works in Beirut as a restaurant cleaner, he is paid 300 dollars, our rent is 350 dollars, I work as a cleaner in private houses. We did not want to come to Lebanon, but there was no opportunity to go elsewhere. It took us 24 hours to get to Lebanon and it was very difficult. My parents live in Lebanon as well, they are also in Zahlé. My brothers and sisters are here too, the family of my husband is still in Syria, our next step is to go abroad to the West. I have two small children, there is no hope for them here. My husband broke his arm, but he cannot stop working

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2 James Martone, 'Syrian Christian refugees turn to churches for help', *National Catholic Reporter* 49.12 (29 March 2013), p. 24.



otherwise they will fire him. I would like to rest and improve our circumstances. Some foreign countries in the West help people, my aunt is in the Netherlands. There is a long waiting list for emigration. I received an appointment for an interview in January 2017. If the war ended tomorrow, we would return because it is our country but there is not much chance for that. And who will help us to reconstruct our home? And our life?

This narrative, like most narratives I heard from my Christian interviewees, either from Iraq or Syria, seems to follow a tripartite sequence: 1. Pre-war. 2. In-between status in Lebanon. 3. The migration plan. I shall stick to this order in my analysis.

First, the lady from Hama tells the story of fights between the Syrian army and Daesh in the eastern part of Hama's countryside. Most of the governorate was under the regime's control, while some villages in the East were taken by the Islamist militias, and others in the north were captured by the opposition to Assad (mainly by al-Nusra front and The Free Syrian Army). Daesh's operations in Hama took place in the eastern part, and especially in the villages in the Salamiyya area. The latter was one of the areas in which fights between the regime and Islamic opposition started from the earliest days of the Syrian revolt and the Syrian forces were on the defensive between 2013 and 2016. The expansion of ISIS in 2013 in the area, threatened, but failed to overcome the Syrian army.<sup>3</sup>

The area was on the fringe, geographically and economically, and did not benefit from investment from the regime, depending mainly on poor agriculture and a basic food industry. My interviewee described her life as a good one—similar to others—which most probably must be read as 'we were good compared to now', however, living in the countryside and working as a driver did not allow for financial security or comfort. Having been forced to leave, migration became an exit for many people from the region although most of the Christians of Syria choose to join territories controlled by the Syrian

3 Daesh yartakin majzara fi 'Aqarib, <<https://www.alaraby.co.uk/politics/2017/5/18/داعش-يرتكب-مجزرة-في-عقارب-شرق-حماء-ويقتصف>> [Accessed 15/10/2021].

government. Before the war, the eastern region was inhabited by diverse communities, mostly by Sunnis, with a considerable number of 'Alawites and Ismailis. As the war began, the regime relied on its close allies, the 'Alawites and the Ismailis.<sup>4</sup>

The choice to stay in Lebanon as a refuge was not the preferred one. The family wished to migrate to a Western country, aspiring for a better life. However, as they are from the fringe in Syria, their house destroyed and being working-class, Lebanon could be only a transit country, with no way back, a place to apply for asylum or to migrate through on another way to the West. The family could still afford booking hotels, etc. to get a residency permit. Both the lady and her husband were working, making a living in Lebanon, as manual labourers. The Syrian Christian upper class in Lebanon obtain citizenship, own property, and conduct business, but the working-class and small traders live in hardship in the county. Some of them even decided to go back to Syria, disappointed by racism and the hard conditions.<sup>5</sup> Their life in Lebanon is lived in suffering.

Most of them, therefore, decide to migrate. This couple looks ahead, where the promised life in the West is idealized as help from the state, calm, and improved conditions. Asylum could be after all an opportunity to improve their social status by educating their children. The fact that half of the family (on the husband's side) is still in Syria illustrates the division of Christians, between those who could stay to care for their homes (mostly in Damascus and Tartous or in some regions that remained under government control) and hope to end the war, and those who left with the intention of not returning. My interviewee's family was itself divided between those who had already migrated (her aunt in the Netherlands) and the others who are in Zahlé, on the waiting list to migrate possibly to the Netherlands. The quest for assistance seems to be influencing the perception of Europe in the narratives I heard; part of that perception lies in the paternalist role of the state in Syria, offering assistance to 'Alawite and Christian

4 Madinat al-Salamiyya bayna narayn tabhath 'an tawq al-najat, <<http://rozana.fm/ar/القصص/23/محتوى/13106/مدينة-السلمية-بين-نارين-تبث-عن-طرق-النجاة/>> [Accessed 15/10/2021].

