

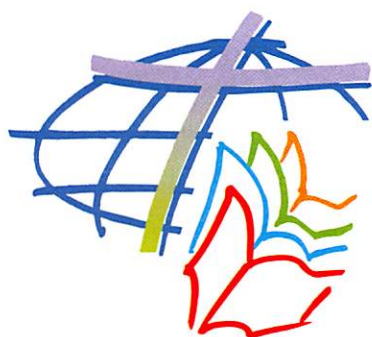


# DEIVERBUM

**Catholic Biblical Federation**

**BULLETIN**

## **Countries of the Bible - Countries of the Sixth Plenary Assembly Part I**



N° 58/59  
1-2/2001

**English Edition**



*BULLETIN DEI VERBUM* is a quarterly publication in English, French, German and Spanish.

#### Editor

Alexander M. Schweitzer

#### Production and Layout

media\_projekt, 70499 Stuttgart

A subscription for one year consists of four issues beginning the quarter payment is received. Please indicate in which language you wish to receive the *BULLETIN DEI VERBUM*.

#### Subscription rates

Ordinary subscription: US\$ 20 / € 20

Supporting subscription: US\$ 34 / € 34

Third World countries: US\$ 14 / € 14

Students: US\$ 14 / € 14

Air mail delivery: US\$ 7 / € 7 extra

In order to cover production costs we recommend a supporting subscription. For members of the Catholic Biblical Federation the subscription fee is included in the annual membership fee.

#### Banking details

General Secretariat

(Address as indicated below)

LIGA Bank, Stuttgart

Account No. 64 59 820

Bank Code 750 903 00

Or per check to the General Secretariat.

We also accept payment by credit card (VISA, EUROCARD/MasterCard, MasterCard).

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#### CATHOLIC BIBLICAL FEDERATION

General Secretariat

Postfach 10 52 22

70045 Stuttgart

Germany

Tel.: +49-(0)711-1 69 24-0

Fax: +49-(0)711-1 69 24-24

E-mail: bdv@c-b-f.org

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## EDITORIAL

### Dear Readers,

The biblical apostolate is all about context. About personal, life context, into which the Word of God comes and with which it enters into fruitful dialogue; about social context, which is clarified in the light of the Biblical text, in the midst of which the Word of God gradually releases its transforming power.

This and the coming double issue of the Bulletin Dei Verbum are also all about context, about the concrete conditions in which the Word of God comes to human beings. In numerous articles members of our Middle East Subregion and other authors sketch a portrait of their lands, which are the lands of the Bible and which together will mark the cultural, social, political and religious context of the coming Plenary Assembly in Beirut.

In fact, however much a Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation is an event and a milestone in the life of the whole, worldwide Federation, it is also just as much characterized by the background conditions of the place in which it is held. Like Bogota, with its clear emphases in the direction of social consciousness and societal engagement, like Hong Kong which left behind traces of an Asian theology and spirituality with its meditative and synthetic elements, Beirut too will bring to light the difficulties and the opportunities of the contemporary, ever more complex reality and especially those related to religious and social pluralism. It will also sensitize us to the ways of God's Word that lead to life amid pluralistic surroundings – ways that will come to light not least in the course of dialogue among churches and religions.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere thanks to our members of the Middle

East Subregion and to all the other authors for the efforts they have made to provide us with an insight into their life-situations and so to contribute to the preparations for the coming Plenary Assembly. As you will see from the news items under the rubric "Life of the Federation" intensive preparations are in progress for the Plenary Assembly in many places in our Federation, and in a variety of different ways.

I wish you all an enriching reading.

Alexander M. Schweitzer



FEATURE  
ARTICLE

## Lebanon and the Bible

*Paul Féghaly, Middle East Subregional Coordinator of the CBF, Lebanon*

"Come from Lebanon" (Sg 4:8), says the bridegroom to his bride, and God to his people. This Lebanon, eagerly desired by Moses who complained of not being able to enter into the promised land and of not seeing that beautiful mountain he so longed to contemplate (Dt 3:25). Yes, Lebanon and the Bible are two companions holding hands, to use the language of Saint Ephraem, who linked the two respectively with nature and Scripture. The nature of Lebanon supplied the Bible with its images and expressions, and the Bible inundated Lebanon with the presence of God, so much so that there are actually two mountains of God in Lebanon. In the North, there is the mountain of the cedars, the mountain of God where Gilgamesh, the Babylonian hero, hid out and whose cedar wood adorned the Temple of Jerusalem, the house of God. In the South, there is Mount Hermon, the place of "herem" where, as at Sinai, no human foot is allowed to tread. Only God has the right to set foot there. And that is precisely what Jesus did at the Transfiguration, according to an ancient tradition that links the coming of Jesus to Caesarea Philippi (at the foot of Mount Hermon, present-day Banias) and the glory of his Transfiguration on a mountain which the Gospel does not name (Mt 17:1 and pars.).

Lebanon, a country of whiteness because of its perennial snows, a country of beauty in virtue of its abundant waters which feed the Jordan in Palestine, the Orontes in Syria, the Abana and Parpar (2 K 5:12) which flow into Damascus; a country of every variety of green plant, in contrast with the surrounding desert, from the Syrian desert to the desert of Arabia and the Sinai peninsula, not to mention the desert of Judea. When one speaks of the Promised Land as a place where milk and honey flow (Ex 3:8, 17...), though this truly conveys the idea of abundance, it is surely not towards the land of Judea that one should turn, but toward Lebanon and its neighboring regions like the plain of Esdraelon.

Lebanon was for the Bible a place of convergence and fellowship. The Phoenicians passed through it as they proceeded toward the Palestinian coast to Saint-Jean d'Acre (ancient Acco) and the tribes of Israel arrived to

the East of Tyre (above all the tribe of Asher). The people of the Bible and the people of Phoenicia maintained friendly relations. Between Hiram of Tyre on the one side, David and Solomon on the other. The Hebrews who came from the desert were to benefit from the ingenuity and the materials of their neighbors for the construction of the Temple of Jerusalem, and for the royal palace which was called "the house of the forest of Lebanon" (1 K 7:2). Hiram furnished the wood and the stone, the engineers and the artisans. A certain Hiram of Tyre (1 K 7:13) even made the different utensils destined for the Temple service. The second Temple, built in 518 A.C., also had to resort to Lebanon for its cedars (Ezr 3:7).



*Cedar of Lebanon*

The relations of Lebanon with the kingdom of the North, or the kingdom of Israel was to perdure in a lasting and profound way after the scission of the northern tribes following the death of Solomon. King Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians (1 K 16:31). And if the kingdom of the North knew true prosperity with the Omrids it was thanks to its openness towards Phoenicia and the access this gave them to the sea.

The name Lebanon appears sixty-four times in the Old Testament, but never in the New. The reason for this is





to be sought in the new administrative organization of the East into the province of Syria and the geographical region referred to as Phoenicia. The Bible speaks of the mountains of Lebanon, of its cedars, of its wood, of its fragrance (Sg 4:11; Hos 14:7), of its glory (Is 35:2; 60:13), of its snow (Jer 18:14), of its wine (Ho 14:7), of its flowers (Na 4:1).

The cities of Lebanon are very often cited. Tyre is mentioned sixty times. It is "tsur" in Hebrew, which also means "rock" and is one of the names of God in the Bible (Ps 18:3; 62:3...). Sidon is cited thirty-four times. It is the fish city, with connections to Bethsaida (Mt 11:21; Mk 6:45). But we also hear of Sidon the Great (Jos 11:8; 19:28) at the time of the expansion of that maritime city, which at one time dominated the entire Lebanese coast and a part of Syria as well. The Sidonians are mentioned (fifteen times) with the Tyrians (seven times) and the Gebalites (Jos 13:5). The city of Byblos is referred to twice, in 1 K 5:32 and Ezk 27:9. Baal-Gad, which is Hosbaya in Lebanon, and Afeqa, the famous cave of Adonis should also be mentioned. And let us not forget Sarepta (Zarephath) where Elijah was hosted by a widow (1 K 17) whom he nourished during the famine and whose child he raised from the dead. Christ himself came into the region of Tyre and Sidon (Mt 15:21; cf. Mk 7:31) where he cured the daughter of the Canaanite woman, who compelled Jesus to anticipate his timetable (cf. Mt 10:5; 15:24, 28; 28:19). She did not wait her turn, in the line established by Mt 10:5. Through her faith she, too, became one of the children of the household who have a right to bread. She thus joins the company of another woman, who put pressure on Jesus to act even though his hour had not yet come (Jn 2:4). This was Mary, and the miracle in question took place in Cana which Eusebius and Jerome situate in the tribe of Asher, that is to say to the North-East of Tyre and hence in Lebanon. Indeed, the first Johannine miracle took place in Lebanon, in a locality that served as a stopover point between Tyre and Safad (Palestine) according to ancient geography.

Lebanon was linked to the Bible and it remains so. In fact, biblical studies have been in progress there since

the 17th century. The Lebanese people have traveled in great numbers to the Polyglot of Paris. It was also a Lebanese bishop who edited the first complete Bible in Arabic, in three volumes (Rome 1671). In 1710, the first book published in Lebanon was the Book of Psalms. It was in carchuni, that is to say in the Arabic language but with Syriac characters. The same book was later reproduced but with Arabic characters.



*Excavations in Byblos*

It was not until the 19th century that Lebanon experienced a truly remarkable expansion in this domain. The Anglicans appealed to the Lebanese Farès Chidiac to translate the Bible for them. Then the Presbyterians accepted the assistance of Nassif Yazji and Boutros Boustani for the Bible Societies' edition. Finally the Jesuits worked with Ibrahim Yazji and others. So Lebanon was the setting for three translations of the Bible, two of them Protestant (and thus lacking the deuterocanonicals) and one Catholic. A concordance of the Bible and a biblical dictionary were published, not to mention the various "sacred histories" and the commentary translations.

In the 20th century, the Bible of the Jesuit Fathers was reworked; as was also that of the Bible Societies, which



became unofficially a common or “ecumenical” Bible in the broad sense of the term. Researchers belonging to different communities living in Lebanon and even more generally in the East worked on it. Father Féghaly worked on it together with the poet Youssef El-Khal. The New Testament has sold three million copies to date. The Anglican Bible has been published in a new edition.

It was in Lebanon that the Living Bible was prepared, in a Protestant edition. Moreover, one could mention at least three new translations of the New Testament, one based on the Peshitta (the official Syriac text), two New Testament concordances, two Synopses and a new edition of the Biblical Dictionary. Finally, a number of fascicles that had appeared in French in the collection Cahiers Evangile have been translated into Arabic.

It is thanks to the Catholic Biblical Federation that biblical research and the work of the biblical apostolate have developed: commentaries on the New and Old Testaments, in-depth studies, a Synopsis in the line of Kurt Aland, an encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible and archaeology, books of biblical apostolate, two reviews – one aimed at biblical formation (Biblia) and another that specializes in the biblical-liturgical domain (Notre vie liturgique). And let us not forget the different centers of formation (26), among which one is a Biblical Institute which confers a license that is recognized by the Lebanese State. The influence of Lebanon is felt in all the Arab countries as well as in the West. It has already organized a number of “biblical days” – for Lebanon – and biblical congresses – for the Middle-East. It is preparing to host the Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Biblical Federation in 2002, focusing on the Acts of the Apostles, with the theme: The Word of God, a blessing for all nations.

Lebanon, this little country of ten thousand square kilometers, situated North of the Holy Land and West of Syria; this country that runs along the Mediterranean Sea for some two hundred kilometers, with a population of four million inhabitants; this country that has been a refuge for all the persecuted peoples of the Middle-East, from the Shiites in the 8th century to the Syrians and the

Armenians in the 20th century. This country is more than a country, as John Paul II said. It has a special vocation. Its mission makes it a crucible for minorities called to live as on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), to foster mutual understanding so as to be able to work together on a common project. These minorities could be divided as were the builders of Babel, but they can also be united by the one Spirit of God whose will it is to reunite all things under one Head, those in heaven and those on earth (Ep 1:10). It is for this reason that a special Synod was held for Lebanon. May the whole Church help this country to rise to this challenge!

(Translation: L. Maluf)



## Lebanon, Land of Encounter of the Religions

*Cyrille Salim Bustros, Greek Catholic Archbishop of Baalbek, Lebanon,  
President of the Biblical and Theological Commission of Lebanon (Full Member  
of the Federation)*

### 1. Lebanon, holy land and land of holiness<sup>1</sup>

Lebanon is one of the countries of the Bible; its cedars helped build the Temple of Jerusalem, and into that Temple its people deposited their labor and their art. Its liturgies echo its enduring glory, particularly when it comes to celebrating the beauty of the Church and of Mary: "All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon." (Sg 4:7-8). But above all the soil of Lebanon was sanctified by the coming of the Lord who visited his friends in the regions of Tyre and of Sidon where he exalted the great faith of a mother (cf. Mt 15:21-28), thereby resuming the gesture of the prophets who announced him (cf. Lk 4:26).

Following his example, the Apostles filled this land, and did so very early; great numbers of its inhabitants professed the Christian Faith. These, in their turn, became the heralds of that faith, and history has recorded saints, theologians, pastors, martyrs and confessors among them, some of whom have been elevated to the altars in very recent years. But it is above all by its high places of prayer, by its monks and its nuns, by its convents and its hermitages, as well as by the fervent piety of its Church throughout the generations that Lebanon has been most profoundly marked.

