

# THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANTIOCH AT A GLANCE



**MOR IGNATIUS ZAKKA I IWAS**  
**Patriarch of Antioch and All The East**

Translated into English  
By  
EMMANUEL H. BISMARJI

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*Dedication*

From

**H.E. Mor Philoxenus Mattias Nayis**

Patriarchal Assistant

And the administration, monks and students of

**Saint Ephrem Theological Seminary**

Maarat Saydnaya – Damascus - Syria

To our beloved spiritual father

*H.H. Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas*

*Patriarch of Antioch and All the East*

In celebration

Of his life's Diamond Jubilee (75 years)

Wishing Him long life and prosperity

**PROFILE OF**  
**HIS HOLINESS MORAN MOR**  
**IGNATIUS ZAKKA I WAS**

Patriarch of Antioch and All the East  
Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church

◆ His Holiness was born in a prestigious Iraqi Family in Mosul –Iraq on April 21, 1933 and was named Sanharib. He is the son of Basheer Iwas and Haseebah Atto. He also has the Lebanese Nationality.

◆ He received his elementary education at the schools of Al-tahzeeb and Mar Touma in Mosul of the Syrian Orthodox Church.

◆ He joined St. Ephrem Seminary in Mosul in the academic year 1946-1947, and was named Zakka. He graduated from the Seminary with distinction and obtained Diploma in Theology, Church history, Canon Law and in the Syriac, Arabic and English languages in 1954.

◆ He took his monastic vows on June 6, 1954 and became a teacher of the Holy Bible, Syriac and Arabic at the same Seminary. Thereafter he joined the Secretariat at the Patriarchal Headquarters in Homs as Second

Secretary during the Patriarchate of Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum.

◆ When the Late Patriarch Yacoub III was enthroned on the Patriarchal See he was appointed as Patriarchal First Secretary and was ordained a priest in 1957. He was decorated with the Holy Cross on April 15, 1959.

◆ He joined the Episcopal School of Theology in New York in the academic year 1961-1962 and later received an Honorary Doctorate in Theology from that School.

◆ He was appointed as an Official Observer at the Second Vatican Council in its two sessions in 1962-1963.

◆ He was ordained as the Archbishop of Mosul and its environs in 1963 and was given the name of Mor Severius Zakka Iwas. He was in charge of the diocese from 1963 through 1969.

◆ In 1966 he was appointed as the Acting Archbishop of the Archdiocese of the monastery of Mar Mattai in addition to his position as Archbishop of Mosul.

◆ He was elected as the Archbishop of the Diocese of Baghdad and Basra in 1969 and was also appointed as the Acting Archbishop of Europe and Australia.

♦ He was unanimously elected by the Holy Syrian Orthodox Synod of Antioch as the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and the Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church on July 11, 1980.

♦ He was enthroned as Patriarch with the name Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas at St. George Cathedral in Damascus on September 14, 1980.

♦ He was elected as a president (one of the four presidents) of the MECC on January 22, 1990.

♦ He became a President (one of the seven Presidents) of the WCC on December 14, 1998.

### **Most important Construction works during his Patriarchate**

- Construction of the ‘Monastery of St. Ephrem the Syrian’ in Ma’arrat Seydnaya which was inaugurated on September 14, 1996.

- Construction of the ‘Universal Center of Syrian Orthodox Religious Education’ at the Monastery of St. Ephrem the Syrian in Ma’arrat Seydnaya which was inaugurated on September 14, 1998.

- Construction of the ‘Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul, the two Chief Apostles’, at the Monastery of St. Ephrem the Syrian in Ma’arrat Seydnaya which was inaugurated on September 14, 1999.

- Construction of ‘St. Ephrem Patriarchal Halls’ at the Monastery of St. Ephrem the Syrian in Ma’arrat Seydnaya which was inaugurated on September 14, 2000.
- Construction of the ‘House of Love for the elderly Syrian Orthodox Clergy’ in Ma’arrat Seydnaya which was inaugurated on September 14, 2003.
- Construction of numerous monasteries, churches, shrines and schools, and the establishment of associations and institutions in various Syrian Dioceses.

## **EDUCATION**

His Holiness holds:

- A Diploma from St. Ephrem Seminary School in Mosul
- A Diploma in Journalism by correspondence from Egypt.
- Fellowship of the Institute of Syriac Studies at the University of Chicago in 1981.
- Honorary Doctorate from the Episcopal General School of Theology in New York in 1984.

## **Positions held**

- 1972: Vice President of the Syriac Language Academy in Baghdad.

- 1979: Active Member, Head of the Syrian Board as well as Member of the Board of Presidents of the Iraqi Academy, and Associate Member of the Arabic Academy in Jordan.

- 1998: Honorary member of the Iraqi Academy.

- 2000: Member Correspondent of Damascus Arabic Academy.

### **Some of his published works**

1- **“Al- Markat fi Amal Rai Al- Ruaat Mar Ignatius Yacoub III”** (The Ascent - Works of Mor Ignatius Yacoub III, the Shepherd of Shepherds). The first book issued by His Holiness in 1958. It includes a historical overview of the town of Bartallehi and a biography of the Late Patriarch Yacoub III with a description of his Apostolic Visits to South America, the villages of Homs and Aleppo. (350pp)

2- **“Husn Al-shahada wa Al- Adaa fi Sir’rai Al- Tajassud wa Al- Fidaa aou Akidat Al- Tajassud Al- Ilahi”** (Perfection of Witness and Deeds in the Sacraments of Incarnation and Redemption or The Doctrine of Divine Incarnation). It is a treatise on the theme of Incarnation and Redemption from theological, Doctrinal and historical points of view. Issued in 1959. (86 pp)

3- **“Al-mishkat fi ziyarat Rai Al- Ruat Mar Ignatius Yacoub III”** (The Lamp - the Visit of Mor Ignatius Yacoub III, The Shepherd of Shepherds). Issued

in 1960. It includes a description of the Apostolic Visits of his predecessor, the Late Patriarch Yacoub III to Zahleh , Egypt, Jordan, USA and Canada. (160pp)

4- “**Silsilat Al- Tahtheeb Al- Maseehi**” (Series of Christian Ethics). 4 vols. (220pp) Issued in 1967. Mosul ed.

5- “**Al- Asrar Al-saba**” (The Seven Sacraments). A theological and liturgical treatise issued in 1970 in cooperation with Priest Ishaq Saka (later Archbishop). (200pp).

6- “**Sirat Mar Aphram Al-Suryani**” (Biography of St. Ephrem the Syrian) issued in 1974 mainly for distribution among the participants in Ephrem Hunain Festival in Baghdad. Published by the Syriac Language Academy in Baghdad. 84pp).

7- “**Al-Hamama**” (The Dove). A summary of the austere life style of ascetics and biographies of anchorites by Bar Hebraeus, Catholicos of the East. A critical comparison of the old Syriac manuscript copied four years after the death of Bar Hebraeus with the older Syriac copies. Translated into Arabic with an introduction written by His Holiness in which he touched upon the life of Bar Hebraeus and his works. He also had concise quotations from the English translation written by the Dutch Orientalist Winsink, who died in 1939 which served as a second introduction to the book.

(260pp.)

8- **“Kanisat Antakia Al- Suriania Al- Orthodoxia Ibra Al- Ousour”** (The Syrian Orthodox Church through the Ages). A general historical treatise on the Church. Issued in 1980. 40 pp. Translated into English.

9- **“Qissat Ahl Al-kahf fi almasader al- Suriania”** (The Story of the People of the Cave According to Syriac References). A historical and theological treatise (40pp.)