5 Al-laji'awn al-suriyyun al-masihiyyun ila Lubnan 'aytam' wala man yahtamm li-amrihim, <<https://www.annahar.com/article/70455-اللاجئون-السوريون-المسيحيون-الى-لبنان-أيتام-ولا-أمن-يهتم-لأمرهم>> [Accessed 15/10/2021].

minorities, leading eventually to the war. This narrative correlates with the one quoted by Jacques Berset, reporting for Aid to the Church in Need on his meeting with Christian refugee families in Zahlé who told him ‘We do not want to go back to Syria ... We are persecuted because we are Christians. We lost everything. We want to leave for Europe, where we will be respected.’<sup>6</sup>

*Existential fear: The family from al-Hasaka*

The wife: ‘I have pain and an infection in my stomach, in my mouth and on my legs. This was caused by anxiety and fear. When I left al-Hasaka and came to Lebanon I got this disease. I cannot rest. I am exhausted.’

The husband: ‘Before the war started in Syria, it was bad for us economically, I am a carpenter. Sometimes I had no work. But as for Christians it could not be better, we were safe and there was no persecution. We are Assyrians. I was working in construction for short periods. We have two children, and we had a third daughter who was born sick and died. The doctors failed to treat her. Then the war started. ISIS entered our village in the outskirts of al-Hasaka. We heard bombing and fled to Qamishli. We stayed there for about a week. Then we went back to al-Hasaka, and it got safe. After that, the war started between the government and the Kurds. The doctor at the school of our daughter was killed. The headquarters of the government’s forces was close to our house, so it was not safe. We left before the government was defeated by the Kurdish fighters. We lived in hard times: we received no help, there was no school, no chance for normal life, there was no work, it was war. It was not safe for us Christians. In al-Hasaka the situation became really difficult. A girl cannot walk alone ... it was different before that, even at 8 or 9 in the evening it was safe. Now girls are kidnapped,

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6 Réfugiés au Liban, les chrétiens de Syrie veulent partir pour l’Europe, <<http://www.aide-eglise-en-detresse.ch/articles-precedents/actualites/article/refugies-au-liban-les-chrétiens-de-syrie-veulent-partir-pour-leurope.html>> [Accessed 15/10/2021]

not by ISIS ... there are also organ traffickers who kidnap children to sell their organs. We fled to Lebanon in 2016. We are here in Lebanon, but no place is safe for us. No place is safe for a Christian in the Middle East. We are afraid. Our son who is seven-years-old, was traumatised in al-Hasaka because of the explosions. We came to Lebanon in the middle of the school year, and our kids get no education, we will see if they can start school next year. We are sick and tired of all this bombing and fleeing. We do not want to go back to Syria even if the war is over, we have seen enough: our daughter did not get proper medical treatment, no medication in Syria ... I had no work in Syria and there was no health service. I started today working in construction in Zahlé, we need to eat, I do not know yet the salary, we pay 200 dollars for the rent. Most Christians left al-Hasaka. For our community it is hard, we are nowhere welcome. When we go to the doctor with my wife, he asks for 15 dollars, and he says he is not a charity organisation. We do not want to go back to Syria, we lived in war in Hasaka from 2011 for six years ... we would like to migrate.’

As a Christian family in al-Hasaka my interviewees lived in economic hardship, but they were safe, in this city with 25,000 Christians, Syriac Orthodox and Catholic, Chaldeans and Armenians (out of a population of 180,000).<sup>7</sup> Al-Hasaka is a city in north-eastern Syria with a mosaic of faiths and ethnicities. The city had tensions which emerged in 2004 when ‘15 people were reported killed and more than 100 wounded in riots with clashes between Kurdish and Arab soccer fans.’<sup>8</sup> Kurds have political, cultural, and social demands they have made for decades in al-Hasaka, and the Northern areas in general. Al-Hasaka is a rich region in energy resources, agriculture and water, but the management by the Syrian regime favoured Arabs over

7 Jabhat al-Nusra tuhasir Masihiyyi al-Hasakah fi Suriyya, <<https://www.annahar.com/article/7090-جبهة-نصر-تحتاصر-مسيحيي-حسكة-في-سوريا>> [Accessed 15/10/2021].