### 2. Lebanon, place of meeting

A striking aspect of Lebanon, and one that gives it a distinctive character is the fact that its inhabitants (roughly 4 million, living in an area that covers 10,452 square kilometers) are distributed among seventeen religious communities belonging to the Christian, Moslem and Jewish faiths and recognized by the Lebanese constitution:

6 Catholic Churches: Maronites, Greek Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Syrian Catholics, Chaldeans, Latins;

6 Orthodox and Evangelical Churches: Greek Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Assyrians, Coptic Orthodox, Protestants;<sup>2</sup>

4 Moslem confessions: Shiites, Sunnites, Druzes, Alaouites;

1 Jewish community.

Lebanon is thus made up of an ensemble of religious communities that are acknowledged by the State and that recognize each other; they all have a right to participate in the government of the State in proportion to the number of their faithful:

The President of the Republic is always to be a Maronite; the President of the Chamber of Deputies, a Shiite, the President of the Ministries, a Sunnite; The deputies that form the Parliament are half Christian, half Moslem (64 Christians and 64 Moslems), distributed over the various seats and in the various regions of the country according to the number of faithful of each Confession in each region; The ministers are also half Moslem, half Christian: the great Confessions are always represented at the ministerial level;

The public functions are also distributed over the various Confessions, at least at the level of the first categories;

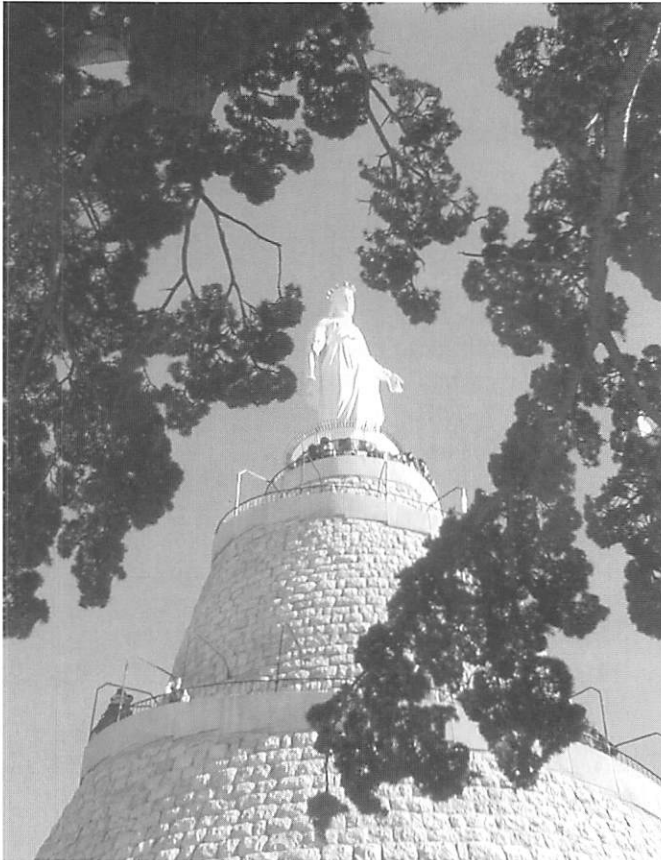
Every Lebanese person receives an identification card that identifies him or her as belonging to a particular religious confession; and marriage is celebrated in the community specified on the card. There is no civil marriage in Lebanon.

This distribution by confession has its advantages; no religious community is deprived from participating in the government of the State. But it also has its disadvantages: since the number of the faithful varies in the course of the years, there is always the risk of confrontation among the communities, which attempt each election to maximize their number of seats in the public functions; moreover, the system tends to make confessional sentiment prevail over national sentiment.

The last war in Lebanon (1975-1990) began with altercations between the Lebanese and the militias of the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon (who are 400,000 in number, forming 10% of the Lebanese population, and who came to Lebanon after the occupation of Palestine by the Israelis and the formation of the State of Israel in 1948). It then rapidly developed into a religious war between Christians and Moslems, the Moslems



relying on Palestinian arms to claim more rights in the government of the State.



*Statue of the Virgin Mary in Harissa*

This war was also the occasion for dissension among Christians, who had been sharing influence in the government of the country according to their political divisions, and who started killing one another. So the war was first one between Lebanese and Palestinians, then between Christians and Moslems, then of Moslems among themselves, and finally of Christians among themselves.

### 3. The Synod for Lebanon

In the face of this dramatic situation Pope John Paul II convoked "the Synod of Bishops" into a "Special

Assembly for Lebanon", which met at Rome from November 26 to December 14, 1995. After which the Pope came to Lebanon for a historic visit (10-11 May 1997), and delivered the Apostolic Exhortation of the Synod: "A new hope for Lebanon".

The purpose of this Synod was to renew the Christian society according to the spirit of the Gospel, and at the same time to make an appeal for peaceful coexistence and collaboration among the various religious confessions that constitute the Lebanese people. Hence the title of the Synod: "Christ is our hope; renewed by his Spirit, we witness to his love".

### 4. The "Historic Vocation of Lebanon"

The Pope has often reiterated: "Lebanon is more than a country, it is a message and a model, for the East as well as for the West", "Lebanon is a message of freedom", "a land of dialogue and of peaceful coexistence among the various religions and cultures"; and he has often spoken of "the historic vocation of Lebanon", a vocation to be the crossroads of peoples and a mosaic of confessions which have decided to live together in spite of, or even because of their ethnic, linguistic and religious differences, in order to prove to the world that a democracy of pluralistic communities, respectful of the rights of all, is still possible today despite the tragedies of recent history.

The Constitution of the Republic of Lebanon, revised on September 21 1990, declares that "Lebanon is a democratic, parliamentary republic, founded on respect for public liberties, and primarily on freedom of opinion and of belief". This parliamentary democracy is based on social justice and equality of rights and duties among all believers without distinction or preference.

### 5. The dialogue between the religious communities'

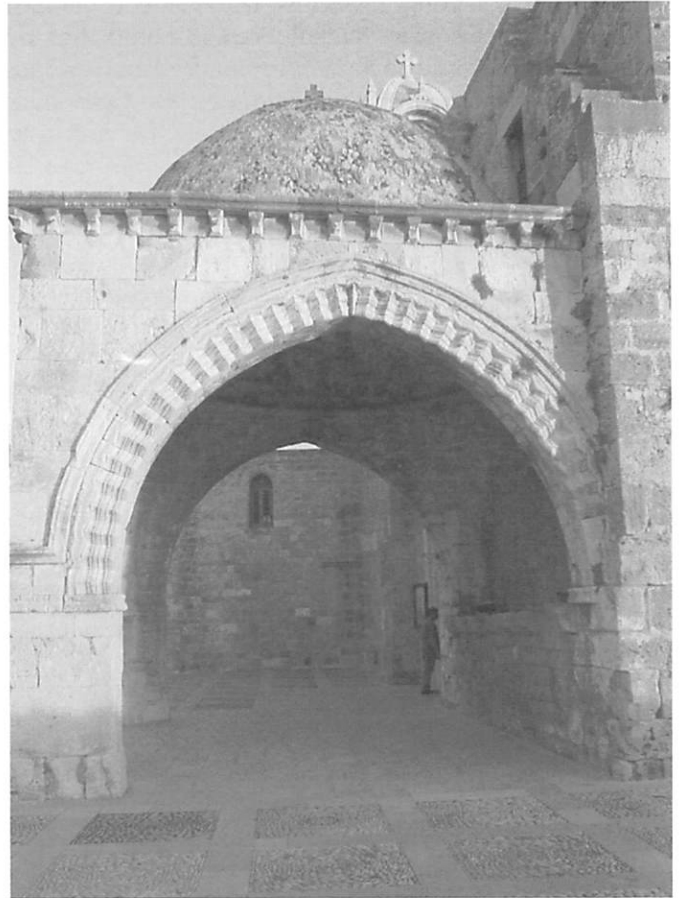
In his announcement of the Synod for Lebanon the pope expressed the desire that the Moslem Lebanese welcome this event as a positive reality which will help the Lebanese society as a whole to transcend the obstacles and the misunderstandings created by violence and war.



The national Christian-Moslem dialogue is based on the fact, accepted by all Lebanese, that their country is one fatherland, accepted as definitive by its children – a country that enjoys a democratic regime, and in which every individual receives his liberty as a gift from God. This liberty manifests itself especially in the permanent effort made by believers belonging to the different religions and aware of their individual cultures, to encounter each other in the shadow of modern civilization and to participate in its evolution. Each citizen and each group puts questions to the other, seeking to form with him, on the basis of stable human values, a unity in the present, rooted in the past and directed toward a common future.

This dialogue takes place at many levels. "First of all, in daily life, in the work place and in the life of the city, individuals and families learn to appreciate each other. Concrete experiences of solidarity constitute a richness for the whole people and an important advance along the path of reconciliation of minds and hearts, without which no common work is possible in the long term. Natural wisdom, then, leads the partners to a rich level of human communication and to a mutual service through which the social fabric is strengthened".<sup>5</sup> In the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, the Pope declares: "In the course of the Synod, I heard the Moslem delegates affirm that Lebanon would no longer be Lebanon without a Christian presence. In order to be truly itself Lebanon needs all its sons and daughters, and all the components of its population. Each has its place in the country and should learn to relish living there and to accept the challenges for its future. No spiritual community can survive if it is not recognized, if it must live in precarious circumstances and if it does not have the opportunity to participate fully in the life of the nation. Its members are then tempted to go looking in other countries for a more fraternal climate, where their survival and that of their family will be assured. In this spirit I invite all the faithful of the Catholic Church to remain attached to their land, with the concern to be an integral part of the national community, to participate in the reconstruction of whatever is necessary to families and to the society as a whole, and to maintain their Christian

specificity... The members of the other national components should likewise strive to remain in the land of their ancestors"<sup>6</sup>.



*Church in Byblos*

On this plane a commission of national Islamic-Christian dialogue has been created, bringing together a representative of each of the larger communities; and this commission meets to reach common positions at the political and national level so as to avoid conflicts among the confessions.

Religious dialogue properly so called takes place in the faculties of theology, and in several centers of Islamic-Christian dialogue, where professors of Christian and





Muslim theology give conferences in comparative theology, each expounding the teaching of his religion regarding the various religious and social problems. Islamic-Christian congresses also take place, organized sometimes by Christian institutions and sometimes by Moslem institutions. Several collections of books concerning this Islamic-Christian dialogue have been published in Arabic, attempting to reconcile ideas and to support friendly coexistence.



Mosque in Baalbek

## 6. Ecumenical Dialogue

Dialogue is also taking place among the various Christian Churches. All the Churches in Lebanon (except for the Assyrian Church, negotiations for its admission being now in progress) are members of the

Council of Churches of the Middle East. Some initiatives are contributing to rapprochement and to collaboration among the various Churches:

- The Week of prayer for the unity of Christians is animated each year, and all the Churches participate in it;
- Programs organized by the Council for the youth, for women and for health group together members of the different Churches;
- The Council also organizes various programs of social development from which the different Churches benefit.

## Conclusion

The Pope terminates the Apostolic Exhortation of the Synod for Lebanon with the hope that the Jubilee Year 2000 will be the occasion of a renewal through Christ. He then concludes: "Thus the Good News of Salvation will be for all men and women a source of strength, of joy and of hope; then the people "will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon" (Ps 92 [91]:12)".<sup>7</sup>

(Transl.: L. Maluf)

<sup>1</sup> *Lineamenta of the Synod for Lebanon*, 1993, pp. 6-8.

<sup>2</sup> *The diversity of the Churches dates from the 5th century: The Assyrians rejected the Council of Ephesus (431); The Chaldeans are the Catholic branch, reunited to Rome, of the Assyrian Church: the Coptic Orthodox, the Armenian Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox reject the Council of Chalcedon (451); those who re-established union with Rome formed the Churches of the Coptic Catholics, the Armenian Catholics and the Syrian Catholics; the Maronites are those who, among the Syrians, accepted the Council of Chalcedon in the 5th century; The Greek Orthodox are the Byzantine Patriarchate of Antioch who joined the separation between Constantinople and Rome in 1054; the Greek Catholics are the branch of the Byzantine Patriarchate of Antioch who reunited with Rome in 1724.*

<sup>3</sup> *Cf. Instrumentum Laboris of the Synod for Lebanon*, 1995, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> *Cf. Lineamenta of the Synod for Lebanon*, 1993, pp. 86-87.

<sup>5</sup> *The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation "A New Hope for Lebanon"*, May 10 1997, n. 91.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 121.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 125.





FEATURE  
ARTICLE

## The Maronite Church

*Paul Féghaly, Middle East Subregional Coordinator of the CBF, Lebanon*

The Maronite Church is situated in the great Antioch tradition, with Syriac as its original liturgical language. One could say that it began to chart its own course, as did also the Syrian Church, at the time of the Council of Chalcedon (451), which spoke of two natures in the one person of Christ. The Syrian Church did not accept the decisions of this Council. It was then characterized as Monophysite, like the Armenian Church, the Coptic Church and soon the Ethiopian Church as well. What was involved here, in point of fact, was a reaction that was as much cultural as it was political. The Church of Constantinople, which was soon to become the Byzantine Church, was attempting to impose its language, Greek, as well as its mentality, which was quite different from that of the Syriac speaking world, for example. Moreover, those who were not of Greek culture feared extinction. Consequently, they made every effort to preserve their autonomy. Decisions made at the cultural level had repercussions at the political level. And in the 8th century, these Churches will be seen to welcome the Moslem advance because it would free them from the domination of Byzantium that remained intolerable. But as it turned out, they were liberating themselves only to experience another yoke which would reduce Christianity, spread out through a territory extending from Turkey to Egypt, to tiny islands in an immense Moslem sea. For a variety of reasons, many Christians even converted to Islam. Others emigrated, and this movement of emigration has continued to this day. Christians feel like strangers in countries where there is no religious liberty and where religious segregation is ubiquitous, even if in mitigated form.