10- **“Hassad Al-Mawaez”** (Harvest of Homilies) 2 vols. A collection of Homilies delivered by His Holiness at the St. George Cathedral in Damascus at Christmas and Easter and on other religious occasions, Patriarchal Encyclicals, Spiritual Discourses and biographies of some celebrated personalities. First vol. Issued in 1984. (167pp) Second Vol. issued in 1988. (200 pp)

11- **“Masabeeh Ala Al Tareeq”** (Lanterns On the Road) A collection of treatises including religious literature, Ecclesiastic History, Social life and biographies of saints.( 184pp)

12- **“Nujoom Satea fi Samaa Al- Kanisah”** (Luminous Stars in the Church) includes biographies of celebrated Syrian Fathers, Mar Philoxenos of Mabbug +523, Mar Gregory I, Patriarch of Antioch +790, Mar

Jacob of Edessa +708, Patriarch Dionysius Al-Talmahri +845, all of whom were included in the collection of theological, historical and spiritual treatises.

13- **“Raihat Al- Maseeh Al-Zakiah”** (The Sweet Fragrance of Jesus)

14- **A collection of treatises** dealing with ecumenical issues:

1- The Church and the basics of ecumenical Councils in it.

2- Acceptance of Councils.

3- Fellowship among local churches and the Syrian Church and Christian Unity.

4- Views of an Observer at Lambeth Conference.

15- **Religious, Literary and Historical Treatises**

1- An illustrious page of the history of Syriac Literature.

2- Religious values and Family Planning.

3- The Doctrine of the One Nature of Christ in the Syrian Liturgy.

16- **“Nafahat Kadasah”** (Fragrances of Holiness) edited by Father Dr. Mitri Haji Athanasius with an introduction written by him. It includes stories of some

saints: St Thomas, St Ibrahim Al-Kaidouni, St Ephrem, St Mathew the hermit and the two martyrs Behnam and his sister Sarah and the forty Martyrs.

**17- Saint Peter, the Chief of the Apostles in the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch.**

**18- The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and the canonical Councils.**

**19- A selection of Patriarchal Encyclicals** issued in 1997. (247pp.)

**20- Illustrious pages of the history of the Church in 2nd and 3rd centuries AD.** Vol. I issued in 1997. (144pp.)

**21- The Role of Women in the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch,** issued in 1998. (31pp)

**22- Religious Homilies** under the title “**Baidar Al-Mawaez**” (Threshing floor of Homilies). Vol. I issued in 1997 (255pp)

**23- Historical, Religious and Literary Presentations.** Vol. I issued in 1998. (240pp)

**24- Theological, Doctrinal, Historical and Spiritual Presentations.** Vol.2 issued in 1998. (447pp)

**25- Historical, Theological and Spiritual Presentations.** Vol.3. Issued in 2000. (296pp)

**26- A selection of Patriarchal Encyclicals.** Vol.2. Issued in 2008. (223pp.)

**27- Tur Abdin Manuscript Manual.** Issued in 2008. (550pp.)

**28- Other works:**

**The Patriarchal Journal** 27 Volumes (from 1980 onwards). Published by His Holiness under his personal supervision. His Holiness has been writing in it since his enthronement on September 14, 1980.

Numerous articles on Doctrine, Spirituality, History and Linguistics also have been published by His Holiness in the Patriarchal Journal and some works are still under print.

## **INTRODUCTION BY THE TRANSLATOR**

The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch is the oldest known church, after the Church of Jerusalem. Syriac is its official language; it had been the dominant language in all the East for a long period of time. Jesus spoke it, since it was the main prevailing language at that time. The geographic domain of the church extended over all of Syria, Palestine, Cilicia, Mesopotamia and Persia. Because of its influence in this whole area, its trace is still obvious in the Syriac names of several places and villages up to this date.

In spite of the difficulties, intrigues, persecutions and divisions it encountered during its long history, the Syrian Orthodox Church still persists in all the world. There are about four million Syrian Orthodox faithful, about half of them in India, and the rest spread all over the world.

Today this church is fortunate to be headed by a spiritual leader, His Holiness Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and the Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, an authority on church history and other religious matters. His Holiness was born in Mosul, Iraq on April 21, 1933. He got his elementary education in the community schools and continued at St. Ephrem Theological Seminary of Mosul. He graduated in 1954, with honours, and obtained the diploma of the abovementioned seminary in theology, philosophy, history, canon law, and in Arabic, Syriac and English languages. In June 1954, he was ordained a monk. In 1955,

he became the secretary to the late Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem I Barsoum, and then to his successor, the late Patriarch Yacoub III, who consecrated him as a priest on November 17, 1957, and awarded him the Holy Cross in 1959, in appreciation of his invaluable services. He accompanied the late Patriarch Yacoub III in his pastoral visits to Damascus, Lebanon, Egypt, North and South America. In 1960, he joined the General Theological College of the Episcopal Church in New York and the University of New York in the United States of America, where he studied oriental languages and pastoral theology, and mastered the English language within two years. In 1962 and 1963, he was delegated by his predecessor to attend the two sessions of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council as an observer. On November 17, 1963, he was ordained as the Archbishop of Mosul, he was then transferred to the diocese of Baghdad in 1969 where he remained until his election as patriarch on July 11, 1980.

In 1967, he was appointed acting bishop for the two bishoprics of Europe, in addition to his diocese. In 1978 and 1980, he was appointed acting bishop to Australia, where he visited the Syrian Orthodox congregations twice and opened a church in Sydney and another one in Melbourne. On September 14, 1980, he was enthroned on the Holy See of Saint Peter. He is the author of several books and a member of several academic institutions.

Many books have been written on the Syrian Orthodox Church, but none is as complete and precise as the present book. Needless to say, nobody is more competent and well versed to write on this subject than His Holiness, Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas.

In one of my frequent visits to His Holiness, after he assumed the apostolic see of Saint Peter, he asked me if I would be willing to translate this book from Arabic into English. I accepted this difficult task gratefully, as it displayed His Holiness' confidence in me.

Several factors motivated me to accept this task:

1- Faith in God implanted in me by my parents since my early childhood. In gratitude, I dedicate this translation to their memory.

2 - My duty towards the church that I like to serve; this field is where I can serve best.

3 - To answer the versatile questions that my American colleagues in the Foreign Service, and other foreign friends ask me about the Syrian Orthodox Church.

For the above reasons and many others, I chose to translate this book. I believe that this translation is one of the very few to be done in this part of the world. Most of the translation of books from Arabic is usually done in Europe and/or in the United States of America; where due to language structure difficulties, the original idea of the book is often lost in the course of translation. Either because of misunderstanding the true intent of the author, or/and because of word-by-word translation, rather than a literal translation of ideas, the result is a dull piece of literature. One advantage that worked in my favour, was that I was close to the author who was always more than willing to

receive me and discuss certain technical and ecclesiastical expressions, in order to maintain the original idea of the book; and, his door and heart were open at all times to assist me with my job.

*Emmanuel*

## **THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ANTIOCH AT A GLANCE**

The Syrian Orthodox Church is the Church of Antioch, whose foundation goes back to the very dawn of Christianity, when Antioch, was the capital of Syria<sup>1</sup> and one of the three capital cities in the Roman Empire<sup>2</sup>. The gospel was first carried to Antioch by some of Christ's disciples who fled Jerusalem because of the Jewish persecution, after the martyrdom of Deacon Stephen about 34 AD. Antioch was visited by Barnabas, one of the seventy preachers, and by Saint Paul the Apostle. They both stayed there for a whole year preaching the gospel, following the example of Saint Peter who preached the gospel there and established his apostolic see about 37 AD.