8 Tension persists in northeastern Syria after weekend rioting, <<http://legacy.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/world/20040315-1317-syria-riot.html>> [Accessed 15/10/2021]

Kurds and led a policy of exclusion in terms of economy.<sup>9</sup> In July 2011, protests reached al-Hasaka against the regime.<sup>10</sup>

The narrative of my interviewees blends the plights of poverty, lack of services (before the war) and the unsafe conditions during the war. Before the war, the family lived in poor conditions in the north-east, like probably many other Syrians, Christians and non-Christians: they endured deficiencies in employment, health service and education. Being on the margin, geographically and socially, worsened their overall condition. As the war started, they lived in al-Hasaka while the government forces shared the control with the Kurds, and later, during their military confrontation in 2015 and 2016. They left after the Kurds had taken control of the city, and the government forces withdrew. Yet, my interviewees said they were not afraid of the Kurds, and as they also told us, they were safe under the government's control. Safety, however, should not be mistaken for comfort or sufficient means for prosperity. Heiko Wimmen reported that Christians expressed fears of being resented by others, a fear of retribution by association.<sup>11</sup> There are also fears that the Kurds who lead an active policy of Kurdification in al-Hasaka will diminish further the role of the Christians.<sup>12</sup>

This fear is not of concrete forces; instead, my interviewees disclose an existential insecurity: they are establishing a link between being marginalized and being 'Christian in the Middle East under attack'. For them, terror, lack of trust and poverty are pieces of the same account. They see the developments in the Middle East as a zero-sum game, in which Christians lose everything, because others take all. The general context of targeting Christians in Egypt and Iraq appears to influence their decision, even if, all things considered, the situation of Christians in Syria, so far, is less tragic than that of the Christians in Iraq. However, their interaction with their society in Syria made them believe that there is no way to fix the social balance, which operates

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9 The Kurdish Reawakening in Syria, <[https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0404\\_s1.htm](https://www.meforum.org/meib/articles/0404_s1.htm)> [Accessed 15/10/2021]

10 Protests' Size Shows Gain in Momentum Across Syria, <<http://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20110722/protests-size-shows-gain-in-momentum-across-syria/2>> [Accessed 15/10/2021]

11 Heiko Wimmen, 'Divisive rule: sectarianism and power maintenance in the Arab Spring: Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria', *DEU*, Berlin, 2014, p. 23.

12 Al-Akrad yanshurun kharita mustaqbaliyya li-hudud iqlimihim fi Suriyya, <<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2012/12/30/257825.html>> [Accessed 15/10/2021]

always in favour of someone, at the expense of someone else. In al-Hasakah the Ba'ath members were favoured, in 2017 it was the Kurds. My interviewees do not wish to go back to Syria after the war, because there is no proper employment, education and health service. The only exit, or flight forward shall we say, they see from their situation, is migration. They want to migrate without a plan, they did not specify a country of destination for it matters little, as long as it offers a better life. All that matters is that migration seems to be a ladder and a saviour from all the social problems they faced so far.

*The broken family from Homs*

We are an Orthodox family from al-Jabriya, in the governorate of Homs. Before the war, our living standard was low, but we were safe and had no security problems. We were farmers, my husband was sick and died years before the war, my son was killed six years ago, we do not know who killed him. He had a child in addition to his wife being pregnant of five months, his wife lives with us here in Zahlé. My son went out to get some milk for the baby. Then they found him dead. I am here with my third son, my daughter-in-law and two of her children, she works and sustains us. I need medication every month, I am registered for medical assistance at the UNHR, but got nothing. My son is a young man but does not find work here. Our house was not destroyed; we sold our land, our house and everything and left Syria to come here, we paid a commission to the army to let my son go who fled illegally from military service. We use the money to cover the expenses here as well. But the end of the month is always difficult.

The son: 'I served in the Syrian army as a reserve in 2005, I refused to respond to the call of the army during the war. We hope we can emigrate, we would not like to return to Syria, we want to emigrate for the sake of the little kids, for their future. As Christians in Syria, we had sometimes

difficulties. We registered for emigration and the embassy of New-Zealand contacted us. But they lied to us in the end, we prepared everything in vain, we were ready, we were the only Christian family among the candidates, they rejected our application, and they did not explain to us why. Everyone else who applied travelled to New-Zealand except us. I think they accept Muslims because they are at an age for work, they want to employ them. It was written in the document that we are Christians, we have tried every Western country possible, and registered for emigration, we tried Austria, France, Australia, Canada, the United States, nobody is interested in our case ... we even asked help from different Catholic and Orthodox churches but in vain.'