One Church, however, did manage to create for itself a certain political autonomy: it was the Maronite Church. It is so called because of a remote "founder", Saint Maron, who knew John Chrysostom and whom Theodoret describes as a hermit who lived not far from Antioch.

This Church remained faithful to Chalcedon and, for a period of time, it was called Melkite. Its position caused it to be persecuted by the great Syriac tradition which perceived its attitude as a betrayal vis-à-vis this move-

ment of emancipation. But because of its use of the Syriac language, the Maronite Church also suffered pressure from the side of Byzantium which was determined to impose uniformity, a uniformity likewise sought by the Church of Rome, which caused the Orient to lose its richness and thus its originality in the great Church.

Torn between the Syriac and the Byzantine worlds, the Maronite Church, which originated from Antioch in Syria and spread to the mouth of the Orontes, emigrated to Lebanon in successive waves. It settled in the mountains, giving its mark to the Christians living there, at least from the time of Simeon Stylites and his disciples. From this time forward its destiny was to become identified with the destiny of this country.

Closed in on itself, it lived in poverty but did not have the misfortune of losing its children to Islam as happened to the Christians who lived in the plains or in the cities. On the contrary, it grew in numbers thanks to a rapid birth-rate and to numerous conversions.

Present throughout Lebanon, from the North to the South, it also took root in Palestine where its children for the most part became Latin-rite Christians in response to pressures referred to globally as Latinization. It spread even into Egypt where it had a great number of parishes, from the Delta all the way to Cairo and Alexandria. But with the revolution of Nasser, the Maronites left Egypt for Canada or Australia.

The Maronite Church had to defend itself, in turn, from the Byzantines, the Fatimids, the Mamelukes (Egypt) and the Ottomans. At the end of the First World War, it played a role of primary importance in the founding of the Great Lebanon with its borders that we know today, and it opted for a life of tolerance with its neighbors. It rejected the idea of a tiny Lebanon where only Christians could live, although this temptation was always present. It opted then for a Lebanon in which a number of Christian communities, Moslems and Jews would live side by side. Which amounted also to creating a division of power in a country where each could guard its rights and be conscious of its unique respon-



sibilities. No one is a second class citizen because of his religion. This was something new in the East: a total respect of faiths and of religious liberties.



*Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Pierre Sfeir*

The Maronite Church opened itself to the West with the crusades, from the end of the 11th century.

Many were the children of Maronites who accompanied the crusaders when they retreated to Cyprus, to Malta, or to other places. In 1570, a large number of Maronites were massacred in Cyprus by the Ottomans who took the island.

Then came the time of relations with Rome and the founding of the Maronite College in Rome in 1584, under the Pontificate of Gregory XIII. This caused a true flowering of Maronite potential. Maronite scholars went to the great capitals. They played an important role in the development of the Polyglot of Paris in the 17th century and at the Vatican Library, not to mention the different chairs they occupied, from Lisbon and Madrid to Paris (Collège de France) and Vienna.

Then came the liturgical reform. The great Arabic "translation" of the Bible was printed in Rome in 1671 (with the Latin text printed on the opposite page). For two centuries, it was the Anglican Church, in its mission to the Orient, which took charge of the editing work. This is the period when translations were made of Western works, among which, in the biblical field, were the commentaries of Cornelius a Lapide. Having said this, it must be admitted that true biblical research in the East had come to a stop as early as the 5th century. What had appeared in the meantime had been mere repetition or compilation of earlier work, without much originality. But today, the climate has begun to change.

The Maronite Church had an important synod in 1736. It endeavored to put into practice the decisions of the Council of Trent with respect to the founding of dioceses, the creation of seminaries, the reform of monastic life. It had a hard time respecting its originality in the face of Roman power which wanted to eliminate differences and to make the Eastern Church follow in the footsteps of the Church of the West, and in particular of the Roman Church.

The Maronite Church benefited from another source of wealth, that of the missionaries who came from Europe. They founded schools, worked in the formation of the clergy, published biblical or theological books. These missionaries played an important role in the creation of the different Uniate Churches, with the help, by the way, of the Maronites, especially of Aleppo.

At the present time, the Maronite Church is centered in Lebanon where its patriarch resides. Some of its faithful



still live in Syria, in Egypt and in Palestine. A number of its children began to emigrate in the 19th century. There was another wave of emigration with the First World War and the famine that raged at that time. But since that time, emigration has continued without pause, especially with the war in Lebanon which lasted almost fifteen years and unfortunately changed the demographic map of the country. Before 1975, the Maronites were settled everywhere in Lebanon and constituted an element of cohesion in the villages as well as in the city quarters. But since that time they have been displaced from entire zones and are all living together now in the center of the country. This development has been bad for the principle of conviviality and has weakened the Christian witness in the Moslem world.

Today, the Maronite Church in Lebanon has its universities, its schools, its hospitals... It is experiencing a blossoming at the level of religious formation in general, and biblical studies in particular, as are the other Catholic Churches. But it remains torn between the West which opens it to the world, but risks making it lose its cultural identity, and an East where it ought to play a role more in line with the act undertaken by Bishop John of Antioch when he had the Bible translated into Arabic at the time of the conquest of Syria by the Moslems.

But there is a danger that it will be smothered by this East, that it will feel threatened by it and be driven to take off for other shores. The Maronite presence in Lebanon has been a force for all the Christians of the East. But if this Church has fear, if it is incapable of looking to the future and fulfilling the mission with which it has been entrusted by the Lord, Eastern Christians will be risking extinction. And the name of Christ will be absent from the land which his feet trod. This is a pessimistic view if there is anything to it, in the context of the post-war period that Lebanon is experiencing. But the seeds of resurrection are there; and after a fall, the rising can rest on solid foundations: Christians (and not only Maronites) can no longer remain at a level that does not go beyond eating and drinking and the easy life; on the contrary, they are called to devote themselves to their land, to their country, and not to forget that they are the leaven in the dough and the salt of the earth. They are the "remnant", a remnant that can be the point of departure for a new people, as the prophet Isaiah said in his inaugural vision.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)





## The Melkite Church of Antioch

*Paul Féghaly, Middle East Subregional Coordinator of the CBF, Lebanon  
and Ignace Dick, Archimandrite of Aleppo, Syria*

In the framework of the Roman Empire five major cities were associated with the five great Patriarchates: Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem. From apostolic times Antioch was universally recognized as the capital of the Eastern province.

Tradition tells us that Peter moved to Antioch and that he there had a confrontation with Paul (Ga 2:11-16). He is supposed to have been the first bishop of that city and to have been succeeded by Evodius. The book of Acts tells us that it was in Antioch that the disciples of Jesus were first called "Christians" (12:26). It also informs us that Antioch was the setting for that famous conflict: would the Gentiles who converted to the Gospel be obligated to become Jews first, practicing circumcision and conforming to Jewish dietary prescriptions? The solution was worked out in Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, before reaching its final form in Jerusalem. Within the first century of Christianity we hear of a bishop who came from Antioch and who died a martyr's death in Rome – Ignatius of Antioch.

From the beginning of Christianity the Church of Antioch was divided between two traditions, and hence two languages. The Greek tradition, cradle of the Melkite Church, as it is called today, preserves a liturgy that goes back to Saint John Chrysostom, Saint John Damascene, Romanos the Melodist and others. The Syriac language tradition, which had a foothold in the country areas, followed a course of its own (with the Coptic Church and the Armenian Church) out of concern for independence. This is the Syrian Church which will later split into the Syrian Orthodox and Syrian Catholic Churches.

The Melkite Church knew wars and upheavals, among them the Persian expansion (538-540, 611). The Emperor Heraclius restored peace when he recaptured Jerusalem. In 638, the Arabs took possession of Damascus, and then of Jerusalem and Alexandria. It was at this time that Constantinople began to play a leading role, and it did so until 1453, the date of its fall at the hands of the Ottomans. During this period, the patriarch of Antioch was chosen at Constantinople,

where a number of bishops also resided.

In the 10th century, the Emperor Nicephorus Phocas took Antioch back from the Arabs, but it fell into the hands of the Turks in 1086, and then to the Crusaders in 1099. It remained under foreign domination for 150 years before returning to the jurisdiction of Constantinople. From 1260 onwards, under the Mamelukes, the authority of the Patriarch was acknowledged though he was unable to reside in Antioch. In 1453 the Ottoman authority recognized the priority of Constantinople, and Antioch thus began to decline in influence. In the 16th century, the patriarchal seat moved to Damascus where it remains to this day.

At the beginning of the 17th century, missionaries arrived in the East, and especially in Aleppo. At this time the Melkite Church was divided into Orthodox and Catholic. Each took a path of its own and still today there are two Patriarchates, one for each, both residing in Damascus. Their theological traditions are identical except for the dogmas that have been defined since their separation, as are also their liturgical and iconographic traditions.

**1. Stages of Union with Rome:** The relations of the Melkite Church with the see of Rome went through three phases. In the first, which corresponds to the great Antiochian period, the relations were one of communion. Rome represented the first see, but retained dialectical relationships with the Patriarchs of the great apostolic sees. The second phase, which corresponds with the Byzantine period, is marked by a situation of rupture: the Melkite hierarchy having rallied to the ideas of the anti-Latin polemics propagated by the theologians of Greek language. The third phase amounts to a partial resumption of intercommunion. A part of the Melkite Church strove to move beyond the break and to renew relations with Rome.

The Melkite Church in union with Rome – now the Melkite Catholic Church – has always been concerned that Rome exercise its primacy in a way that respects the Patriarchal reality of the Church of Antioch. It has



always fought to maintain its fidelity to the Roman See and its fidelity to its own cultural and juridical heritage. Its intention has been to put an end to the break with Rome in such a way as to avoid causing a break with the Church of the East.

This resumption of communion was made possible thanks to the activity of the missionaries from the West who came in great numbers at the beginning of the 17th century. The Melkite Church, faithful to its origins, did not espouse the animosities of the Greeks against the Latins.

The doubling of the hierarchy took place in 1724, after a century of intensive missionary presence. The arrival in Aleppo of the first missionaries coincided with the presence at the head of the Melkite eparchy of a zealous bishop, learned and virtuous, Méléce Karmé, who opened his bishop's palace to the Jesuits, who there founded their first school. Having become patriarch in 1634 he sent a secret mission to Rome to officially conclude a pact of reunion of the Patriarchate of Antioch with the Catholic Church. But he died while the negotiations were still in course.

His successor, Euthymius III, maintained good relations with the missionaries, but was unwilling to continue the negotiations begun under Karmé. Macarius III also had good relations with the missionaries and wrote a highly deferential letter to Rome, demonstrating his pro-Roman sympathies; but he did not draw up the official act of reunion.

The work of the missionaries did not begin to bear visible fruit until the first quarter of the 17th century. The two patriarchs, long in competition with each other, Cyril V and Athanasius III, sent their profession of Catholic faith to Rome which first recognized Athanasius, who had been first to send his profession of faith in 1687. In 1683, Euthymius Saïfi, a student of the Damascus missionaries, was consecrated bishop of Tyre and Sidon. He was a convinced Unionist. In the vicinity of Sidon, he founded the Monastery of the Holy Savior, whose religious would win over to union the faithful of the region. Some

young citizens of Aleppo, eager for authentic religious life, made a new foundation at Saint-Jean de Choueir, in 1697. One of the founders, the future Patriarch Maximos Hakim, spent some time at Sinai to initiate himself into Oriental Monasticism.

The cleavage between the Melkites had already been effected before the doubling of the hierarchy. The regions where the Melkites had been won over en masse to the unionist movement were those under the influence of the Jesuits as well as the first Salvatorans and Chouerites. But in 1722 the Ecumenical Patriarch reacted violently, excommunicated the prominent Catholics and imposed the rejection of Catholic doctrines not in agreement with Orthodoxy. The Metropolitan Euthymius Saïfi was exiled and succumbed to his sufferings, in 1723.

**2. Formation of the Patriarchate:** It was at this time that the Catholic party decided to have a separate Catholic patriarch. At the death of Athanasius, in 1724, the Damascenes chose Séraphim Tanas, nephew of Euthymius Saïfi and student of the Propaganda, who took the name Cyril VI. But the Synod of Constantinople chose Sylvester of Cyprus, who was consecrated a week later.

It was Cyril's intention to be the patriarch of all the Melkites. But since he was not recognized by the Sultan, he took refuge in the monastery of the Holy Savior in Lebanon. The Aleppins, although Catholic, had embraced the party of Sylvester. But when they found out that the latter intended to impose his anti-Roman views by force they joined forces against him and he had to flee hurriedly from Aleppo. The Orthodox then resumed the offensive and the Catholics had to suffer a loss of property and, at times, fidelity to their Church even cost them their lives. Many families sought asylum in Lebanon where, under the auspices of the Chehab emirs and in the Maronite Kesrouan they felt more free from oppression. The Druzes, with their chief Ali Joumblat, prevented Sylvester from taking possession of the Monastery of the Holy Savior and seizing Cyril, who had a price on his head.