According to some historians, the conversion of the city of Antioch itself to Christianity was carried out by Peter the Apostle. It was done in two stages: the first was the

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<sup>1</sup>- Dr. Assad Restom, History of the City of Antioch (Beirut 1958). Volume 1, p. 14, from the British Encyclopaedia, 9th ed., Vol. 2, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup>- Selucas I Nicatur built the city of Antioch on the Orontes River in Syria in 311 B.C., after the division of the Kingdom of Alexander the Great. He called it Antioch after his father, Antiochus. It was the capital of the Seleucids until the Roman conquer in 64 BC. The Syrians liked it and adopted the first month and the first year of its foundation (October 311 BC), as a general date in their religious and civil records. They shifted to the AD date only at the beginning of this century.

conversion of the Jews from whose ranks the Christian Church was established;<sup>3</sup> and the second was the conversion of the pagans who included Arameans, Greeks and Arabs. This took place after the settling of the case of Cornelius and his acceptance in the church.<sup>4</sup>

As we go through the events recorded in the New Testament, we find that during Saint Peter's second visit to Antioch, he refrained himself from mingling with the converted gentiles, even after their baptism, because of his fear of the Christians in Jerusalem who had contended with him regarding the reception of Cornelius. However, Saint Paul opposed him publicly.<sup>5</sup> Further, some of the Jewish converts compelled gentile converts to circumcise so that

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<sup>3</sup> - It is believed that Saint Peter the Apostle was in Antioch in 34 AD, the year he established his see. The Ascension of Jesus was in the year 30 AD; Saint Paul accepted the faith one year after that. He came to Jerusalem three years later, i.e. in 34 AD, and he did not find any disciples, except Saint James, the Lord's brother. According to the church rites, Saint Peter was then in Antioch, where he stayed for seven consecutive years, until 41 AD. Some scholars believe that the birth of Christ took place four years earlier than the date used today. (See Patriarch Ignatius Yacoub III, *Kanisat Antakya Sourya*, Damascus 1971, pp 3-6.)

<sup>4</sup> - Dr. Assad Restom, *History of the City of Antioch* (Beirut 1958).

- The incident of Cornelius is detailed in Chapters 10 & 11 in the Book of Acts, in the New Testament.

<sup>5</sup> - The Apostle Paul said to Saint Peter "If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Galatians 2: 14.) - See also Lestus Doueiri, *Mujaz Tarikh al-Massihieh* (Egypt, 1949), p. 55.

they become Jews before they are allowed to become Christians. In order to settle this problem, a council was held in Jerusalem in 51 AD, and it was decided that “we trouble not them, which from among the gentiles are turned to God. But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollution of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood”. This decision was sent to Antioch through Saint Paul and Barnabas accompanied by Judas surnamed Barnabas and Silas.<sup>6</sup> This event gives us an idea on the importance of the Syrian Church of Antioch at the dawn of Christianity.

The Book of Acts witnesses the earnest zeal that the members of the Church of Antioch had possessed and their consideration for their fellow men. They collected alms and sent it through Barnabas and Silas to the poor in Jerusalem. The Book of Acts also testifies that it was in Antioch that the disciples of Jesus Christ were first called Christians.<sup>7</sup>

When Saint Peter and Saint Paul had to leave Antioch for the sake of preaching, they appointed two bishops, Aphodius who was assigned for the Christians of pagan origin, and Ignatius the Illuminator for those of Jewish origin.<sup>8</sup> The two groups were spiritually united after 68 AD, under the auspices of Ignatius the Illuminator. It was he who called the Church of Antioch “The Universal Church”, since it comprised both the gentiles and the circumcised. Ignatius of

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<sup>6</sup> - Book of Acts, Chapter 15.

<sup>7</sup> - Book of Acts 11: 26.

<sup>8</sup> - Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History, 3 : 22

Antioch was the first to apply the adjective “Universal” to the Christian Church.<sup>9</sup>

## **THE SYRIAC LANGUAGE IN ANTIOCH**

The Syriac language is the Aramaic language itself, and the Arameans are the Syrians themselves. Whoever has made a distinction between them has erred. Through the passage of time and developments, Syriac appeared with the Aramaic to call anybody speaking the language - it is a linguistic name. After the spread of Christianity, the name Syriac outweighed the Aramaic, because the disciples, the first preachers of Christianity were Syrians linguistically. In the early centuries, when it was revealed that the disciples spoke Syriac, every Aramean who accepted their teachings and became a Christian, changed his original Aramaic name with a Syrian name. He would be proud to be a Syrian and as a result, the Syriac name became a symbol for the Christian faith and Aramaic became synonymous for a pagan, to the extent that the simple Syriac translation of the Bible known as “Peshitta”, used the name Aramaic to distinguish a pagan<sup>10</sup>. This is how the Aramaic calling of the Christians almost vanished in the land of Aram and was replaced by the Syriac calling which became synonymous to Christianity in heart and soul. Hence, when we say the

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<sup>9</sup>- Patriarch Yacoub III, Kanisat Antakya Sourya (Damascus 1971).

<sup>10</sup>- Letter to the Galatians 2: 14 and 3: 28.

“Syrian Church” we mean the Christian Church. The Syriac language is also known as the Aramaic language. Originally, it was the language of the Arameans,<sup>11</sup> who had settled since the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC, in the lands of Aram of Damascus and Aram of Mesopotamia.<sup>12</sup>

This language had spread far and wide in the ancient world, to the extent that the alphabets of many other Oriental languages were developed from Aramaic.<sup>13</sup> During the reign of King Nabokhaznassar, it was the official language of the Babylonian Court, and during the reign of Darius the Great (521-486 B.C.), it was also the official language between the various districts of the Persian Empire.<sup>14</sup> It sustained the status of an international language<sup>15</sup> in the whole East for a

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<sup>11</sup>- Dr. George Post, Dictionary of the Holy Bible (Beirut 1913), Look under Aram.

- Adai Ashir, History of Kaldos & Athur (Beirut 1973), Vol. 1, p.16.

- Breasted. Earlier Ages, Chapter 211, p. 109.

- Gregorios Youhanna Bar Habraeus, Summary of Nations (Beirut 1962).

<sup>12</sup>- The Greeks called these lands Mesopotamia, i.e. ‘between two rivers’. It comprised the upper part of Tigris and the convergence of Tigris and the Euphrates, near the mouth of the river. Aram of Damascus included inner Syria, Palestine and Lebanon. The word ‘Aram’ means ‘the elevated land’.

<sup>13</sup>- Al-Arabi - Arabic Literary Magazine published in Kuwait, No. 81 for 1965.

<sup>14</sup>- Dr. Philip Hitti, History of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. The First Book of Ezra 4: 6 & 7.

<sup>15</sup>- Dr. Ali Wafi, Feqh Al-Lougha (Cairo 1944 ), p, 120. - Chabot.

long period of time. The Jews had learned it and used it since the Babylonian conquest in the fifth century BC, as their common language, at the expense of their own Hebrew language, since they had forgotten it. Jesus Christ and his disciples spoke Syriac.<sup>16</sup>

Thereafter, it remained dominant over a large section of the Orient, until the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, when Arabic became more popular, and Syriac started to decline gradually.<sup>17</sup> Some of its dialects, however, are still being used in Tur Abdin, Turkey, some villages around Mosul and Northern Iraq and in Maloula, a village near Damascus,

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Aramaic Languages. p. 9.

- Kaldo & Athur, 1: 16.