Al-Jabriya is a village in the north-eastern plateau of Homs, in the governorate of Homs province. It is located in a plain land, 15 kms north-east of Homs. Its houses are made of mud, wooden and tiled roofs. Despite some recent urbanisation, its inhabitants are predominantly small farmers, who cultivate grains, vegetables and potatoes, and raise poultry. It has one high school.<sup>13</sup> The village was the border between the area under the regime's control (including al-Jabriya) and the north of Homs, under the Islamist opposition to the Syrian regime.<sup>14</sup>

In this discourse too, three phases can be distinguished: the pre-war period, the transitory situation, and the emigration plan. Before the war, Christians in the countryside of Homs (some 150,000 people)<sup>15</sup> experienced ethnic antagonism from the 'Alawites, but in an authoritarian framework, resentment and hate were suppressed. Until the war, there was no Christian victimhood in Homs, nor in Syria as a whole. The situation of the Christians in the countryside, like that of my interviewees, was socially and economically precarious, because the countryside, in Syria and the larger MENA region, is a

13 al-Jabriya. <<http://www.discover-syria.com/bank/1097>> [Accessed 15/10/2021]

14 Majzara li-l-nizam fi al-Rastan, <<http://www.akhbaralaan.net/news/arab-world/2016/5/18/massacre-rastan-kidnapped-40-women>> [Accessed 15/10/2021]

15 Al-Masihyyun fi Hims wa-mawaqifuhum min al-thawra, <<http://raseef22.com/politics/2016/06/18/المسيحيون-في-حمص-ومواقفهم-من-الثورة>> [Accessed 15/10/2021]

marginal place. Necessarily being on the fringe impacts the health and employment conditions of the people. This has affected Sunnis and Kurds. My interviewees left an area under the government's control and therefore they did not leave due to persecution.

Not only this family expressed mistrust of the government but also affirmed that the third son refused to serve in the army, indicating the rejection of the government's drain of manpower. As the conflict turned into a sectarian war between Sunnis (backed by Sunni Gulf countries) and 'Alawites backed by Iran, Iraq and Lebanese Shi'ites, the Christians of the countryside got irreversibly pushed to the margin. The family did not come to start a new life in Lebanon. They had a plan to migrate to the West, already in al-Jabriyya. They heard and saw that the world accepts Syrian migrants, so they decided to sell everything. Their assumption that they were rejected by New Zealand because they are Christians aggravated their resentment that permeated their views and feelings.

## DISCUSSION

The conflict which emerged in Syria in March 2011 has significantly impacted upon the Christian communities leading to internal displacement within the country and in the region. Syria's Christians, especially those in the countryside suffered a threefold deprivation. First, living in villages under minimal conditions of a subsistence economy, lacking the services the state had offered in the major cities, they saw the gap increase between their conditions and those residing in the centres. The regime favoured 'Alawites and Christian-Sunni urban elites who had taken functions in the Ba'ath Party and in the army, while Christians in the countryside have often remained marginal to these relations. Furthermore, the conflict has remapped Syria around an explicit intercommunal or sectarian antagonism between Sunnis and 'Alawites-Shi'ites, with the Kurds emerging in the north-east region. Christians are excluded from this remapping. It is argued here that we should review our understanding of the situation of Christians in Syria; bearing in mind that the vulnerability of those residing in the countryside is as acute as that of other social groups, and their fragility has become exacerbated with the conflict. The



Syrian conflict has revealed the structural weakness and vulnerability of minority groups in the absence of state power and authority and the failure of any coherence mechanism in Arab society. Despite nearly a century of state building and modernization in the MENA region many minority communities have come to realize that their existence, presence, stability and future is no longer self-evident. This perspective is an important backdrop to the on-going refugee crisis among the Christian communities in the Middle East.

#### IRAQ'S CHRISTIANS REACHING A POINT OF NO RETURN

*A mother of four from Tesqopa*

Daesh entered Mosul to cause Maliki's fall ... they entered with tanks and weapons, in Mosul ... after that they (Daesh) announced in the mosques that Christians either surrender, that is they convert to Islam or they pay the *jizya* (the tribute), or they should be slaughtered ... Christians came to us in the villages, after Daesh took Mosul, fights continued around the city between them and the Iraqi army, reaching our villages, hitting a church at Tel Keppe, which is close to our village Tesqopa. We heard firing by guns, but we did not know who was involved, so we left our village, on 4 August 2014, two days before they (Daesh) took Tesqopa. There were no cars. I was living with my family (my husband rejected me and my daughters). Someone found us a car, it was very difficult, and finally we reached safe areas in Erbil. Before leaving to Erbil, we lived for four days in psychological and physical siege, water supplies were destroyed, there was no water, no electricity, generators of electricity were destroyed, no gas, the price of a generator of electricity reached the price of 100,000 Iraqi dinars (around 85 dollars), we were tired, we had no income ... Ours (The Iraqi army) withdrew, we had no weapons, they were called to withdraw because the issue was bigger than them, the high officials withdrew. Some people stayed in Tesqopa, especially the disabled who had none to help