The Melkite Church never amounted to more than a small flock. Its spread was hindered by these internal struggles and by its self-defensive attitude against the danger of Latinization. In 1743 Pope Benedict XIV published the encyclical "Demandatum" which prescribed the integral safeguarding of the oriental rite and forbade all attempts to attract Orientals to the Latin rite.

The outgoing Metropolitan of Aleppo, Maximos Mazloum, was elected patriarch in 1833. A man of vast culture and an indefatigable fighter, he extended his activity along many fronts. He reorganized the Patriarchate and strove to revive the spiritual level of the clergy and people. He endowed his Church with a more solid hierarchy. Melkite Catholics who until then would say their prayers at home and in hiding, or in the small chapels of the missionaries now started to build cathedrals of their own in a number of towns.

At the civil level, Maximos fought to obtain full autonomy for his community and, against the Greek Orthodox patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, to affirm the oriental character of his Church. At the same time he made every effort to assert his rights in the face of the centralizing mentality of the Roman administration.

More gentle and more docile to Rome, his successor, Clement Bahouth, introduced the Gregorian calendar, which caused serious troubles within the community and a schism which lasted for many years. Worn out by the strife, Clement resigned.

His successor, Gregory Yousef (1864-1897) restored calm within the community and labored tirelessly to elevate its cultural and spiritual level. He reopened the seminary of Ain Traz and supported the foundation by the White Fathers of Seminaire Sainte-Anne in Jerusalem which, for more than a century, gave the Melkite Church an educated clergy among them many bishops and two patriarchs. His role at Vatican I belongs to the great history of the Church. At this council Gregory proved to be an ardent defender of oriental ecclesiology. In 1893, Leo XIII published his encyclical "Orientalium dignitas" which responded to the com-

plaints of the Orientals in the face of the Roman tendency toward Latinization and centralization.

The first patriarch to leave Seminaire Sainte-Anne was Maximos IV Saïgh. The cultural and spiritual level of his clergy attracted a large number of Orthodox faithful. Special missions were even organized in the regions where Catholicism was not established. The patriarch made a decision to stop this movement and declared that he was even prepared to yield his position to the Orthodox patriarch in the event that communion were re-established. At Vatican II he played a leading role in making the voice of the Orient heard.

**3. Cultural and Spiritual Renewal:** The renewal began at the beginning of the 17th century, in Aleppo, with its Metropolitan Méléce Karmé, supported by the Jesuits who opened a school at Aleppo, then at Damascus and at Aintoura in Lebanon. The missionaries devoted themselves to teaching and to preaching.

At the end of the 17th century a circle of young Aleppins, Melkites and Maronites, took up the study of classical Arabic and theology, following the courses of the Maronite Pierre Toulouai who had been formed in Rome. From this circle issued the founders of religious renewal, both among the Maronites and among the Melkites. The most famous of these were Maximos Hakim, the future patriarch, Fr. Nicholas Saïgh, the actual founder of the Chouerite Order, the fiery controversialist Abdallah Zakher. At this time, Patriarch Athanasius Dabbas introduced at Aleppo the first Arabic printing house of the Orient whose first published work was the Psalter that appeared in 1706. In 1723 Zakher established the first Arabic printing house of Lebanon at Saint-Jean de Choueir.

The complete office for the feast of the Blessed Sacrament, as well as that of its vigil, composed by Maximos and Saïgh, were also published. This office draws on authentically oriental spiritual and theological sources.

In the 19th century, the Melkites participated in the cultural and national Arabic renaissance. The principal writ-





ers were Nassif Yazji and his son Ibrahim, as well as the poet Khalil Moutran. The founder of "Al-Ahram", the largest newspaper of Cairo, is also a Lebanese Melkite, Selim Takla.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the religious literature became more open to scientific research and began to spread beyond the East thanks to valuable oriental texts that were translated into the European languages.

In 1910, Mgr. Moaccad, founder of the Missionary Institute of the Paulist Fathers, launched the Arabic review "Al-Mapra". In 1936 the young Father Georges Hakim, now Patriarch Maximos V Hakim, inaugurated in Cairo a bulletin written in the French language, "Le Lien", destined to become a line of union between the Patriarchate and the Catholic Church as a whole. It is currently published in Lebanon. In 1953 the review "Proche-Orient Chrétien", a periodical of the highest scientific tenor published by the White Fathers of the Seminaire Sainte-Anne, came out in Jerusalem.

The Melkites likewise began to concern themselves with their history and their ancient literature. The first pioneers, at the beginning of the century, were Fr. Constantin Bacha and Mr. Habib Zayat. Numerous authors produced works of value in various domains: history, law, Islamology, spirituality, theology and liturgy. Special mention should be made of a great servant of the Church, Cardinal Akakios Coussa who was a renowned canonist and Prefect of the Oriental Congregation.

**4. National Integration:** In Lebanon, with Fakhreddin, the Christians were citizens in a class completely apart. Their secretary was none other than the future patriarch Ignace Atyeh. At the Cour de l'Emir Béchir lived two Melkite Catholics, writers and poets, Boutros Karamé and Nassif Yazji. The Druze emirs Abilama had for scribes Melkites of the family Kassab. Among the Melkites of Lebanon, only the Kassabs had received the title of Sheikh.

In the contemporary Arab States, the Melkites are acknowledged as a juridical entity just like the other communities, but by personal statute, not by a specific political statute. Lebanon is a particular case: the Melkites there have a right to a determinate number of parliamentary seats and ministerial functions. Responsibility in political questions belongs to the laity, but the hierarchy cannot remain completely apart. A higher Council oversees the interests of the community.

**5. Statistics of the Melkite Church:** Its spiritual head is the patriarch, assisted by the Synod of bishops. The patriarch has his own diocese. The patriarchal diocese of Antioch is that of Damascus. That of Alexandria forms a diocese apart; the diocese of Jerusalem consists of the region of Judea and Samaria.

The dioceses that depend directly on residential bishops are:

**In Lebanon:** Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, Zahlé, Baalbek, Tripoli, Marjeyoun.

**In Syria:** Aleppo, Homs, Hama, Yabroud, Lattaquié, the Hauran.

**In Palestine:** The Galilee including Acca, Haifa and Nazareth.

**In Jordan:** A diocese that includes Transjordan, with a residence in Amman.

The parishes of Baghdad, of Kuwait and Khartoum depend on the Patriarch.

In the Diaspora, the best organized community is that of the United States with its head a bishop whose seat is in Boston. Then come the communities of Canada and of Brazil. In France there are two parishes, one in Paris, the other in Marseille. They are under the Latin archbishop of Paris. There are also two parishes in Brussels and in Sydney.

Melkite Catholics total almost a million faithful. In Lebanon the gross figure is 250,000; in Syria, 150,000, and there are 100,000 divided between the countries of the Near-East and the remaining Diaspora countries.



This Church is endowed with a relatively numerous clergy and nearly four hundred priests serve in parishes and work in education and in the missions. There are three religious congregations: the Salvatorans, the Chouerites and the Aleppins, and a Missionary Institute, the Paulist Fathers. There are also five female congregations: the Salvatorans, the Chouerites, the Aleppins, the Religious of Our Lady of Perpetual Help (Notre Dame du Perpétuel Secours) and the Religious of Bon-Service.

The war of 1948 caused the exodus of nearly half the faithful of Galilee. The occupation of Jerusalem and of Transjordan entailed the closing of the major seminary, Sainte-Anne. The patriarch built a new major seminary at Raboueh, in Lebanon. But it was the Lebanese crisis that was the hardest blow of all for the Melkite community whose personnel and institutions are mostly in Lebanon. A good number of churches, bishoprics and monasteries were destroyed. The historical center of the Patriarchate, at Ain-Traz, was set on fire together with its archives. Fortunately Patriarch Hakim had managed to build a new, completely modern Patriarchate at Raboueh, closer to Beirut.

**6. Mission of the Melkite Church:** Like every particular church, the Melkite Church is a segment of the people of God for whom the Gospel is the nourishment that assures their growth in faith and holiness, in accordance with the rich spiritual and historical heritage and with the exigencies of the world of today.

On November 13, 1983, Pope John Paul II beatified Sister Marie Bawardy, a humble Melkite from Galilee, who was a Carmelite nun. Others of the faithful, priests or even lay persons who died in the odor of sanctity have their canonization process in course in Rome. These include Fr. Béchara Abi-Mourad, a Salvatoran, and George Bitar, a layman from Damascus.

Because of its joint membership in the great Byzantine family and in the Roman communion, the Melkite Church has played and continues to play an undeniable ecumenical role. It has helped the Roman Church to moderate its centralization tendencies. On the other hand, its presence alongside the Orthodox has helped the latter to better understand the Catholic Church and its spiritual riches. The Melkites, by their presence in the Arab world, have a special vocation as witnesses of Christ to Islam. They should be supported in their effort to validate their heritage so as to enable them, in the concert of God's Churches, to assume this noble mission with which they have been entrusted by Christ.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



## Chronological Overview: The Development of the Christian Church in East and West

<b>Before 100</b>	Peter founds the community of Rome. Peter and Paul in Antioch. Mark the Evangelist in Alexandria. Thomas the Apostle founds the "Mesopotamian Church".	<b>1070</b>	Capture of Jerusalem by the Seljuq Turks. Christian pilgrims can no longer visit Jerusalem.
<b>2nd cent.</b>	Syrian preachers from Edessa bring Christianity to Armenia. In the last third of the 2nd cent. Christianity in Egypt comes to full bloom.	<b>1099</b>	The re-conquest of Jerusalem by the Crusaders and the subsequent establishment of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem
<b>4th cent.</b>	The Latin Church is present in the Holy Land from this time on. At the beginning of the 4th cent., the origin of the Church in Ethiopia, which becomes the State church probably in 341.	<b>1187-1291</b>	After the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin (1187), they transfer the Patriarchate to Akko. Antioch is captured in 1268 by Mamelukes. Akko falls in 1291; this ends the era of the Crusades. From 1291 to 1847 the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem is merely a titular seat without resident office-holder.
<b>301</b>	The Armenian king and his court accept Baptism.	<b>1441</b>	The Armenian Church is divided.
<b>325</b>	The Roman Emperor Constantine I embraces the Nicene Creed and in 330 founds Constantinople as the second capital of the Roman Empire.	<b>1431-1442</b>	The Council of Florence: it ratifies the (short-lived) union with the Greeks, the Armenians and the Jacobites. The expression "Chaldean Church" goes back to Pope Eugenius IV during this Council.
<b>380/381</b>	Under Theodosius I, the Great, Christianity becomes the official religion of the Empire.	<b>1453</b>	The end of the Byzantine (East-Roman) Empire, with the capture of Constantinople by the Turks.
<b>395</b>	The Roman Empire is divided between the two sons of Theodosius into a Western and an Eastern half. The Western Roman Empire comes to an end in 476 when the last Roman Emperor is deposed (Romulus Augustulus).	<b>1584</b>	Founding of the Maronite College in Rome.
<b>431</b>	The Council of Ephesus: The Nestorians break off. They later become the Assyrian (East Syrian) Church, which today is Orthodox and the Chaldean Church, which today is in union with Rome.	<b>16th cent.</b>	The East Syrian Church moves closer to Rome.
<b>451</b>	The Council of Chalcedon: The Copts, Ethiopians, Syrians (Jacobites) and Armenians reject the Council and go their own ways. The Maronites and the Melkites comply with the decisions of the Council.	<b>17th cent.</b>	Missionaries from the Latin West in the East. The Syrian Church splits into Syrian-Catholic and Syrian Orthodox
<b>5th-6th cent.</b>	The Nestorian mission to India ("Thomas Christians").	<b>1630</b>	Franciscan missionaries in Cairo; followed by the Jesuits in 1697; the effect is that the Copts move closer to the Roman Church.
<b>1054</b>	The Eastern Schism: the four Eastern Patriarchates, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem break from the Latin Church and attach themselves to the Church of Constantinople.	<b>1724</b>	The Melkite Church splits into Melkite-Catholic and Melkite-Orthodox.
		<b>1824</b>	The establishment of a Patriarchate for the Coptic Catholic Church.
		<b>1847</b>	Re-establishment of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem.



## Syria in the Bible

*Elie Tobji, Catholic Biblical Commission of Syria  
(Full Member of the Federation)*

### 1. Old Testament

In the genealogies of the peoples, the Arvadites and the Hamathites (Hamath, now Hama, Arwad) are mentioned as descendants of Canaan, son of Ham and grandson of Noah (Gn 10:18). These were Canaanites. Moreover, the city of Ugarit (Ras Shamra) left behind texts that may have inspired the Book of Psalms (for example when it uses imagery such as that of the riders on the clouds). As for Abraham, who set out from Ur of the Chaldeans and arrived in Palestine, he had to pass through Syrian territory. Then, at the time of the war with the four kings, he pursued them all the way to Damascus and beyond (Gn 14:15).

When the Hebrews journeyed from Egypt to Canaan, they wanted to pass through the country of the Amorites. At that time they fought a war with Og, king of Bashan, in the city of Edrei (present-day Deraa in the Hauran). This king attempted to block their passage, but the Hebrews defeated him and took possession of his land (Nb 21:33-35; Dt 3:1-4). Then the land of the Amorites passed into their possession as well, from the Arnon Gorge all the way to Mount Hermon, which constituted the border between Lebanon and Syria. This mountain, which the Sidonians called Sirion, was called Senir by the Amorites (Dt 3:8-9). As for the land of Bashan, it was the inheritance of the half tribe of Manasseh (Dt 3:13). At the time of the division of the land among the tribes, the town of Kenath fell to Nobah who renamed it after himself (Nb 32:42). It is thought that this city is in Syria.