<sup>16</sup>- It is the language known as Palestinian Syriac and sometimes called Hebrew. Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 AD), stated in his book 'Al-Dhhour Al-Ilahi, (the Syriac manuscript is kept at the British Museum under No. 12150, it was written in 411.AD, published by Rev. Paul Bedjan in Paris in 1905), about the disciples before being inspired by the Holy Spirit that "they are people from Galilee, knowing nothing except the Syriac language". While the Holy Bible was translated to several languages, however, it kept several expressions in their original Syriac forms, e.g. (*Abba*; meaning father (Gal. 4: 6) ; *Talitha Cumi*; meaning 'Damsel, I say unto thee, arise' (Mathew 9: 23 & Mark 5: 41); and *Tabitha Cumi* meaning 'you deer arise'(Acts 9: 40); Look also Mathew 27: 46; John 20: 16 and Acts 1: 19, etc... Parts of the Book of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah and all the gospel of Mathew and the Epistle to the Hebrews were written in Syriac. The Holy Bible was totally translated into Syriac towards the end of the first century AD, for the benefit of those that became, Christians from the Syrians and Jews.

<sup>17</sup>- Dr George Post, Dictionary of the Holy Bible, 1: 58.

Syria. The trace of its influence is obvious today in the name of several cities and villages in the Middle East and in their common dialects.<sup>18</sup>

At the dawn of Christianity, Syriac was the mother tongue of the original inhabitants of Antioch, especially of those living in its suburbs, as well as those in the interior parts of Syria.<sup>19</sup> Syriac was also the language of the Jewish immigrants in Antioch whereas Greek was the language of the colonists of the Greek community brought in by the Seleucids.<sup>20</sup>

Dr. Philip Hitti says that as a second linguistic expression, the name Syrian in English, refers to all the people speaking Syriac (Aramaic), among them those in Iraq and Iran. As a religious expression, it refers to the followers of the Ancient Syrian Church, some of which have spread in Southern India. The name (Syrus), a Syrian, for a Roman, meant any person speaking Syriac.

The Church of Antioch started to use the Syriac language in its religious rites; they celebrated the first mass<sup>21</sup> employing the Syriac liturgy written by Saint James, the brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first archbishop of

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<sup>18</sup>- Dr. Anis Freha, Dictionary of the Names of Lebanese Cities and Villages (Beirut 1972).

<sup>19</sup>- Patriarch Ephrem Rehmani, Al-Mabaheth Al-Jalia fi Al-Liturjia Al-Sharqia , (Deir Al-Sharfeh, 1924), p. 23.

- Dr. Assad Restom, History of the City of Antioch.

<sup>20</sup>- Al-Mabaheth Al-Jalia, p. 151.

<sup>21</sup>- Kanisat Antakya Souryia, pp, 3 & 8.

- Al-Durar Al-Nafisa fi Makhtassar Tarikh Al-Kanisa, Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum (Homs 1940), p. 143.

Jerusalem. This same liturgy is being used in the Syrian Orthodox Church all over the world until the present date. The divine liturgy is celebrated in Syriac and in the local and national languages. Many of the church fathers wrote their religious and scientific books in Syriac.<sup>22</sup>

## **ECCLESIAL STATUS OF THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH**

The Church of Antioch is considered to be the most ancient and widely known church, after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by Titus, the Roman emperor. It was from Antioch that the disciples went to the then-known parts of the world, spreading the gospel and establishing churches, monasteries and schools which produced many illustrious scholars who enlightened the world with their religious and scientific achievements.<sup>23</sup> The fathers of the Syrian Church of Antioch made great and memorable contributions in the study of the Holy Bible – both Old and New Testaments. It was their translation of the Holy Bible into the Syriac language that came to be known as ‘Peshitta’, which means ‘Simple’. They also translated the Bible into Arabic, Persian and Malayalam (a South Indian dialect)<sup>24</sup>. Their work was

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<sup>22</sup>- Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum, *Al-Lou’lou’ Al-Manthour* (Baghdad 1976).

<sup>23</sup>- Patriarch Yacoub III, *Al-Kanisa Al-Suryiania Al-Antakyaia Al-Arthodoxia* (Damascus 1974) pp. 10-15.

<sup>24</sup>-Patriarch Yacoub III, *Tarikh Al-Kanisa Al-Suryiania Al-Antakyaia* (Beirut 1953), Vol. 1, pp. 117-119.

not limited to translation only; it included commentaries and exegesis of the Holy Scriptures. They have left behind them a rich heritage that should be counted as unique. This church played a great role in spreading the gospel to the different nations of the world such as Arabia, Armenia, India and Ethiopia, and in the process, it suffered the loss of thousands of martyrs.<sup>25</sup>

### **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SEE OF ANTIOCH BY SAINT PETER THE APOSTLE**

Reliable historians such as the scholar Orijans (d. 256 AD), Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 340 AD), John Chrysostom (d. 407 AD), Hieronymus (Iraeneous d. 420 AD) and Mor Severus of Antioch (d. 538 AD), have unanimously commented on Saint Peter's efforts in Antioch, where, as mentioned earlier, he established his Apostolic See. He was the first of its patriarchs to whom the line of succeeding patriarchs can be traced. Eusebius of Caesarea<sup>26</sup> says: "In the fourth year after the Ascension of Jesus Christ, Saint Peter proclaimed the word of God in Antioch, the great capital, and became its first bishop".<sup>27</sup> He also says in his *Church*

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<sup>25</sup>- Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, the author of this book and current Patriarch. A lecture given in Vienna, Austria on 4/5/1972, in English. Its Arabic translation was published in the Damascus Patriarchal Magazine, 10<sup>th</sup> year, 1972, No.96, p.326.

<sup>26</sup>- Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History.

<sup>27</sup>- Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum, Al-Durar Al-Nafisa (Homs 1940), p. 340.

*History:* “Ignatius became famous and was chosen to be the Bishop of Antioch and the successor of Saint Peter”.<sup>28</sup> In the calendar of feasts, Hieronymus<sup>29</sup> fixed February 22<sup>nd</sup> as establishment date of the See of Saint Peter in Antioch. The Catholic Church still celebrates this feast on this same date.<sup>30</sup>

We can therefore surmise that Saint Peter was the first Patriarch of the Apostolic See of Antioch. He had many illustrious successors, including Saint Ignatius. This succession has remained unbroken up to the time of the present patriarch, the author of this treatise. He is the 122<sup>nd</sup> among the legitimate patriarchs,

## **HEADQUARTERS OF THE SEE OF ANTIOCH**

The headquarters of the See of Antioch was in Antioch, until 518 AD. On account of many historical upheavals and consequent hardships, which the church was forced to undergo, it was transferred to different monasteries of Mesopotamia. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, it was established in the Monastery of Deir Al-Zaafran, near Mardin, Turkey. It was not until 1959 that it was transferred to Damascus, Syria after passing through Homs, Syria, during the reign of Patriarch Ignatius Ephrem 1<sup>st</sup> Barsoum.

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<sup>28</sup> - Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History.

<sup>29</sup> - Jerome, Latin Church Father of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>30</sup> - Patriarch Yacoub III, Man Hua Al-Batriark Al-Shar'i, published in the magazine Al-Mashreq of Mosul, 1st year, p.836, quoted from Te Roman Calendar (Rome 1852).

## **THE NAME 'IGNATIUS' TAKEN BY THE PATRIARCHS OF ANTIOCH**

In the early centuries, the Patriarchs of Antioch had kept their original names, even after being installed as patriarchs. However, when Patriarch Yeshou was enthroned in the year 878 AD, he adopted the name Ignatius, out of his veneration for the great martyr, Ignatius the Illuminator who had been patriarch in the first century AD. Four other patriarchs followed his example. When Patriarch Yousef, son of Weheb, Bishop of Mardin was installed in 1293, with the name Ignatius, this custom was confirmed and it has continued to be an unbroken tradition in the Syrian Orthodox Church up to this date.