them to leave, some of those who stayed were beaten, the cousin of my husband was beaten and died, he was buried after the liberation. Then Daesh left land mines, and someone from my family died because of that ... the houses were sacked, they destroyed the Christian statues and took off the crosses. We travelled from Erbil by car to Beirut paying 150 dollars, it was highly risky to live, and normally they would not let us go ... salvation can only come from God, we lost hope in Erbil and feared Daesh will come to Erbil and take us ... life here in Beirut is difficult, Erbil is better, it is a tourist area after all, Erbil was difficult for me because I had no papers, all my papers were in the name of my husband, and that is why we left Erbil. I paid the trip with the money I got from my husband (I was his second wife), now God willing we go to Great Britain. After two years, nothing seems to improve, wherever we go, there are extremists. I worked as a cleaner here in Beirut, I get 500 dollars from which I pay 300 dollars for the rent.

The interviewee, a divorced woman—former primary school teacher—with four daughters from Tesqopa (Teleskuf) near Mosul, left for Erbil on 4 August 2014 and then in 2015 on to Beirut where at the time of the interview she had been staying for two years. The lady described the event that took place in Tesqopa in early August 2014, when ISIS took the town on 6 August 2014.

In Saddam Hussein's era (1979-2003) Tesqopa 30 kms to the north of Mosul was a victim of confiscation of fertile lands by the Ba'ath regime redistributed to the regime's clients (mostly Arab Sunnis). After the fall of Saddam in 2003, the town became a field of geopolitical remapping of Northern Iraq as Kurdistan aimed to take under its administration the Christian towns of Northern Iraq expanding its territory to the West, while Arab Sunnis claim the region for themselves.<sup>16</sup> As an illustration of this conflict, in 2007, two terrorist attacks targeted the Kurdish Democratic Party in Tesqopa.<sup>17</sup> The city

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16 The government of Iraqi Kurdistan plans to annex Christian villages, <<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2006/10/16/28318.html>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017].

17 News about our Christian people, <<http://www.karemlash4u.com/vb/showthread>.

was inhabited by nearly 14,000 Chaldean Catholics, making 1,300 families, who live mainly from agriculture. Half of these families emigrated abroad while, as of 2017, 600 families live today as refugees mostly in Kurdistan. The number of houses is around 1,700, 20 of them were destroyed, and fifty were burned down. The town has been safe since 2015, but the Iraqi government was absent in subsequent years and no services were provided in the town. Fifty families had returned by February 2017.<sup>18</sup>

Two interconnected layers can be identified in the story: a historical-political layer and a social layer. While the lady tells the story of war and its consequences on her village, it is perceived in dramatic and personal terms. That ISIS only stayed for a short time in Tesqopa, that the military confrontation touched superficially the town leaving most of the buildings intact and that the town was safe for two years in 2017, are absent from her story. What seems to emerge from this story is a lost trust and hope in the region as a whole, and the experience of an insecure and scattered life in the Middle East independently from the war on ISIS. She is suspicious of a conspiracy that allowed the ISIS to take easily Mosul.

The social layer pertains to her fragility, rejected by the husband, living with her with daughters, and in conditions of surviving on her income as a teacher, unsustainable in the longer term. All these factors intensify her perception of the region as a waste land. Then in Erbil she became prisoner of her past as all her papers were in the name of her ex-husband. In Beirut, she had a regular income but lived in a 20-square meter abandoned store in a disused shopping mall; her children were attending the Chaldean school free of fee. However, the hope of a better life (feeling safe especially socially) seems to direct her to the West, especially to Great Britain, believing that the status of refugee offers better perspectives. The stories of other members of the village who managed to get to Norway and other European countries serve as dream catchers.

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php?t=10916> [last accessed: 6/07/2017].

18 50 families return to Teleskuf, <<https://aawsat.com/home/article/858251/عودة-50-عائلة-نازحة-إلى-بلدة-تسقف-المسيحية-شمال-الموصل>> [last accessed: 6/07/2017].