II Samuel (8:5-6, 9-12) and 1 Chronicles (18:3-10) speak of a war between David and Hadadezer. I Kings (11:22-25) speaks of Rezon, son of Eliada, who had fled from his master Hadadezer, king of Zobah. It is important to understand that Hadad was king of Damascus and represented a danger for the kingdom of the North.

The Bible then speaks of a treaty between Asa, king of Judah, and Ben-Haddad 1st, against Baasha, king of Israel (1 K 15:18-19). The Book of Kings also speaks of a miracle performed on behalf of Naaman, chief of the

army of the king of Aram and inhabitant of Damascus. At one time in history there was a treaty between Rezon, king of Damascus, and Peqah, son of Remalya, king of Israel, against Ahaz, king of Judah. The latter requested the help of Assyria. Tiglath-pileser III responded; he took Damascus, killed its king and deported the population to Anatolia (732 BC). Sargon II continued the work of his predecessor; he laid siege to Samaria which fell into his hands in 721. He took a part of the population of Gozan, north of Mesopotamia, and of the people of Hamath whom he transported to Samaria.



*Shrine of John the Baptist from the Omayyad Mosque*



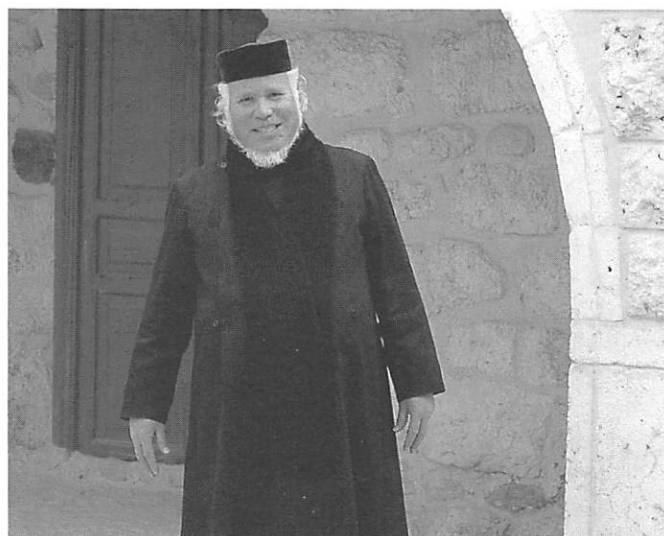
In the Book of Kings and in Isaiah, we hear of the cities taken by the Assyrians: Calno, north of Aleppo, which was taken by Tiglath-pileser in 738 (Is 10:8); Arpad, near Aleppo, which was placed under siege because it had formed a league against him. Damascus also fell in 733. Sargon II had taken Hamath in 720 and Carchemesh in the same year. Moreover, in 609 Carchemesh was the location of a battle between Necho, the king of Egypt, who came to the assistance of the king of Assyria, and Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. It was at this time that Josiah king of Judah died, when he had hoped to stop the march of the Egyptian army. This same Nebuchadnezzar conquered Zedekiah, king of Judah, and brought him to Riblah (not far from Homs) on the Orontes: it was here that he carved out the king's eyes, after having slaughtered his children. Finally, in the book of Maccabees, we hear of the Seleucid army with its king who resided in Antioch. In fact, the Greek text speaks of the Syrian army (1 M 3:13, 41...) in this context.

## 2. New Testament

Syria is mentioned more than once in the New Testament. In Mt 4:24 it is said that Jesus' fame reached all the way to Syria. In Lk 2:2 mention is made of Quirinius who was governor of Syria and of whom an inscription has been found north of the old city of Damascus (today, directly before Damascus). In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul's home base is Syrian Antioch. We see him going through Syria to Cilicia (modern-day Turkey, cf. Acts 15:23, 41; Ga 1:21). Finally we should mention that the conversion of Saul, who became Paul, took place on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22; 26).

Outside of the biblical corpus, we should mention the great Syrian cities which left behind an abundant documentation: Mari, Ebla with its thousands of recently discovered texts, and finally Ugarit. The town of Dura-Europos has preserved unique frescos that are now in the Damascus museum. Finally, we should note the Hebrew manuscript which was at Aleppo before it was moved to Jerusalem. It is dated to the year 930 and it contains mostly the Prophets and the Psalms; it is older

than the Leningrad manuscript (1009) which remains the basis for the editions of the Hebrew Bible in use today.



*Greek-Catholic priest*

(Arranged and translated by Paul Féghaly from Arabic)

(Transl.: L. Maluf)





## The Syrian Church

*Paul Féghaly, Middle East Subregional Coordinator of the CBF, Lebanon*

The Syrian Church is so called for two reasons. It was born and developed in Syria around the Patriarchate of Antioch. Its patriarch, moreover, still resides in Damascus today. Its language is Syriac, the language of the Syrians, whose origin is Aramaic, a language spoken in the Persian era all the way from the Indies to southern Egypt.

The Syrian Church is as old as the Gospel, because Christ himself spoke in Aramaic. Of course the New Testament has come down to us in Greek, but it certainly contains writings that were originally in Aramaic. Eusebius of Cesarea speaks of a Gospel of Matthew in that language. Not to mention the fact that the sign posted over the cross of Jesus bore an inscription in Aramaic (= Hebrew in Jn 19:20), alongside Greek and Latin. As for the first community of Jerusalem, it was first composed of Jews (who spoke Aramaic), and was only later joined by faithful of Greek language and culture. This situation could have constituted a factor of division if it were not for the wisdom of the Apostles who instituted the Seven to serve the Greek-speaking Christian, reserving for themselves the care of those who spoke Aramaic.

The Syrian Church grew up around Antioch. If Greek was spoken in the city, in the surrounding country-side people spoke in Aramaic which was soon to become Syriac. When a liturgy was held in town, the Gospel was read first in Syriac (or Aramaic), and then in Greek; and the homily was delivered in Greek. When the liturgy was celebrated in the country, the Gospel was first read in Greek, and then in Syriac; and the sermon was in Syriac. This law applied in Syria, in Lebanon, in Palestine, and in Turkey. And still today it is observed that in the cities and towns it is the Melkite element that dominates, with Greek for a liturgical language, while in the country the Syriac element is most prominent, whether Syrian or Maronite.

However it is in Edessa that the Syriac Church properly so called saw the light of day. A legend tells the story of its founding. King Abgar was ill. He heard about Jesus and sent a delegation asking him to come and cure him,

with the offer that he could share power with him. Being unable to come, Jesus promised to send one of his disciples. This was Thaddeus who healed the king and converted his kingdom.

Christianity became established in Edessa and from there radiated outward into Armenia and Georgia, such that the Armenian Bible was a translation from the Syriac (and perhaps from the Aramaic); as for the Bible of the Georgians, it is indirectly linked to the Syriac Bible.

We have to do, then, with a very early form of Christianity. It was at Edessa that the Syriac language broke free of its origin in Aramaic dialect to become a literary language. One will find inscriptions in this language as far away as China and Mongolia. As a testimony to this Christian presence, Abercius left an epitaph dated from the 2nd century which spoke of the presence of Christians in the plain and in the towns of Syria and beyond the Euphrates.

This Syrian Church will take on its own proper character at the time of its insurgency against the Greek element of Constantinople. It rejected the definition of Chalcedon and established its own patriarch, James Baradée. He was the one who organized this Church, which adopted his name: Jacobite. At its side another Church was created; it, too, of Syriac language: the Maronite Church which remained faithful to its Syriac patrimony but did not reject the teaching of Chalcedon which insisted on the two natures of Christ in the one person. This Church was at one time called Melkite (melek-king) like the Orthodox Greek-language Church.

The Syrian Church counted several renowned schools, among which are Edessa, Nisibus (in present-day Turkey), and Quennesrin. It was rich in monasteries, so much so that it could be called the monastic church. It had illustrious monasteries such as Saint-Gabriel at Tour Abdin (Turkey), Saint-Matthieu near Mossoul (Iraq), Zaafaran, to the East of Mardin in Turkey.

Its great masters were Ephraem, James of Saroug, Rabboula, Philoxenus of Mabboug, Severus of Antioch,





Michael the Syrian – the great historian – , John of Dara, Moses bar Kepha, James of Edessa, Denis bar Salibi, Bar Hebraeus, who has been called the Thomas Aquinas of the East. And in the biblical domain we would have to cite once again Ephraem († 373) who commented on both the Old and the New Testaments, Moses Bar Kepha († 903), Denis Bar Salibi († 1171) with a material (or corporal) commentary and a mystical (symbolic) commentary. As for the commentaries of Bar Hebraeus on the Old and New Testaments, written between 1272 and 1278, they are a voluminous index of glosses on biblical exegesis, critical notes on the Peshitta (the official biblical text in Syriac), on the Hexaplay (Origen's Hexapla in Syriac) and on the Harklene... Unfortunately, most of these works have not yet been published.

What is the situation of this Church today? It is divided into two:

The Syrian Orthodox Church, sometimes called anti-Chalcedonian (although this term is somewhat outdated, since theologians now understand that the difference was a matter of vocabulary) which has a presence in the East, but above all in the West on account of massive emigration, from Turkey above all, but also from Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. Its Patriarch resides in Damascus. It is related to the Church of the Malabar rite that has its roots especially in the south of India.

The Syrian Catholic Church, a small branch cut off from the great Syrian Church which is today called Orthodox. The modality of its union with Rome is similar to that of the other Uniate Churches (Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Coptic Catholic). This union took place in the 17th century. The Patriarch of this Church lives in Lebanon since the time of the persecutions perpetrated by the Ottoman empire. The Syrian Catholics constitute a minority; many of them live in Syria and in Lebanon, but there are also a few who have emigrant status.

What is the place of the Bible in the Syrian Church, whether Catholic or Orthodox? It is in fact rather minimal, and this for two reasons: a repetitive liturgy which nourishes exclusively the life of the faithful and some devotional practices that are of Western origin and not of strong biblical inspiration. Not to mention the fact that the Bible is accessible to the faithful almost exclusively in Syriac, without available explanation for a popular audience.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



## The Armenian Church

*Pierre Marayati, Bishop of the Armenian Catholics, Aleppo, Syria*

Armenia has an important place in the Old Testament. Its territory corresponds to the Garden of Eden, and the arc of Noah is said to have come to rest on Mount Ararat. The prophets spoke of the peoples of Ararat.

Armenia is not mentioned in the New Testament. When, in Acts 2, Luke speaks of the peoples who were in contact with primitive Christianity, he makes no mention of Armenia which did not become acquainted with Christianity until the 2nd century. However, we do find an apocryphal gospel, the Armenian Infancy Gospel, which, though originally written in Syrian, is extant today only in this Armenian translation. The gospel cites the names of the Magi who visited Christ in the cave of Bethlehem: Gaspard, Malakoun, Baghdasar. These were commonly used names among the Armenians.

Christianity was planted very early in Armenia. The ecclesiastical tradition states that the disciples Thaddaeus and Bartholomew evangelized Armenia as early as the first century. Historical sources confirm that there were many Christians in southern Armenia, thanks to Syrian preachers who came from Edessa (Rouha, Urfa in present-day Turkey). But it was not until the time of Gregory the Illuminator that King Dartad converted to Christ together with his whole court, in 301. Armenia thus became the first State to adopt Christianity as its official religion. In 2001, the Armenians will celebrate the seventeen-hundredth anniversary of their baptism as a nation.

Gregory was consecrated bishop by the bishop of Cappadocia. He organized the catechesis and the liturgy and built a church in Etchmiadzin (descent of the Only Son). Narses organized the monastic life and the dioceses; Mesrop invented the Armenian alphabet, which is composed of thirty-six letters. Many books were then translated, from the Bible to the Fathers of the Church. And there are many works (Syriac or other) that exist only in Armenian.

The Armenian Church accepted the first three Ecumenical Councils, but rejected the Council of Chalcedon (451) because it had not taken part in it, hav-

ing been engaged in a war against the Persians. In the following years, misunderstandings in the interpretation of this Council led the Armenian Church to withdraw from the Byzantine Church and the Latin Church. It found itself on the same side as the anti-Chalcedonian Churches: the Copts, the Jacobites and the Ethiopians. It was wrongly labeled Monophysite (confessing one only nature in Christ) – wrongly, because it rejects the teaching of Eutyches and confesses that Jesus Christ is truly man and truly God. Thereafter, a number of Armenian communities accepted Chalcedon and were thus once again in communion with the Church of Byzantium: this was the kernel of what later became the Armenian Catholic Church.

The Armenian Church strove to survive in spite of the attacks of the Arabs, at this time that of the Seljuks, and even managed to flourish in Cilicia where it transferred its patriarchal seat. With the arrival of the Crusaders, it became more open to Europe and experienced a kind of ecumenical movement, like the Syriac Church and the Byzantine Church. It took part in the Council of Florence in 1433 and stopped short of proclaiming its communion with the Church of Rome in 1439. But this movement toward unity was halted by the bishops of Greater Armenia.