## **THE SEE OF ANTIOCH AND ITS RELATION WITH THE OTHER APOSTOLIC SEES**

According to the church laws, which took shape in the first centuries, the bishop of the main city (Metropolis) was named Metropolitan, which means the bishop of the capital city or the pedestal of the kingdom. Through various regional and ecumenical councils, the bishoprics were eventually attached to the archbishoprics and the great and equal apostolic sees were specified as Antioch, Alexandria and Rome. At the Council of Constantinople (381 AD), the See of Constantinople was also added to those three. All these four sees attained high status, due to the political importance of

these four cities and their strategic locations.<sup>31</sup> In the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, the bishop of each of these cities was named Patriarch, which means the head of fathers.<sup>32</sup> Every see had its own jurisdiction and all the churches within it were subjected to its religious authority throughout the local seats (centres of bishoprics and archbishoprics). In 325 AD, the Council of Nicea specified the authority of each of these sees, stating the following: “Preserve the old custom in Egypt, Libya and the five cities, since the bishop of Alexandria had authority over all of these places, as the Bishop of Rome had also the same authority. Also the dignity of the churches in Antioch and the rest of the bishoprics must be kept fully intact”.<sup>33</sup> The Council of Nicea did not create these privileges, but only confirmed them.<sup>34</sup>

## **FELLOWSHIP OF FAITH AND AUTHORITY OF THE COUNCILS**

The four Sees of Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and

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<sup>31</sup> - A lecture by the author in Vienna, Austria on 5/5/1972. Its Arabic translation was published in the Damascus Patriarchal Magazine No. 97, 10<sup>th</sup> year, Sept.1972.

<sup>32</sup> - Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum, Al-Durar Al-Nafisa, Vol.1, p.398.

<sup>33</sup> - The Lebanese Synod, p. 311.

- Patriarch Doueih, Maronite Patriarch, Manaret AlAqdas, 1:22.

<sup>34</sup> - Jesuit Father De Friz, Al-Kersi Al-Rasouli Wal Batriarkia Al-Sharqia Al-Catholikyia, published in the magazine Al Wehda Biliman in Lebanon 1971.

Constantinople were identical in faith and doctrine, as well as being equal in authority and privileges. It was a custom for the occupants of these sees to exchange, upon their election, copies of their creeds in order to receive the right of fellowship. The receipt of this right of fellowship, however, is not considered as the installation of the patriarch in his position; it is only a necessary requirement to exercise his authority legally.<sup>35</sup> The historical events testify to the fact that these four great sees were not only autonomous,<sup>36</sup> but also autocephalous,<sup>37</sup> which means that none had authority over the others and none might interfere in the affairs of the other sees. In the case of bishops also, no bishop could interfere in the affairs of the others. Whenever some local or internal problem or dispute occurred between the bishops of an archdiocese, a regional council of bishops, under the chairmanship of the archbishop of that archdiocese would be convened to settle the matter. The council was considered above the bishops and even as the highest authority in the whole archdiocese. If any major problem relating to the faith emerged, a general or ecumenical council<sup>38</sup> was convened, whose authority was above all the bishops and archbishops, including the bishops/patriarchs of the four great sees. Since all the bishops over the world were

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<sup>35</sup> - Ibid., pp. 7,9 & 10.

<sup>36</sup> - Autonomous: self directing freedom, esp. moral independence.

<sup>37</sup> - Autocephalous: being independent of external and especially patriarchal authority - used especially to describe the Eastern national churches.

<sup>38</sup> - 'Ecumenical': worldwide or general in extent, influence or application. Representing the whole body of churches.

invited to such a council and had the right to take part therein, and as no one was to be absent, except for genuine reasons, therefore, the universal church was represented fully. As a consequence, all the bishops had to accept the decisions of that council and enforce them in the whole church.

This council was considered as the supreme authority in the whole church.<sup>39</sup>

No bishops, even the patriarchs of the four great sees, had authority to take action in any major faith problem individually, since that was the responsibility of the councils. Contradiction of opinions and diversification of decisions taken by the regional councils relating to matters of faith often confused the universal church. When such cases were discussed in the ecumenical council, the council would issue its judgment, which would be accepted by the universal church as if it were a divine decision. Councils of this type were convened to authenticate the genuineness of the true faith and to reject heresies. The declarations of faith in the Nicene Creed, for example, were included in the writings of the fathers in detail and were accepted by the church since its dawn. The council, however, formulated it very clearly and asked the faithful to stand by its terms, or else they would be subjected to excommunication.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> - Lecture by the author in Vienna, Austria on 5-5-1972.

<sup>40</sup> - Lecture by the author in Vienna on 6-9-1973.

## **DIVISION AMONG THE FOUR GREAT SEES**

In 451 AD, the Council of Chalcedon<sup>41</sup> was convened, and it resulted in the division of the apostolic sees into two groups. The Sees of Rome and Constantinople became one group, and the Sees of Antioch and Alexandria another. These latter two sees remain united in faith until today, and each of these has its own leadership and absolute independence, as was the case at the beginning. The other two sees - Rome and Constantinople - split also from each other in the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, (on the basis of the disputes about the clause of '*Filioq*')

## **JURISDICTION OF THE SEE OF ANTIOCH**

The pontiff of the See of Antioch always had a prominent position in the church. His religious authority extended from the Greek Sea in the West to the far end of Persia and India in the East; and from the border of Asia Minor to the frontiers of Palestine in the South.<sup>42</sup>

The church of Antioch was one and was headed by only

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<sup>41</sup>- Chalcedon is a district within Constantinople (Present-day Istanbul.)

<sup>42</sup>- Bishop Gregorios Georges Shahin; Nahjon Wassim (Homs 1911), Vol. 1, p.14.

- Patriarch Rehmani, Al-Mabaheth Al-Jalia, pp. 23, 24 & 28.

one patriarch. There was no other patriarch in all the Eastern Countries<sup>43</sup> and his jurisdiction extended over the lands of Syria, Palestine, Cilicia, Mesopotamia, parts of Asia Minor and all of Persia.<sup>44</sup> His authority was dominant over all the Christians in these districts, irrespective of their nationality, race or language. The larger dioceses had archbishops and the smaller ones, bishops with their spiritual administration, while they all presented obedience to him.<sup>45</sup>

### **CATHOLICOSATE OF THE EAST**

The countries which were lying beyond the Eastern boundaries of the Roman Empire altogether were known as the East. It was, during the time of Jesus Christ, under the Persian rule, from where the Magi came to Bethlehem and worshipped the Lord and presented their gifts to Him.<sup>46</sup> When they returned to their countries, they proclaimed the news of Jesus' birth. As there were Jewish communities in the East, some of them might have been present in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. The Book of Acts identifies Parthians, Medes and Elamites and the dwellers in Mesopotamia.<sup>47</sup> It is beyond doubt that some of them who believed in Christ conveyed the gospel to their countries.

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<sup>43</sup> - Lemon the French, Moukhtassar Twarikh Al-Kanasi; translated by Rev. Youssef Daoud (Mosul 1873), p.178.

<sup>44</sup> - Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum, Al-Durar Al-Nafisa, p.143.

<sup>45</sup> - Rev. Butros Nassri, Dhakhirat Al-Adhan fi Twarikh Al-Mashriqa wal Maghriba Al-Suryian (Mosul 1905), p.73.

<sup>46</sup> - The Gospel of Mathew 2: 2.

<sup>47</sup> - The Book of Acts 2: 9.

Church history records that Addai, one of the seventy preachers, was sent by his brother, the apostle Thomas to Edessa, capital of Abgarite Kingdom and cured its king, Abgar V, from leprosy and converted him together with all the inhabitants of the city. Then Addai preached in Amed (Diarbekir), in the South of Arzen, in the Eastern valley of the Tigris River, and in Bazebedi. Then he came to Hidiab (Arbil),<sup>48</sup> where he settled down with his friend, Mari, preaching. The Syrian historians, Mor Michael the Great, Bar Hebraeus and Bar Salibi add that the apostle Thomas passed through these places and preached their inhabitants on his way to India. That is how Christianity spread since the first century all over the East, where churches rose and bishoprics established.