I have four daughters. I fled from Baghdad to protect them. Some people had intentions to kidnap my daughters as I was working with foreigners. I was something like a driver-translator. They said you are a Christian, and you bring foreigners and Americans to Iraq. Our life standards were very good in Baghdad. We had a house and a farm. They (Daesh) destroyed them now by cannons. Then, we moved to Northern Iraq, Batnaya, near Mosul. We left Mosul because of the insurgents in 2010 and came to Lebanon. We were completely destroyed. There is no justice, no humanity. I was working, but in Baghdad they hit me with a car, and I went to the hospital for seven days. It was a car accident, on my way to the military camp, as I was working for the foreigners. My wife and daughters were scared. Now in Beirut, two of my daughters are married to Iraqis. I have two daughters with me at home. My wife is at home, for three months, she has been sick, she had a stroke so that left her hand and foot paralysed. She is mentally tired. One of my daughters left school to cook and wash the clothes. She is only thirteen. I have been for seven years here. I tried to go to America, but they rejected me. First, they accepted and told us to get prepared for leaving in ten days. Then three days before the departure, they said we should examine further your case again. After a year and a half, they rejected my application all at once. They said there are other reasons for rejection. The United Nations used to provide help every two or three months. In Batnaya, we lost everything, my father died, and the house was gone. I have a brother here and I have sisters married in Northern Iraq. All the Christians of Northern Iraq left, either for Lebanon, Jordan or Turkey. There are still Christians in Northern Iraq, in Erbil, and other places, some 150-200 families, many of them in Syria. They (Daesh) said: this is not your country, this is an Islamic state, they destroyed the churches, after the fall of Saddam, they said this is not

your country. But Iraq belonged to our ancestors ... I do not want anything: all I want from Jesus Christ is that my wife gets cured, and my daughter goes to school ... I am 57 years old, after three years I retire, I do not want anything from life, except stability, if there is a place to go, we would go, but the mental and material conditions are dire, sorry. Life here in Lebanon is hard, very hard, by Christ, I know some fifty families whose children work, they still get the red card from the UN which guarantees them financial assistance, while me I have no one to work, my wife is sick, my daughter cannot work, my hands are tied. All my money has gone here in Lebanon. For seven years, I ask for assistance from the United Nations. Only the Church helps me. I pay for this garage where we stay 350 dollars; it is like one room. I need to regularly buy medicine for my wife, by God there is no justice. For six months now, they give me nothing. We are in urgent need, it is necessary, but our voice is not heard by the United Nations.

The interviewee is originally from the Northern Iraq, he worked for the US army, then in 2010 left for Beirut. Similarly to the lady from Tesqopa, the man from Baghdad witnesses a double pain: on the one side, he suffers the pain of social fragility, which leads him to repeat several times in his story that there is no justice (in this world), and even the priest who accompanied me added that his life is the most miserable he has ever seen. On the other side, the man from Baghdad endures the pain of victimhood as a Christian. In his case, the double pain incarnates the nexus of social identity of poverty, especially of Christian lower middle classes, and farmers in the Middle East. While this man enjoyed a double privilege in Baghdad, being Christian deemed trustworthy by American forces and being assigned jobs of translation and driving, he lost everything in a sectarian country in which social status and ethnic-religious identity are interrelated.

Until the fall of Saddam in 2003, Christians in Baghdad lived as a privileged minority, under secular Arab nationalism (which favoured Sunni and Christian urban elites), and especially under the Ba'ath party (many Christians were members of the party, and there was a strong

alliance between the Churches and the Ba'ath-led Christians to secure a high social status). Their exodus started in late 1990s, following the coalition bombings and impoverishment caused by the US embargo on Iraq. However, the first attacks and threats directed to Christians in Baghdad started in 2003 after the American invasion of Iraq (March-April 2003). In July 2003, it was reported that 'a band of criminals threatened to kill members of Saint George Chaldean Church unless the church paid \$10,000. The church refused and American forces sent extra patrols, but couldn't provide 24-hour security ... the church began advising members to move out of Baghdad to safer ground in northern Iraq.'<sup>19</sup> On 1 January 2004, a terrorist attack targeted a Christian restaurant in Baghdad.<sup>20</sup> Several attacks were led the same year against Christians.<sup>21</sup> The purpose was to push out Christians from Baghdad as the capital was a battlefield between Shi'ites and insurgent Sunnis (al-Qaida), with Shi'ites taking over in alliance with the American troops. Christians lost their security and livelihood and were disappropriated by the new Shi'ite urban elites. After being threatened by insurgents in 2004, thousands of Christians left the Iraqi capital.<sup>22</sup>

Leaving a privileged urban life, albeit unsafe, in Baghdad for Batnaya, the interviewee certainly underwent a social downgrading. Although for a while Northern Iraq was spared, as the battle was about the control over Baghdad between 2003-2006 (dominated by Shi'ites). The battle moved west and north, and Christians came under attack again, when Northern Iraq became the battlefield between Sunni Arabs and Kurds, and although seemingly peaceful before 2006, it was less protected an area than Baghdad, and Christians were again to be disappropriated.<sup>23</sup> Following the withdrawal of US troops from Iraq between December 2007 and 2011, Sunni insurgents started to

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19 Kevin Begos, 'Baghdad: Battles ahead for Christians', *Christianity Today*, Vol. 47, Issue 9 (Sep2003), <<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/september/12.35.html>> [Accessed 16-10-21].