The Seljuks, and then the Mongols, attacked Cilicia and an attempt was made to bring the Patriarch of Cilicia to Etchmiadzin. When he refused to go, the Armenian Church split in two, in 1441. This situation endures till today: there are two patriarchs, one in Armenia and the other has had its seat in Lebanon (Antelis) since it left Cilicia. A Patriarchate has also been created in Jerusalem and another in Constantinople.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the Chalcedonian current resurfaced with the monk Mekhitar Sipasdati (1676-1746) who founded the Mekhitarist Fathers, in 1701. In the face of growing opposition, these monks fled to the island of Saint-Lazare, near Venice in Italy. This religious order still exists today in Lebanon, in Vienna and in Venice. Another religious order was founded: the Antonine Order. It follows the rules of a



Maronite Order of the same name. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this order rejoined the Mekhitarists at Bzommar, in Lebanon.

In 1740, the Bishop of Aleppo, Abraham Ardzivian, became Patriarch of the Catholic Armenians; he left for Rome, where he received the pallium from the hands of Benedict XV. Not being able to return to Aleppo because of the Ottoman authority, who recognized only the Orthodox Armenian Patriarch, he was obliged to seek exile in Lebanon and to set up his seat there. It was not until 1830 that the autonomy of the Catholic Armenian Church was recognized by Istanbul. The year 1915 was marked by the great massacre of the Armenians of all religious confessions. There were a million and half martyrs in all. At the end of World War I, in 1920, there were no Armenians left in Turkey, except in Istanbul. Thereafter, the Armenians attempted to maintain their identity in whatever part of the world they happened to be. There is a Church in Armenia, with its capital in Erevan and another in the diaspora, which

extends to the United States. But a significant number of Armenians still live in the Middle-East, especially in Lebanon and Syria. They remain faithful to their liturgy, to their customs and to their language, but they have managed to become acclimated in their host countries.

At present, the Armenians number six million, of which six hundred thousand are Catholics, which represents 10% of the population. A number of Armenians have become Protestant. The liturgy and the language used are the same in the Orthodox and Catholic Armenian Churches, and the communities treat each other with mutual respect, awaiting the day when they will be one again as they were in the first ages of the Church.

Translation from Arabic by Paul Féghaly

(Transl.: L. Maluf)

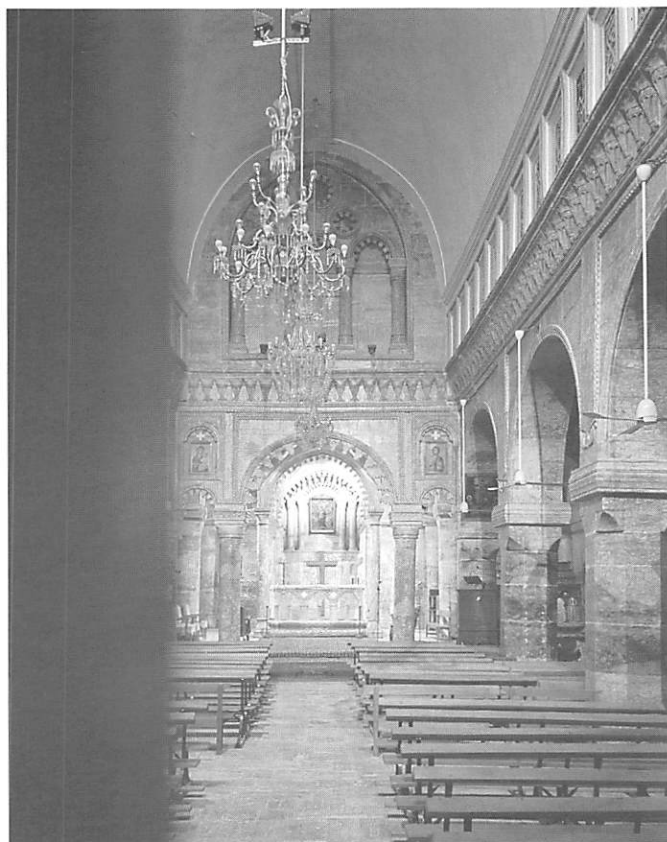


FEATURE  
ARTICLE

## The Chaldean Church

*Raphaël Bidawid, Patriarch of the Chaldeans, Baghdad, Iraq*

This is the Church of Mesopotamia, founded by the Apostle Saint Thomas who, after his departure for the Indies, delegated the mission to his companion Addai, one of the Seventy, and to his disciple Mari who founded the Church of Seleucia and Ctesiphon, two towns built on the Tigris. It was on the basis of their liturgy in the Aramean language that this Church's liturgy, notably the Eucharist, was developed.



*Renovated Mar-Thoma Church in Mosul*

Called the "Church of the Orient" after the gospel narrative of the three Magi who came from the Orient (Mt 2:2), it was one of the first churches to receive the message of salvation, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles: Jews from Mesopotamia were present in the audience of Peter on the day of Pentecost.

The name Chaldean Church was given to it for the first time by Pope Eugenius IV at the Council of Florence in 1445, on the occasion of the union of the Nestorian Church of Cypress with Rome. As evangelization progressed, small Christian communities formed around the bishop. The Annals report that at the beginning of the 3rd century, there were about twenty dioceses in Mesopotamia and in the countries of the Gulf.

But hostility increased against the followers of the new religion, who were regarded as enemies of the Empire or allies of the Western Empire. A period of bloody persecutions then began for the Christians, the most famous of which was the so-called Great Persecution that lasted for forty years (338-378), under King Sapor II.

Monastic life was already flourishing at the beginning of the 3rd century. But it reached its apogee only between the 5th and the 7th centuries, with the great reformer and organizer, Mar Abraham the Great.

Culture and the sciences developed in the centers of religious life, the transmission of which was assured thanks to the schools attached to monasteries that were scattered throughout the Empire. One would have to cite, among the most famous, that of Nisibus, founded by Saint James of Nisibus at the beginning of the 4th century, and that of Edessa founded by Saint Ephraem in 363.

Thanks to its schools and monasteries, the Church of Seleucia and Ctesiphon took on some importance, developed a character of its own, and proved its capacity to manage its affairs by itself. It gradually acquired autonomy with respect to the Church of Antioch, with which, however, it managed to maintain very good relations. A first step in this direction was made when Mar Papa (310-329) had himself given the title of Catholicos. Full authority was confirmed by Dadicho' in 424, without however entailing any break at all with Antioch.

The conversion of the Empire of the West to Christianity created a new situation for the Church of the Orient. The Church was divided into two zones, eastern and



western, and politics began to play an important role in the relations between the two Churches. The rupture between East and West began at Ephesus in 431, progressed at Chalcedon in 451, and was definitively consummated and proclaimed at the Council of Acacius, in 486, and Babai in 497. The Church of the East became Nestorian (it was referred to at the time as the Church of the Persians or of Persia as opposed to that of Byzantium) and its head took on the title of Patriarch in imitation of the heads of the other Eastern Churches. The Church of the East, isolated from the West for reasons of politics and of Creed, became active in the foreign missions and experienced an extraordinary expansion in the course of the 8th century, under the reign of the Abbaside Caliphs, particularly under Timothy the Great (780-823). At this time, the Church of the East included organized communities in Kurdistan, in Turkestan, in Tibet, in China, in India and in Ceylon, in Japan and Indonesia, and in other regions as well. The evangelization of these territories continued and increased until the end of the 13th century, under the reign of the Mongols.

The fall of Baghdad into the hands of the Mongols, in 1258, did not have a negative impact on the life of the Church which even counted a Patriarch of Mongolian origin, Yawalaha III (1238-1317). Unfortunately, Tamerlan (1370-1405) unleashed a general persecution against the Christians throughout his whole Empire and he inaugurated a policy of annihilation pure and simple. From this date forward, the Church of the East began to weaken and to retreat into the mountainous regions of Kurdistan and into Persia, destined thereby to near extinction.

In order to confront this tragic situation and to save the patriarchal institution in the Church, Patriarch Chimoun IV (1437-1477) decided that the patriarchal charge should become hereditary. This decision gradually became more generalized, till the arrangement began to be followed for bishops as well. This provoked a considerable amount of discontent and division among the clergy themselves and the faithful. The policy in fact ran up against the synods of the Church of Seleucia and Ctesiphon.

So it was that at the death of Patriarch Chimoun VII in 1551, the legitimacy of his nephew Chimoun VIII was contested by the adversaries of hereditary succession to the Patriarchate. Another candidate was proposed, Youhannan Soulaqa, superior of the monks of the convent of Rabban Hormizdas at Alcoche, who left for Rome in 1552 and there professed the Catholic Faith. He was consecrated bishop at Rome and proclaimed patriarch of the Chaldeans by Pope Julius III, on the

20th of April 1553. The new Patriarch fixed his residence at Amed (Diarbekir) but in 1555 he was assassinated by the Emir of Amadiyan, at the instigation of Patriarch Chimoun VIII.



*Parish priest and members of the Syrian Catholic community in Mosul*

To avoid a recurrence of this drama, his successor Abdicho' IV Maroun moved and settled in Seert. But this line of patriarchs united to Rome did not remain faithful to the end. A century later, Chimoun XIII (1662-1700) decided to return to Nestorianism and selected a new residence at Qochanes, in the mountains of Kurdistan. As a result, the Church united to Rome remained without patriarch for some time. It was not till 1681 that the bishop of Amed, recently united to Rome, was elected patriarch under the name of Joseph I. In 1830, Rome decided to suppress the patriarchate of Amed and to recognize Youhanna Hormez as patriarch of Babylon for the Chaldeans, in residence at Mosul. It is this line that has headed the Chaldean Church from that time till today.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



FEATURE  
ARTICLE

## The Latin Church in the Holy Land

*Narczyz Klimas, ofm, Studium Theologicum Jerosolymitanum, Jerusalem*

Studying the history of the Church of the first centuries of Christianity and the formation of the primitive ecclesiastical institutions, one cannot help but note in them a certain evolutionary process, always rooted in the command of Christ the Lord to "go and baptize all the nations", a mandate that was fully implemented after the day of Pentecost, with the founding of particular Churches which, in time, developed into communities with distinctive formal features.



*Latin Patriarch Michel Sabah*

The structures of the Roman Empire themselves had a considerable influence on the formation of the particular churches, especially in two major blocks, the Oriental Church and the Western Church.

In the first period of antiquity, the Latin Church was present in the East, in the Holy Land, from as early as the 4th century AD. This presence terminated in the year 614, when the Sassanid Persians, who had penetrated into Syria, arrived at the walls of Jerusalem and succeeded in conquering and pillaging the city. In the period that followed, the presence of Latin Christianity was renewed with the pilgrims who arrived in the Holy Land from all parts of the Empire. No one knows how many

there were. Some left traces of their sojourn through their writings or through other documents. Others remained unknown. These pilgrims, unknown or without mention in history, left behind some few traces of piety and also some marks of their Latinity. Among these pilgrims one would have to include such personalities as Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, the pilgrim of Bordeaux, the nun Egeria, a pilgrim from Piacenza...

There were also people who led lives wholly devoted to the Lord. According to testimonies that come from all through the centuries, we know two locations that are marked by signs of a Latin monastic presence in the Holy Land:

- *the Mount of Olives*, with the convent founded by the noble Roman matron Melania, called the Great, and with the houses built by her niece, Melania the younger. Later, Rufinus also arrived there;
- *and Bethlehem*, where Saint Jerome lived with his companions, Saint Paula and her daughter Saint Eustochia, foundresses of the convent found at the site of Jesus' nativity.

After the separation of the Churches in 1054, there is evidence of a vibrant Latin presence in 1099, following the taking of the city of Jerusalem, with the founding of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. This presence made itself felt through the pilgrims who arrived now in greater numbers, by way of the military Orders like the Knights Templars, the Hospitallers and the Teutonic Knights. It also manifested itself through the Latin clergy, with its head, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. Four years after the Moslem conquest by Saladin, in 1187, and following the 3rd crusade, Richard the Lion-hearted re-conquered a coastal territory of Palestine that extended from Jaffa to Tyre. The new seat of the Patriarch then became Saint Jean d'Acre and remained so until 1291, the year of the definitive fall of this new kingdom. But the Latins would set foot on Jerusalem soil once again in 1240, when, by a treaty made by the Hospitallers, the Holy City returned to them once more. But from 1291 until 1847 the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem ceased to be a residential assignment and remained for five and half centuries a mere titular see.





During this long period only Franciscans remained in the Holy Land to represent Catholicity. However, their presence goes back only to 1229. Following the treaty of Frederick II and the Sultan Malek al-Kamel, they succeeded, along with the Dominicans, in establishing themselves in Jerusalem, where they opened a convent on the Via Dolorosa. The Friars Minor took over important positions in the Holy Places where they continued to officiate amid changing vicissitudes. In 1342 Pope Clement VI, by the Bull *Gratias Agimus*, assigned to the Franciscans sole charge of the Holy Places and of the apostolate connected with them. They acquired many rights not only over the Holy Places themselves, but also for the care of the Catholics who were living there.

On July 2, in the year 1847, Pope Pius IX, by the Apostolic Letter *Nulla Celebrior*, had restored the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. This restoration was intended to counterbalance the missionary activity of the Protestants. It also encouraged a growth of the Latin faithful through the conversion of believers who came generally from the Orthodox rites and who were culturally closer to a Western mentality. Moreover, this restoration afforded some protection to the Latins with respect to Islam.

After the restoration of the Patriarchate, a number of religious orders and congregations that lived and exer-

cised their apostolate in the West came to serve in the Holy Land, to assist the new and restored Latin diocese alongside the Franciscans. Today there are as many as 31 religious Orders or Congregations of men and 72 Orders of women who exercise different ministries in the Holy Places: they guide and receive pilgrims, study the Bible, work in the field of the apostolate and in the various social agencies and charities, not only for the benefit of Latin Christians but also on behalf of all who are in need.