In the third century, a number of bishoprics were gradually organized and a general leadership was established for them with Madaen as its centre, in the ecclesiastical region under the jurisdiction of the Apostolic See of Antioch.<sup>49</sup> Its bishop was called Bishop of the East or Catholicos of the East, and was later known as the Maphrian<sup>50</sup> of the East.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> - Mari bn Suleiman, Akhbar Fatarikat Kursi Al-Mashreq, from the book Al-Madal (Rome 1899), 1.1.

- Patriarch Ephrem I Barsoum, Al-Durar Al-Nafisa, Vol. 1, pp. 76 & 77.

- Eugene Tisserand, Khoulassa Tarikyia Lilkanisah Al-Kaldania; translated by Bishop Suleiman Sayegh (Mosul 1939), p.76.

<sup>49</sup> - Al-Durar Al-Nafisa, p.586.

- Nahjon Aassim, p.12.

<sup>50</sup> - Catholicos: general father; Mafrian: a Syriac word meaning

The Catholicos of the East had general authority over the churches in his district, in collaboration with the Patriarch of Antioch. The political situation hindered this relation since the headquarters of the See of Antioch was within the Roman Empire while the East was subject to the Persian rule, and the enmity between the Persians and the Romans was severe.<sup>52</sup>

In 431 AD, the Council of Ephesus excommunicated Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. A number of bishops from Syria together with the majority of the teachers and students of the School of Edessa sided with him. Hence, Nestorius' teachings were spread in the East with the exception of Tikrit and Armenia. The result was the division of the Syrians, from the religious and doctrinal points of view, into two groups. This division affected even the Syriac language which came to be distinguished in its phonetic and calligraphic styles, called as the Western Style and the Eastern Style. The Western Style in the land of Damascus and the Eastern Style in the lands of Mesopotamia, Iraq and Azerbaijan. The Eastern part cut off its relations with the See of Antioch, except the Orthodox people in Iraq<sup>53</sup> who remained loyal to the Apostolic See of Antioch, enduring great hardships because of that. In the year 480 AD, Barsouma, the Nestorian Bishop of Nisibis, slandered against the faithful orthodox of the East to Hiraqlus, the

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fruitful.

<sup>51</sup> - Patriarch Ignatius Yacoub III, *Dafacat Al-Tib fi Tarikh Deir Mar Matta Al-Ajib* (Zahle, 1961), p.51.

<sup>52</sup> - Ibid. pp.42-43.

<sup>53</sup> - Al-Lou' Lou' Al-Manthour, p.16.

Persian king, accusing them that they were spying in the interest of the Byzantine Kingdom. As a result, Fairouz slaughtered many of them shedding their innocent blood. After the death of Barsouma, Christophorus, the Armenian Catholicos visited the East and consecrated Monk Garmai as a bishop in the Monastery of Saint Mathew and gave him authority to consecrate bishops, as the Catholicos of the East. Christophorus also consecrated Monk Ahodemeh bishop in Baerbye.<sup>54</sup>

In 559 AD, Yacoub Baradaeus visited the church in the East and consecrated Ahodemeh as General Bishop (Catholicos) for it and was considered the first General Bishop of the East, after the Nestorians had captured its see.<sup>55</sup>

In 628 AD, a reconciliation was reached between the Persian and Roman Empires. Patriarch Athanasius I (595-631) sent his secretary Rabban (Monk) Youhanna to the East. He met with Bishop Christophorus, head of the Monastery of Saint Mathew and discussed with him the subject of resuming relations between the See of Antioch and the Church in the East. The bishop convened a synod, which was attended by Monk Yauhanna and four regional bishops. They elected three monks, Marotha, Ithalaha and Aha, and requested the patriarch to consecrate them bishops. The patriarch regretted in order to preserve the old custom of the

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<sup>54</sup> - Dafakat Al-Tib, p.34, quoted from Al- tarikh AlKanassi, by Bar Hebraeus, Vol.2, pp.87 & 99.

- Tarikh Mar Mikhail Al-Kabir, p.35.

<sup>55</sup> - Dafakat Al-Tib. p.35.

- Al-Lou'lou' Al-Manthour, p.26.

Church of the East, which in the absence of the catholicos, and in case of an unavoidable necessity, three bishops together can consecrate a new bishop. Then the Eastern bishops, and in the presence of the patriarch's bishops consecrated the chosen monks bishops. The patriarch installed Marotha, one of the three new bishops, as Bishop

(Catholicos) of Tikrit, and gave him authority to preside over the East, on his behalf. The above incident shows that the Church in the East was autonomous and that its catholicos who was installed by the patriarch had authority over all its bishoprics. Also we can see in the history of the church, that the patriarch was enthroned by the fathers of the church with the cooperation of the catholicos. Several attempts have taken place for infringing this tradition.

Mor Marotha of Tikrit (d. 649 AD) was the first to be called Maphrian and from him the Maphrianate took its succession. It is worth mentioning that the bishoprics of the East increased in number and prestige to the extent that they outnumbered the dioceses of the See of Antioch, during the time of Mor Gregorios Bar Hebraeus who was the Maphrian of the East (1264-1286), as he himself declared. Bar Hebraeus is considered as one of the most famous scholarly Maphrians of the East.

The headquarters of the Maphrianate was first in Tikrit and remained there until 1089 AD. Subsequently, it was transferred to Mosul, then brought back to Tikrit until 1152, when it was transferred to Saint Mathew Monastery. For some time, the Maphrianate was moved to Bartleleh, near Mosul and then to Mosul itself.

In the past, it was the custom to have the Maphrian keep his episcopal name, even after his installation. However, from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, it was decided to have the name Baselios added to his original personal name. In the year 1860, after the death of Maphrian Mor Baselios Bahnam IV of Mosul, the Maphrianate was abolished by a decision of a synod.

### **REINSTATEMENT OF THE OFFICE OF THE MAPHRIANATE**

On May 21, 1964, the office of the Maphrianate was reinstated according to a resolution of the synod held at Kottayam, Kerala, South India. It was presided by H.H. Mor Ignatius Yacoub III, the late Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, and attended by all the bishops of the Syrian Church in India and three bishops from the Middle East who had accompanied His Holiness on his apostolic visit to India; the author of this book was one of those three bishops. It was

decided that the headquarters of the Maphrian should be in India, and that the jurisdiction of the Maphrianate is limited to India and to the East of India only.<sup>56</sup>

Since 1964, the Maphrian is elected by the Holy Synod of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India and installed by

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<sup>56</sup> - Damascus Patriarchal Magazine, 3<sup>rd</sup> year, 1964, No. 21; pp. 6-7.

- Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, *Merkat fi Hayat Ra i Al-Rouat* (Homs: 1958), p. 344.

H.H. the Patriarch of Antioch and All the East who is the Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church. He represents the Syrian Orthodox Church in India in the Universal Synod of the church, when it is convened for the election and enthronement of a patriarch. The present Maphrian is H.B. Mor Baselios Thomas I.

## **SCHISMS IN THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH**

The Church of Antioch (Syrian Church) endured in its history painful incidents, which divided its flock into several sects at different times. These incidents, a few of which will be briefly discussed hereafter, greatly enfeebled the church.

In 431 AD, the Council of Ephesus rejected the teachings of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, who claimed that there were two separate persons and natures in Christ. Patriarch Yuhanna of Antioch supported him. He was succeeded by his nephew, Domnos who also unfortunately accepted the same heresy. He was deposed in the year 449 AD by the Second Council of Ephesus and was replaced by Maximus. The teachings of Nestorius were accepted by some Syrians in the Persian Empire, in some parts of Syria, Palestine and Cyprus. They formed a church, breaking away from the See of Antioch in 498 AD. They chose a leader for themselves who called himself catholicos. Their first catholicos was Babai who had his headquarters in Selucia, near Madaen in Iraq. This was later transferred to Baghdad in the year 762 AD. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century it

was shifted to Al-Kosh and in 1561 to Erumia,<sup>57</sup> both in Iraq.