20 Suicide bomber kills five in attack on Baghdad restaurant, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/suicide-bomber-kills-five-in-attack-on-baghdad-restaurant-72513.html>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017].

21 Iraqi Christians targeted, <<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/595081348/Iraqi-Christians-targeted.html>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017].

22 Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan Say They Will Not Return to Baghdad, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-2008-09-15-voa20/405484.html>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017].

23 Iraq Christians flee Baghdad for peace and hardship in Kurdistan, <<http://www.aina.org/news/20060630110317.htm>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017].

move their operations to the north (in the hope to overtake Kurds and establish a Sunni state in the north and western parts of Iraq).<sup>24</sup> Christians were forced from their homes and an archbishop in Mosul was kidnapped and killed. Northern Iraq became unsafe for Christians, under attack from the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI) (to become later ISIS after entering Syria in 2013). Christians started to flee to Jordan and Lebanon, and up to 2010, it is estimated that hundreds of Iraqi Christians were murdered and tens of thousands had fled Iraq.<sup>25</sup>

As the man from Baghdad said, ‘his hands are tied.’ Having lived for seven years in Beirut as a refugee, both as a social and religious refugee, on assistance and having lost everything, he represents thousands of Christians who, like him suffer from the double pain of being uprooted and refused by the West. The lady from Tesqopa reacted by resilience, while the man of Baghdad responded with resignation.

*The goldsmith's wife from Mosul*

We come from Mosul, the city. On the day of 10<sup>th</sup> of June, there was a big noise in the streets, there was a curfew for five days, they said there was a gang that entered Mosul, the army was deployed. We were unprepared, had no bread. My husband was a goldsmith, he said life was turned upside down in the market. They said it was a just small group, there was no talk about Daesh. On the fifth day of the curfew, we saw people coming from the right side of the city to the left side, fleeing on foot, we were scared, seeing those people, as we realized we could not get out of the city. My daughter was studying medicine and preparing for her exams, another daughter was studying dental medicine. The next day the curfew was ended, and everyone fled Mosul, they said Mosul fell to Daesh. At 1 o'clock in the morning we took the car and left the city,

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24 Christians in Iraqi Kurdistan Say They Will Not Return to Baghdad, <<https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-2008-09-15-voa20/405484.html>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017]

25 Iraqi Christians suffering ‘between two fires’ <<https://www.osv.com/MyFaith/Article/TabId/586/ArtMID/13752/ArticleID/4533/Iraqi-Christians-suffering-between-two-fires.aspx>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017].

we went to Qaraqush, where we met an officer of the Iraqi army who fled as well in civilian dress. He said they received orders to withdraw. It was 48 degrees Celsius, we spent ten days in Qaraqush ... but then fighting reached Qaraqush, then we went to Erbil, and from Erbil to Beirut by airplane. We came to Lebanon to apply for emigration, we came to see the United Nations. For what reasons should we stay in the Middle East? They took our house, our factory in the market, with all the gold and silver, some strangers took our house. The conditions of refugees are similar in Beirut and Erbil. But in Erbil, there is humiliation and hopelessness, but Beirut, even if it is hard, it allows application for emigration with the United Nations, and offers help to get out of here. Here one can hope to emigrate, we applied for Canada, my father and uncle live in Canada, we are ready to go, we only wait for the visa. When we came here first, we were humiliated for two months, we did not know how to get by. Some Lebanese people exploited us, we pay now 400 dollars for the rent, it is better than the first apartment we had, now we have a kitchen and a bathroom, my daughter did her medicine exam in Erbil and graduated before we left for Beirut.