Statistics of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Holy Land, Jordan and Cyprus):

<b>Faithful</b>	<b>72,000</b>
<b>Parishes</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Chapels</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Patriarchs</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Bishops</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Priests</b>	<b>85</b>

The numbers are those supplied by the archivist of the Latin Patriarchate on December 31, 1998.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



# FEATURE ARTICLE

## Three Interreligious Symposiums in Jerusalem

*Alviero Niccacci, ofm, Studium Biblicum Franciscanum – Jerusalem  
(Associate Member of the Federation)*

The Franciscans of the Custody of the Holy Land have a long history of seeking dialogue with the faithful of other religions, beginning with Saint Francis who went to Egypt to meet with the Sultan, as an unarmed man who would bring peace at a historic moment, that of the Crusades, and in a place, the Holy Land, where violence and conflicts were the daily bread for the two groups.

When he sent out his brothers among the non-Christians, Saint Francis would urge them not to get involved in disputes or cause conflicts, but rather to live in peace, submitting themselves to every human creature. The Franciscans, who have lived in this country now for many centuries, are conscious that even as people interested in the study of the Bible they can make a contribution to the search for a common path of dialogue, of respectful coexistence, and of honest and mutual understanding between Jews, Christians and Moslems.

With these desires and these motives the Custody has supported, encouraged and sponsored three Symposiums whose aim has been to encourage research and discussion on the interpretation of the sacred texts of the faiths and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The symposiums have all taken place in Jerusalem, organized by the Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, the center of studies of the Order of Friars Minor and of the Custody of the Holy Land. They have been held at a distance of two years from each other, specifically in 1993, 1995, and 1997.

The SBF as an academic center in Jerusalem wishes to make a contribution toward greater comprehension and mutual understanding, and the symposiums are supposed to be a prophetic sign in a divided country, as Fr. Giuseppe Nazzaro, Custodian of the Holy Land, remarked at the conclusion of the first.

In 1994 the Pontifical Biblical Commission published a document on the interpretation of the Bible. The document examined the Christian interpretation of the Bible

and of the New Testament. In Jerusalem, the problem of the interpretation of the Scriptures takes on a particular coloration because the children of Abraham, Jews, Christians and Moslems, read and interpret the sacred text according to their particular experience. How is a text to be interpreted? Interpretation is not limited to philological analysis but carries with it existential dimensions which are different for each faith.

The meetings have been conducted at a strictly academic level, without pretending to be complete or exhaustive of the topics under consideration. It follows that they have not been interreligious meetings in the strict sense of the expression, even if sometimes the discussion has touched on themes of this kind.

Jews, Christians and Moslems all take the revelation made by God in a very special way to Abraham as the source of their faith. God commanded Abraham to leave behind his homeland and his people and to journey to an unknown land. Abraham accepts the commandment of God and has confidence in the promises the Lord makes to him: a son destined to be the stock of a great people, a land and its blessing. The blessing of God is for all peoples of the earth: Abraham will be the father of all and of each. For all, Jews, Christians and Moslems, the revelation of God is the source of their faith, each with his own holy books.

The presenters of the first symposium in 1993 met to discuss the promises of God to the Patriarchs: Alexander Rofé, department of the Bible of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Alon Goshen-Gottstein of the University of Tel-Aviv, Robert Karris, president of the Catholic Biblical Association of America and professor of New Testament, and Yasir Al-Mallah, associate professor of Arabic at the University of Bethlehem. This was, as the sub-title suggested, an exegetical investigation of the sources and traditions of the three monotheistic religions, not an interreligious meeting as such. After the reports there was a discussion period in which eight representatives of Catholic academic centers and institutions of the Holy Land participated along with the four presenters.



The theme of the second symposium was the sacrifice of Isaac. Papers were given by Thord Thordson of the University of Ingår (Sweden) who explained the Samaritan tradition, 'Amer Yunis of the University of Hebron, who explained the Moslem tradition, Mark Bregman of the Hebrew Union College, who explained the Jewish tradition, and Miguel Pérez Fernandez of the University of Granada, who explained the Christian tradition. Commenting on the papers as "respondents" were Bruno Chiesa of the University of Pavia (Italy), Halim Noujaim, of the Custody of the Holy Land, and Justin Taylor of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française.

The episode of the sacrifice of Isaac represents a gesture of supreme obedience and love both on the part of the father Abraham and of his son Isaac (or Ishmael). It is with the same spirit of obedience and submission to the one God that everyone is called to acknowledge and to respect the faith of the other.

The presenters at the symposiums, each an expert in his own material, have come from all three religions and have almost all been local specialists. Their presentations have always been very lively and have attracted a considerable public for the Jerusalem milieu.

Each paper has been followed by a response from an expert in the subject matter, after which the discussion was opened to the public as well.

Jerusalem as House of prayer for all peoples was the theme of the third symposium in 1997. From the height of the terrace of the Franciscan convent of the Flagellation, seat of the SBF, one can admire a marvelous view of Jerusalem, the Holy City, with its cupolas and its venerable monuments. One can see the cupola of the Rock and the esplanade of the Temple, sacred to the Moslems, but which rises to the place of the ancient Temple of the Jews. Here the Jewish and Christian traditions place the sacrifice of Isaac, while the cupola of the Holy Sepulcher recalls the sacrifice of Jesus, the new Isaac offered by his Father. Every Friday, in the afternoon hours, the Christians perform the pious devo-

tion of the Via Crucis and, as they make their way all the way up the via Dolorosa, they cross paths with the Moslem faithful who are exiting from their prayer at the Haram El-Sharif, and also with the Jewish faithful on their way to the Weeping Wall for the beginning of the Sabbath. For many centuries, and up until the present day, the prayers of all, Christians, Jews and Moslems ascend to God from this city. This too is a way of reaching unity under the guidance of God.

The presenters at the third symposium were Moshe Greenberg of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on the basic text of Is 56:7, Jean-Marie Sevrin of the Catholic University of Louvain (Belgium) on the citation of the text of Isaiah in Mk 11:15-19, Avigdor Shinan of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem on the rabbinic interpretation of the same text, Abdul Rahman Abbad of the University of the ONU of Ramallah on the Moslem vision of the Holy City, Wadi Abullif of the Franciscan Center of Oriental Studies of Cairo (Egypt) on the Coptic tradition. The contribution of the "respondents" from various Jerusalem institutions, J. Loza of the École Biblique, T. Masvie of Caspari Centre, F. Manns of the SBF, G.S. Khoury of the Centre A Liqa'de Bethlehem, and Halim Noujaim of the CTS clarified, amplified and complemented the different points of view. The Symposium had a relaxed and constructive tone and the critical or divergent perspectives themselves were expressed with a sense of responsibility.

At the conclusion of the third symposium there was a general affirmation of the importance of three concepts: fidelity, dialogue, sharing. Fidelity towards God and to his guidance in history. Dialogue centered on the Scriptures and the various sacred traditions, with an open mind and without mistrust. From past centuries we have remarkable examples of pacific discussion between Jews, Christians and Moslems on biblical passages and on theological themes of the common tradition.

Today, too, these examples can be a source of inspiration. It is important to learn from one another, and above all to learn from God, allowing Scripture to be our judge



and our guide. Sharing is the only solution. If the three religions have so many things in common, and have a place and a function in God's plan for humanity, then sharing is a matter of obligation. Again, looking back at past ages, we find examples of sharing of places of worship. With the help of God, this attitude can guide and bring together the three religions in a mutual understanding which alone can open the way to a viable solution. This statement might appear naively irenic and simplistic; on the contrary, it is a demanding proposition; it obliges everyone to look to the end of human history and to evaluate the present differences in that light.

It is significant that the symposium presenters were the first to acknowledge that the sessions were beneficial above all to themselves. It has been a real challenge to read the sacred texts with an eye open to the points of

view of the other religions. One could say that the presenters felt a sense of responsibility before God, the author of our common revelation.

The acts of the first two symposiums have been published by the Franciscan Printing Press of Jerusalem: A.Niccacci (ed.), *Divine Promises to the Fathers in the Three Monotheistic Religions. Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Jerusalem, March 24-25th, 1993*, 1995; F.Manns (ed.), *The Sacrifice of Isaac in the Three Monotheistic Religions. Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Jerusalem, March 16-17th, 1995*, 1995. The acts of the third symposium have gone to press at the same publishing house.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



## Glossary

### Arianism

Doctrine of the Alexandrian priest Arius, who argued that Christ is not equal to God and eternal, but rather the first of God's creatures and as "Logos" occupies an intermediary position between God and the world. Arianism was condemned at the Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381).

### Armenian Church

The Christian Church of the Armenians, which acquired permanent form around the year 300 A.D. through the work of Bishop Gregory the Illuminator (hence also called the Gregorian Church) and the translation of the Bible by the Armenian Church Father Mesrop Mashtots (5<sup>th</sup> cent.). Its doctrinal position (which has developed since the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. as a distinct doctrinal tradition) was traditionally described as a form of "Monophysitism", but is described by the Armenian Church itself as "miaphysitic" (one united nature of Christ). The liturgical language is ancient Armenian. The head of the greater part of the Armenian Church is the Katholikos ("universal bishop") with his seat in Ejmiadzin (since 1443); under him come the Patriarchates of Jerusalem (since 1311) and Istanbul (since 1438); besides these there has been an independent Patriarchate in Cilicia since the 11<sup>th</sup> cent. (Sis; transferred to Antilyas near Beirut in 1921). World-wide there are about 5 to 6 million Armenian Christians. A small segment of the Armenian Church has entered into union with the Catholic Church (Uniate Armenians, with the seat of the Catholic Armenian Patriarch in Beirut), but these have their own church order (Mechitarists).

### Ethiopian Church

1) (Earlier the Abyssinian Church). The National Christian Church of Ethiopia. Dating to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> cent., the Ethiopian Church became a state church under King Ezana (341) and continued as such without interruption till the military revolt of Mengistu Haile Mariam in 1974. The head of the Church was the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria till 1959. Since that time (when they became autocephalous) the Ethiopian Church has been led by a Patriarch-Katholikos of their own, although as a daughter church of the Coptic

Church it recognizes the primacy of honor of the Coptic Patriarch. The latter released the Eritrean Orthodox Church from under the jurisdiction of the Ethiopian Patriarch in 1998 and placed it under a separate Eritrean Patriarch. Theologically, the Ethiopian Church developed a doctrinal tradition of its own, following the Council of Chalcedon (451), whose decisions it did not recognize. Its teaching has traditionally been regarded as "monophysite", but the Ethiopian Church describes its own doctrinal position as "miaphysite" (one united nature of Christ). Liturgically, the Church has retained many ancient practices, including circumcision.

2) (Uniate Ethiopian Church), the ecclesial community of Ethiopian Christians who are in union with the Catholic Church; originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. (after earlier attempts at union) as a Catholic Oriental Church of the Alexandrian rite; jurisdictionally constituted as a metropolitan see in Addis Ababa with suffragan sees in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

### Chalcedon

A city founded in 675 B. C. at the point where the Bosphorus exits into the Sea of Marmara. In Chalcedon the fourth Ecumenical Council met in 451. The faith confession or creed that emerged from this Council – which affirms that in the person of Christ the divine and the human nature are united in an "unmixed" and "indivisible" way (the so-called Chalcedonian Formula) – remains binding even today.

### Jacobites

A term denoting Syrian Christians whose ecclesial structure was reorganized in the 6<sup>th</sup> cent. by the Syrian monk Jacob Baradaeus and who have traditionally been regarded as Monophysites. Today the term designates the members of the West Syrian Church (Syrian Churches).

### Coptic Churches

The National Church of Egypt. In the 5<sup>th</sup> cent. after the rejection of the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon (451), it developed its own doctrinal tradition, traditionally described as "monophysite", but which the Copts



themselves understand as "miaphysite". The Coptic Church traces its tradition back to the Evangelist Mark and claims to be the authentic Orthodox Church of Egypt, which includes world-wide approx. 10-12 million Copts. The head of the Coptic Church bears the title "Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the Chair of Saint Mark" with its seat in Cairo. The liturgical languages are Coptic and Arabic.

### **Latin Church**

Designates the part of the Church in the Roman Empire which belongs geographically and politically to the Western half of the Empire and which owes its distinctive character to the influence of Roman-Latin culture. Until the Eastern Schism (1054) part of the one Roman-Imperial Church, the Latin Church, now as a canonically independent Church under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome (as patriarch of the West), included all of Western Christianity up until the time of the Reformation. Threatened first by the Great Western Schism (1378-1417), the unity of the Latin Church was broken up after the consolidation of the Reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> cent. Since that time, on the one hand the Protestant Churches that broke away from communion with the Latin Church constitute an independent branch of Western Christendom; on the other hand, the Latin Church, through the world-wide Catholic mission which likewise began in the 16<sup>th</sup> cent., has experienced an expansion far beyond the borders of what was originally the Western-Roman cultural domain and it embraces today the overwhelming majority of Catholic Christians in the whole world, as a world-wide Catholic Church which still retains a distinctively Latin and Western character.

### **Melchites**

(Melkites) [from Syrian Malka "Emperor"], originally those Egyptian, Syrian, and Palestinian Christians who accepted the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon (451) against the Monophysites; they were called "the Emperor's men"; in the 17<sup>th</sup> cent. under the influence of Catholic missionaries the break-up of the Melchites (definitively in 1724) and the creation of a new Patriarchate of Antioch in union with the Catholic Church; since 1838 called the Melchite "Patriarchate of Antioch and of the whole Orient, Alexandria and Jerusalem"; the residence of the Patriarch is Damascus, the rite is Byzantine; today approx. 1.7 million Uniate Melchites as opposed to 1.1 Million Orthodox Christians in the Greek Orthodox Patriarchates of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem.