As a result of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, the four great sees were split into two groups and confusion dominated over the church discipline. Illegal interferences took place in several bishoprics and fishing in troubled waters was considered a great gain. The Roman See was able to win a Nestorian bishop called Temotheos, the Bishop of Cyprus. In 1445 AD, he joined the Catholic Church with a group from his church. It should be remembered that this group comprised members of the Syrian Church who had already embraced the Nestorian ideas: Pope Ojanus IV declared: "It is henceforth forbidden to treat those Syrians who had left Nestorianism and joined the Roman Church as heretics, but they have to be distinguished with the particular name of 'Chaldeans'".<sup>58</sup> Five years later in 1450 AD, they returned to their Nestorian Church. But disputes soon arose in that church when Patriarch Shemoun's Synod passed a resolution to the effect that no patriarch should be installed from outside his own tribe. When such a decision was taken by Shemoun's Synod, a parallel synod, which opposed Shemoun, was convened in Mosul and a great number left Shemoun and joined the Roman See in 1553. Accordingly Pope Julius III consecrated for them Patriarch Yuhanna Sulaka. This split did not last long, since Patriarch Yuhanna Sulaka was killed in 1555 AD, and the relation with the Roman See was severed.

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<sup>57</sup> - Al-Durar Al-Nafisa, p.585.

<sup>58</sup> - Rev. Ishaq Armaleh, Al-Salasel Al-Tarikhia (Beirut 1910), p.135.

Until 1827, there were two patriarchs for the Chaldeans, one of whom was called Patriarch of Amed, and the other, Patriarch of Babylon. In that same year, the distinction between the two patriarchates of Amed and Babylon was abolished by Pope Leo XII. As of 1830, that is from the time of Patriarch Yuhanna Hermezd, there was only one patriarch who was called the Patriarch of Babylon. Yuhanna Hermezd was the first patriarch of the united Patriarchate of Babylon. In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Patriarch Yousef Odo<sup>59</sup> who, unlike his predecessors, was known to have liked the Oriental Church and its ancient traditions, was installed as the Patriarch of Babylon.

Turning back to the See of Antioch, we shall see that since the time of Maximos (449-512 AD), it was usurped by patriarchs who had followed the formulation of the Council of Chalcedon and by others rocking from one side to the other. During this critical period, the famous Patriarch Peter II who is known as Al-Kassar, was installed to the Holy See of Antioch.

In 512 AD, Mor Severus was enthroned as the Patriarch of Antioch succeeding Phlabianos, who was deposed because of his unsteadiness of faith. Mor Severus ruled the Holy See in peace until 518, when he was sent into exile. When the Orthodox emperor Anastas died, he was

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<sup>59</sup>- Cardinal Tisserand, Khoulassa Tarikhyia Lilkanissa Al-Kaldania, p.107. From a bull issued by Pope Ojanus IV.

- Nahjon Wassim, p.57.

succeeded by Justinos I who was a supporter of the Council of Chalcedon.

He sent into exile most of the orthodox bishops including Patriarch Mor Severus who died in the year 538, while in exile in Egypt. Mor Serjius succeeded Mor Severus to the Holy Throne of Antioch. Through all these great storms the See of Antioch struggled hard to keep the succession of its patriarchs up to this date.

The followers of the Council of Chalcedon seized the opportunity of the exile of Mor Severus, to install from among themselves patriarchs with the title of “Patriarch of Antioch”. The most famous of these patriarchs was Ephrem of Amed. From this time (518 AD), the series of Byzantine Patriarchs started. Most of those Byzantine Patriarchs were Syrians and others from Greek colonies. Those patriarchs and their followers were called **Melkites**, which means the followers of the king. They were called so because they abided by the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon which was upheld by the then-king. They used the Syrian rites until the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries, when they changed to the Greek rites. However, because of their ignorance of the Greek language, they used the Syriac translation of the Greek rites. In later centuries, after they learned the Greek language, they started to use the Greek rites both in Greek and Arabic languages. They collected the Syriac codices, which were preserved in the library of Saint Mary’s Monastery (a Syrian

Monastery which the Greeks later occupied), in the village of Seydnaya, near Damascus and burned them all.<sup>60</sup>

At the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, a dispute arose among the followers of the Council of Chalcedon within the jurisdiction of the See of Antioch, because of the emergence of a new dogma of two wills in Jesus Christ. It resulted in a division among the Maronite monks in Lebanon leading to the establishment of a separate patriarchate. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, they joined the Roman See<sup>61</sup> and started calling their patriarchate “the Patriarchate of Antioch”.<sup>62</sup>

There were further new foundations of Patriarchates of Antioch splitting off from the original Patriarchate of Antioch. At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, through the influence of some Capuchin monks, and with the assistance of the French Consul, a group in Aleppo, Syria, left the Holy See of Antioch. They approached a Maronite bishop in 1657, who consecrated for them an Armenian priest, Andraos Akhijian, who was originally from Mardin, Turkey, as bishop whom they called patriarch. The Syrian Catholic Patriarchate<sup>63</sup> started with him. They called their patriarch ‘Patriarch of Antioch’.

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<sup>60</sup> - Nahjon Wassim, Vol.1, pp.72-73.

<sup>61</sup> - Ibid. Vol. I, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> - Rev. Issa Assa'd, Al-Turfa Al-Naqia mn Tarikh AlKanisa Al-Massihia (Homs 1924), appendix p. 453.

<sup>63</sup> - Nahjon Wassim, Vol. 1, pp. 41-42.

- Al-Mashreq, magazin published in Mosul, 1<sup>st</sup> year, p. 847.

At the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a schism took place among the Greek Orthodox, which led some to abandon their patriarchate and follow the Roman See. They established for themselves a separate patriarchate, which they also called 'Patriarchate of Antioch'. They are known as Greek Catholics.

In the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a group of Syrian Orthodox believers in Iraq was compelled to join the Roman See, through the connivance of the French Consul, who advised the Ottoman ruler to impose heavy taxes on the Syrian Orthodox people. The Consul encouraged the Dominican missionaries who had already spread in Iraq, to persuade the simpleminded Syrian Orthodox people to ask for French protection, in order to get rid of the burden of taxes. However, when they approached the French officials for help, they were told that unless they followed the Pope of Rome, no help would be provided for them. This is how catholicism spread in Iraq. The first group to embrace it were the inhabitants of Karakoush in 1761 AD. Later, in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, other groups from Bartelleh and Mosul<sup>64</sup> followed them.

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<sup>64</sup> - The author, Al-Merqat, pp. 24-25.

## MOR YACOUB BARADAEUS

As a result of the oppression of the leaders of the Syrian Orthodox Church by the Byzantine Emperors, many holy fathers were martyred, some were exiled, others severely persecuted and the rest scattered. At one stage, i.e. 544 AD, because of all these hardships and chaos, there were only three living bishops left for the Syrian Orthodox Church.

At this critical stage, God raised up an indefatigable man called Yacoub (Jacob) Baradaeus (Burdono) to defend the church. He went to Constantinople and was respectfully received by Empress Theodora, the daughter of a Syrian priest in Mabbugh, Syria, and the wife of Emperor Justinian. She was serving the exiled bishops and supporting them in their sufferings. Through her influence, Mor Yacoub was consecrated general bishop in 544 AD, by Mor Theodosius, Patriarch of Alexandria who was then in exile in Constantinople. Mor Theodosius was assisted by three bishops who were also under imprisonment. After his consecration, Mor Yacoub travelled far and wide vigorously organizing the affairs of the church. He consecrated twenty-seven bishops and hundreds of priests and deacons. Before his death on July 30, 578 AD, Mor Yacoub had strengthened the church to survive disasters. Every year on July 30, the church respectfully and gratefully celebrates his feast.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> - Bishop Youhanna Dolabani, *Al-Mithal Al-Rabani*, (Buenos Aires 1942).