Daughter: 'I cannot work here because I need an authorization from the Lebanese Doctors' Union, it is costly (50,000 dollars), I do not have a residence permit to practise medicine either, I am here temporarily anyway before leaving, I am here with my two brothers and my mom. My father and my sister are in Erbil, she will graduate this month ... My little brother is at school, a school for Iraqi Christians, and the other brother works in a wood factory, he is 17 years old, all our papers are ready, we just wait for the visa. Our life was very good, we lost everything ... '

The goldsmith's wife lived the experience of the fall of Mosul to ISIS on 10 June 2014. Mosul is a city in Northern Iraq, of around 1.5 million



inhabitants, and an estimated several thousand Christians. On the 10 June, reports indicated that ‘thousands of families were fleeing north from Mosul towards the nearby Kurdistan region, where Iraq’s ethnic Kurds have autonomy and their own large and disciplined military force, the Peshmerga.’<sup>26</sup> In Erbil, where the goldsmith’s wife moved with her family, she realized that they crossed the line of non-return. As Father Emmanuel, a pastor of a refugee camp in Erbil expressed it, ‘for us Christians, Mosul is over. We will not be returning.’<sup>27</sup> Father Emmanuel fled Mosul with 500 families of his parish on 10 June 2014 for Erbil, where a camp received 1,500 Christian families and about 5,000 people, mostly land owners, merchants, or businessmen who lost everything.<sup>28</sup> Father Emmanuel said ‘something was irreparably broken between us and our Muslim compatriots. We want to stay in the country. But if the Muslim majority no longer wants us, what can we do? Muslims do not know the love of neighbour, especially if it is of another religion. It is very unlikely that they will accept to give back the property they have stolen from the Christians.’<sup>29</sup>

Thanks to their financial resources as upper middle class, the goldsmith’s family worked out a means to migrate, which will take them to Canada, via Beirut. N.b., to the great resentment of the Chaldean priest with whom I visited the family, they started to align with a Protestant missionary network, who promised them help, for which they expressed their willingness to leave their own denomination. Migration seemed to be the only plan they envisioned, probably ever since they had taken the road to Erbil. They did not want to go back to Mosul. The occupation interrupted their life which was prosperous and promising with no intention (need) to emigrate. Both in her story and that of her daughter, there is mourning for the past, a sense of enduring an unexpected situation, almost as a curse. There is also an element of mistrust towards Middle Eastern countries and societies.

Like the lady from Tesqopa, she mistrusted the decisions of the government and the Iraqi army. Another element that undermines

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26 Mosul falls to militants, Iraqi forces flee northern city, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iraq-security-idUSKBN0EL1H520140610>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017].

27 Iraq: Christians No Longer Want to Return to Mosul, <<http://sspx.ca/en/news-events/news/iraq-christians-no-longer-want-return-mosul-30227>> [last accessed: 6-07-2017].

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

any possibility of return is the economic disappropriation and lack of protection they were victims of. They do not seem determined at all to get back what was taken from them, as if it was normal: when you lose something in the Middle East, it is gone for ever. Life with Muslims was difficult even in Beirut where they had to develop a high sensitivity to fasting in Ramadan, being forced to reside in an Islamic neighbourhood. Every obstacle, necessary to a war situation, migration, mobility, or the bureaucratic procedures are seen as a humiliation, and every situation is perceived as a proof of hopelessness in the Middle East. Projection on life in Canada seems to nurture the hope and offer perspectives with two medical doctors in the family and where arrival seems to be the end of the Calvary.

## DISCUSSION

The US-led intervention in Iraq in 2003 profoundly altered the strained balance and relations between different communities and religions, however, one of the direct consequences has been that nearly 70 percent of Christians have left the country, either being displaced across the region or to Western states. The narratives of the Iraqi Christian refugees help us to understand the irreconcilable cleavages Islamism and sectarian politics and social alliances cause in modern societies. Migration has appeared at times for them a natural avenue to compensate the loss, and a desperate resort to reconstitute for themselves a worthwhile life with security and a stable social and economic future. This proves a framework to understand and give context to the hardships they endure as refugees. Those who have remained have often continued to experience the precariousness of internal displacement and the mercurial actions of the various sectarian or ethnic/tribal militias. To understand the dual identity of Iraqi Christians in Beirut as refugees and migrants, one must consider their double loss: homes and hopes. They are homeless because either their homes were taken and destroyed or their group was erased from the political map in Iraq, and their hopes were gone, as economically they were disappropriated, becoming deprived of goods and capital.

## CONCLUSION

The current structures of societies and regimes in the Middle East are such that any gain of any ethnic or religious group implies the loss and defeat of another group. It is a social-ethnic sectarian moral economy based on extreme exclusion and a zero-sum game. Christians in the Middle East endure a double pain: that of political, social, and economic vulnerability as a religious minority, and that of social disappropriation as former urban elites, targeted by rival social (religious and ethnic: Shi'ite, Sunnite or Kurd) communities. As a result, even if Christians live or stay in relatively safe areas in the Middle East, they tend to migrate out of the region.