- Patriarch Yacoub III, *Al-Mujahed Al-Raassouli* (Damascus 1978).

Thus, the Syrian Orthodox Church withstood the heavy blows of Byzantine persecution and maintained the apostolic faith, affirmed by the three ecumenical councils. The Holy See of Antioch remained united with the See of Alexandria, and they continue in communion with the Armenian Orthodox Church and the Ethiopian Church sharing the same faith and doctrine.

In the 8<sup>th</sup> century, the Byzantines, in their seventh council described the Syrian Orthodox Church as the ‘Jacobite Church’, after the name of Mor Yacoub Baradaeus. Their intention was to disgrace and degrade the noble Syrian Orthodox Church. Though Mor Yacoub is indeed one of the famous and great fathers of the Church, he is not its founder. Since the Syrian Orthodox Church was not established by him, and since he did not introduce any fresh doctrine into its apostolic faith, we repudiate the title ‘Jacobite’.<sup>66</sup> The Syrian Orthodox Church also denies the designation ‘Monophysite’ which is Euthychean and which means that the human nature in Jesus Christ was mingled with the divine nature and thus became a mixture and its attributes confused. Euthycos (Eutyches) and his teachings were rejected by the Syrian Orthodox Church, which follows the footsteps of Saint Cyril of Alexandria who believed that Jesus Christ was perfectly human and at the same time perfectly divine, and has only one nature from two united natures without any mixture, confusion or transformation.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> - Archdeacon Ne'matallah Denno, *Iqamat Al-Dalil ala Istemrar Al-Esm Al-Assil* (Mosul 1949).

<sup>67</sup> - Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, *Akidat Al-Tajsed Al-Ilahi* (Aleppo: 1981).

## **THE SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH TODAY**

The number of followers of the Syrian Orthodox Church today is around four millions. The majority of them reside in India and the rest are spread mainly in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Europe, North and South America and Australia. Its supreme head at present is Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, the 122<sup>nd</sup> successor of Saint Peter in the legitimate line of Patriarchs of Antioch. The supreme head is looked upon as the common father of all Syrian Orthodox people wherever they are. He is obeyed by the catholicos, prelates, clergy and laity of all ranks in the Syrian Orthodox Church. The name of the patriarch is to be mentioned before that of the catholicos in India and of the bishops in their respective dioceses, during the Eucharistic services, at the end of the daily prayers, on religious festivals, and during other spiritual ceremonies such as ordinations, consecrations, etc... His title is 'His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and the Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church'. His religious prerogatives include the installation of the catholicos, the consecration of the legally elected bishops and the consecration of chrism, provided that at least two bishops are present with him for the ceremony. He also has the authority to convene universal synods and other synods of which he is the chairman. He cannot be deposed unless he introduces heresy in the orthodox faith of the church, ratified by the three Ecumenical Councils of Nicea, Constantinople and Ephesus and the teachings of the saintly fathers, or deviates from the

canonical laws, or suffers from mental disorder or is guilty of serious misconduct.

The patriarch is responsible to the Holy Synod consisting of all the bishops of the Apostolic See of Antioch, which is considered to be the supreme authority in the church. The synod is vested with the authority for the election and installation of patriarchs, the approval of the election of bishops, the examination and trial of bishops in case of their deviation from the doctrine and canonical laws, their transfer from one bishopric to another, the acceptance or rejection of their resignation and their deposition, if at all necessary. The synod also has the authority for the creation of a new diocese or the abolition of an existing one. The meeting of the synod is considered legal, if it is attended by at least two-thirds of its members. Synodal decisions, taken by majority, become effective upon their approval by the patriarch.<sup>68</sup>

The Syrian Orthodox Church today consists of twenty nine dioceses – without those of India, spread in different parts of the world. Each diocese has a bishop who administers its spiritual affairs, ordains their priest, monks and deacons, consecrates altars, churches and the holy oil for baptism (not ‘mooron’, the chrism) and codifies bylaws for its welfare. Each diocese has an ecclesiastical board and a laymen’s board to help its bishop in its administration.

All the dioceses maintain the orthodox faith of the church and keep its ancient apostolic traditions. The church rituals

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<sup>68</sup> - The Constitution of the Syrian Orthodox Church issued by the Synod of Homs in 1959 and amended by the Synod of Damascus in 1979.

are performed in Syriac along with the local language. In the past, the church had hundreds of monasteries, a few of which still flourish. The most famous ones are in the Middle East:

1- Saint Mathew's Monastery near Mosul, Iraq.

2 – Saint Gabriel Monastery in Tur Abdin, Turkey; both of these monasteries date back to 4<sup>th</sup> century.

3 - Saint Hananya Monastery, known as Deir A1-Zaafran, near Mardin, Turkey, established in the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

In each of the last two monasteries, there is an elementary theological school.

4- Saint Mark's Monastery in Jerusalem, which deserves the pride of Christianity, because it includes the upper room, where Jesus Christ took the Last Supper with his disciples. The historicity of this fact has been confirmed by the inscription discovered in 1940, under the plastering of the church in the monastery. The inscription is in Syriac and it dates back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. It reads as follows: "This is the house of Mary, Mother of John, called Mark".

The church has two theological seminaries, one in Ma'arat Seydnaya in Damascus, Syria and the other in India, where the clergy are trained.

The Syrian Orthodox Church is progressing and growing actively. In the opinion of a Greek Orthodox historian: "The Syrians are active, hard workers and economical, that is why you can hardly find a beggar among them. In spite of all the great crises that they endured, they are still maintaining their economical standard, because of their love to work steadily, and their remoteness from imitating the foreigners in

spending extravagantly”.<sup>69</sup> Another researcher from the Episcopal Church, in the last century, said the following about the Syrian Orthodox Church: “It is within the possibilities of God’s providence that they might yet take new root downwards and bear fruit upwards, if the people who still cling passionately to their ancient faith, were once freed from the domination of foreign religion and power, under which they have so long and so cruelly been oppressed. As it is, in all their present feebleness, they are the representatives of the ancient church, which once flourished in these eastern and southern lands”.<sup>70</sup>

The Syrian Orthodox Church is a member of the World Council of Churches, which it joined in the year 1960, through the efforts of the late Patriarch, Mor Ignatius Yacoub III. It is also a member in the Council of Local Churches and collaborates with the other Christian Churches, and takes part in the ecumenical and theological dialogues at official and non-official levels.

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<sup>69</sup> - Rev. Issa Ass’ad, *Al-Terfa Al-Naqia* (Homs:1922), appendix p. 424.

<sup>70</sup> - Rev. Edward L. Cutts, *Turning Points of General Church History* (N.Y. 1890), p. 446.

## CONCLUSION

This is a panoramic view of the Church of Antioch, the true Church of the East, commonly known as the Syrian Orthodox Church, whose faith, liturgy and tradition are distinctively Oriental and are at the same time a witness to the undivided early church.

This church battered by the events of history and torn by schisms is still the custodian of a great heritage. I am hopeful that through prayer and dialogue, its scattered parts can be brought together again, and its wounds healed. Communion of Faith could be restored among its different sections, and excommunications and curses could be wiped out. Then grace will abound, leading to the unity that was at the dawn of Christianity, and the gospel imperative “That all may be one”, will be fulfilled.

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