### **Maronites**

The members of the "Syrian-Maronite Church", the only self-contained Eastern Church that has always been in union with the Catholic Church. Its origins go back to

the Syrian monastery of Saint Maron (before 423); today world-wide there are approx. 2.2 million Maronites, above all in Lebanon and in the Near East; numerically significant Maronite diaspora in North America.

### **Monophysites**

The adherents of a Christological conception (Monophysitism) going back to the Alexandrian School of theologians and according to which in Jesus Christ there were not two distinct natures (one divine and one human) but only the one divine nature of the Logos become flesh; after their condemnation at the 4<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon 451) the Monophysites broke away from the Imperial Church and developed Churches of their own (the Armenian Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Jacobites, the Coptic Churches). According to their theological self-understanding these Christians represent a pre-Chalcedonian theology best described as "miaphysite" (one united nature of Christ), as opposed to "monophysite".

### **Nestorians**

Followers of the doctrine of Nestorius (\*approx. 381; from 428-431 Patriarch of Constantinople). In opposition to the Alexandrian theology the divine and human natures in Jesus Christ are kept separate according to this doctrine. Nestorius objected to referring to Mary as "Mother of God"; in 431 the condemnation of Nestorianism and the removal of Nestorius by the Council of Ephesus; the emigration of the Nestorians to the Sassanian empire; in 484-486, the split from the Imperial Church and the founding of the Nestorian Church (also the East Syrian or Assyrian Church); in the immediately following period a widespread missionary activity in India (Thomas Christians), China, Mongolia, Tibet. Today the East-Syrian Church (which calls itself "the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church of the East") has about 150,000 members in the Near East (Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria), in India, Australia and the United States. It is thus numerically the smallest of the Oriental Churches. The Chaldean Church, a part of the East-Syrian Church that has been in union with the Catholic Church since the 16<sup>th</sup> cent., has approx. 270,000 members.

### **Oriental Churches**

A general term for all the Christian Churches that belonged to the Eastern half of the Empire after the definitive break-up of the Roman Empire (395): the Churches that originated in this part of the Empire as well as those founded through the missionary activity of the Oriental Churches. The following Churches and church groups are distinguished: the Orthodox Churches that originated in the realm of Byzantine culture; the ancient Oriental National Churches which originated in the aftermath of the theological controversies





of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries; the parts of the different Oriental Churches which are under the Pope and which constitute the Uniate Churches of the Catholic Church. 1) *Orthodox Churches*: a general term for the autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox (national) Churches which for the most part go back historically to the post-Constantinian Imperial Church, especially its Eastern half. At present there are fourteen autocephalous and nine autonomous Churches (the latter being those Churches that are independent in matters of internal administration, but have canonical links to an autocephalous [mother]-church). These Churches regard themselves as equal members of the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ of the True (Orthodox) Confession", grounded in a common theological, liturgical and spiritual tradition. For all, the decisions of the seven Ecumenical Councils according to Orthodox understanding (325-787) constitute a common doctrinal foundation and the basis of their Canon Law. The ecclesial understanding is synodal. The governing body of an Orthodox (national) Church is the Synod, within which the primacy of honor goes to the first hierarchs (Patriarch, Metropolitan, Archbishop). Similarly, the highest court of appeal for deciding questions at the level of the Orthodox world as a whole is thought to be an Ecumenical Synod, which since 1961 has been prepared for by a number of pan-Orthodox conferences. Within Orthodoxy as a whole the primacy belongs to the Ecumenical Patriarch. Theologically the Orthodox Church understands itself as the earthly image of the heavenly Church. Heart and center of ecclesial existence is the Eucharist; the basic liturgies are those of Basil and John Chrysostom. Central importance has been attached to (an often ascetically marked) monasticism and to monasteries within the Orthodox Churches; these are regarded as bearers of spiritual authority and spiritual life and the monasteries are centers for the preservation of religious, cultural and national identity. As a rule, bishops are chosen from monastic circles. Worldwide, the Orthodox Church numbers approx. 150-170 million believers. The largest national Orthodox Church is the Russian Orthodox Church which is thought to have as many as 100 million members. 2) *Ancient Eastern National Churches*: Oriental Churches. 3) *Uniate Churches*; many dating back to the Middle Ages, Churches of ancient Eastern or Orthodox origin. The Uniate Churches acknowledge the primacy of jurisdiction and the teaching authority of the Pope, but they retain in ecclesiastical language, liturgy and spirituality the self-understanding, the peculiarities of canon law and the traditions of their ancient Oriental and Orthodox mother churches. The only Oriental Church which is in its entirety in union with the Catholic Church is the Maronite Church. Partial unions exist with various Churches of the Armenian, Ethiopian, Byzantine, Coptic, East-Syrian and West-Syrian rites.

### Schisms

The two most consequential schisms of Church history are the Eastern Schism, the separation of the four Eastern Patriarchates (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem) from the Latin Church, which exists till today in spite of renewed efforts of reconciliation that have taken place (most recently in 1995, with the publishing of a common declaration of the Ecumenical Patriarchs Bartholomaios I and Pope John Paul II) and the Great Western Schism (1378-1417, settled by the Council of Constance), when two (and for a short time three) individuals simultaneously laid claim to the papal office.

### Syrian Churches

A common designation for the Christian Churches which originated in the ancient Syrian cultural domain with centers in Antioch and Edessa. To the Syrian Churches belong the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch (with its seat in Damascus), the East Syrian (Nestorian, also called Assyrian) Church which originated in the aftermath of the theological controversies of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, the West Syrian (Jacobite) Church, the autonomous Syrian Orthodox Churches of the East in India (Thomas Christians) which sprang from the missionary activity of the Jacobites, the Melchites and the Oriental Churches of Syrian tradition which are united (in whole, or as parts of larger church communities) with the Catholic Church: of Maronite Rite: the Maronites; of the West-Syrian Rite: the Syrian Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch (with its seat in Beirut) and the Syrian Malankar Churches in India (which in 1930 broke from the Syrian Orthodox Church of the East and united with the Catholic Church); of East-Syrian Rite: the Chaldean Church (actually the Chaldean-Catholic Patriarchate of Babylon, with its seat in Bagdad) and the Syrian Malabar Churches in India.

### Thomas Christians

A general designation for Christians of various confessions on the Malabar coast (South-West India, State of Kerala) who trace their origin traditionally to a mission of the Apostle Thomas from the year 52 A.D. The tomb of the Apostle is venerated in Madras, although historical evidence for a missionary journey of Thomas cannot be established. The founding of the Christian Churches in India goes back to the Nestorian mission of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries. The total number of Thomas Christians, who today are sharply divided confessionally (Syrian-Orthodox, "neo-Nestorian", Catholic-Uniate, Anglican, the Protestant "Thomas Church") is estimated at several million.

(Transl.: L. Maluf)



## Life of the Federation

Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC)  
Office of Laity – AsIPA Desk  
P.O. Box 36-516  
34 Lane 32, Kuangfu South Road  
Taipei (105)  
Taiwan, R.O.C.  
Tel: +886-2-25 77 20 07  
Fax: +886-2-25 77 20 07  
E-mail: fabcol@ms8.hinet.net

### Asia: AsIPA General Assembly II: "A New Way of Being Church in the New Millenium"

Training Teams of AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) from 12 Asian countries met from October 12-21, 2000 in Thailand to share their experience in using the AsIPA method and texts, to evaluate and deepen their understanding of the AsIPA way towards becoming a Participatory Church – a Church that is a "Communion of Communities". The 105 participants gave witness on how the Word of God not only has become a source of inspiration for daily life in many parishes – through Gospel Sharing done regularly in Small Christian Communities – but also the leading agent in the process of renewal: "As they look together at their life and their surrounding in the light of the Gospel, the Church in its smallest cell is vivified" (Final Statement 1.5).

The AsIPA texts, which include four series of materials on "Gospel Sharing methods", "Building Small Christian Communities", the "Vision of a Participatory Church" and on how to acquire a new leadership style, are compiled by trainers who are involved at the grass-root level. They bear witness to a renewal in the pastoral use of the Bible in many parts of Asia. For example: A parishioner tells his parish priest: "I used to come late for mass but since we started to do Gospel Sharing in the neighborhood I want to be there when the WORD is read because we have taken it up in our Gospel Sharing group. I want to hear it once more when this text is proclaimed in the big community. Sometimes I pity the people who hear the text for the first time."

The FABC Office of Laity's AsIPA Desk is in charge of the networking among the AsIPA teams, which includes the coordination of workshops as well as the sharing of locally produced modules. The coordinator is Cora Mateo who attended the 1996 Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation in Hong Kong.

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines  
Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate (ECBA)  
CBCP Bldg., 470 Gen. Luna St.  
Intramuros, 1002 Manila  
Philippines  
Tel: +63-2-527 41 57  
Fax: +63-2-523 53 11  
E-mail: ecba@cbcpnet.net  
Website: www.cbcpnet.net

### Philippines: National Bible Week 2001

The Church in the Philippines celebrated its National Bible Week from January 22 to 28, 2001 having as theme the theme and motto of the VI Plenary Assembly of the CBF which will be held in Lebanon from September 3 to 12, 2001 "Word of God – a blessing for all nations" – "You show me the ways of life". (Ps 16:11; Acts 2:28).

The Chairman of ECBA, Bishop Arturo Bastes, svd, wrote in a circular letter for the National Bible Week:

"Being a full member of the Federation, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, through the Episcopal Commission for the Biblical Apostolate (ECBA), has chosen this theme because it leads us to a concrete implementation of our resolve to be a truly missionary Church, spreading the Good News of the Lord to all nations, especially to our neighbors in Asia. The theme is missionary because it refers to the dynamics of early Christianity as depicted in the Acts of the Apostles: the messengers of the Gospel bring God's Word from Jerusalem to Samaria, to Asia Minor and Europe, to Rome and to



the ends of the earth, thus crossing borders and being open for all humanity. As missionaries of the third millennium we are challenged to journey together, reaching out to all peoples, opening the Word of God to them just as the first missionaries of the nascent Church did before us.

The theme also refers to the pluralism of today's world, reminding us of the presence of other great religious traditions in Asia, particularly the Abrahamic religions. In our country, especially in Mindanao and Sulu, there is a conflict between us Christians and Muslims, who are all descendants of Abraham, believers in the one true God. The theme expresses the hope that the common basis for Christianity and Islam (and Judaism) can become a blessing in spite of the conflict that exists among believers of the one true God, not only in our country, but also in the countries of the Bible where the conflicts are even more intense.

The scriptural motto "You show me the ways of life" is taken from Psalm 16,11, which is quoted by St. Peter in his sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2,28). "Way" and "life" are biblical key words, which express the basic elements of religious aspiration at all times, especially today. God's self-communication through his Word is life for humanity, for all human beings without distinction and discrimination. This motto implies the manifold ways by which God reveals himself in the Bible, in Christianity and in all world religions to give life to every human being.

The celebration of the National Bible Week, which culminates on the National Bible Sunday (January 28) is also a reminder for all faithful to support the biblical pastoral ministry in every parish, vicariate, diocese so that our people, who feel an intense hunger for the Word of God, will be satisfied with the heavenly food that gives them real life."

Bishop Angelito R. Lampon, omi, Vicar Apostolic of Jolo, gave a paper on the theme "The Word of God – A Blessing for all Nations" during the 14th National Workshop for the Biblical Apostolate" (Feb 19-23, 2001) highlighting the special situation of the minority Church in Jolo and the consequences for its ministry.



Ms. Estrella del Mar  
P.O. Box 582  
6000 Cebu City  
Philippines  
Tel: +63-32-344 01 70  
Fax: +63-32-495 70 86  
E-mail:  
stardelmar@philwebinc.com

### Philippines: Bible Course in Quezon City

This year, starting September 22, 2001, Fr. Carmelo O. Diola, SSL will offer a course for the lay people on "ACTUALIZING THE WORD IN THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS". Actualization means the re-reading of the Biblical texts in the light of new circumstances and applying these texts to the contemporary situation of the People of God (Interpretation of the Bible in the Life of the Church, 170-171).

It is an introductory course on the art and method of basic exegesis coupled with even briefer introductions to other methods of interpretation. The course will combine a workshop, seminar approach with lectures. Handouts will be given, together with recommended readings. Questions will not only be entertained but encouraged.

### Objectives of the Course:

- To lead the students to an appreciation for the various methods of biblical interpretation, paying close attention to the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation within the context of the life of the Roman Catholic Church;
- To familiarize students with basic terminology and tools used in the study of the Synoptic gospels in order to empower them to do their own research and communicate the fruits of such activity to their fellow Catholics;
- To analyze particular passages (i.e. pericopes) from the Synoptic gospels and apply the various methods of interpretation to them.
- To get the students to read the synoptic gospels, not simply read about them, and to pay adequate attention to the religious, spiritual, and ecclesiastical issues raised by them.
- To balance the requirements of serious study and fun through the use of multimedia, group interaction, and application of studies to contemporary situation. ■

Fr. Sebastian Quadros, svd  
Centre Catéchétique et  
Biblique du Diocèse de  
Mananjary  
c/o Maison Arnold  
Janssen, B.P. 17  
Mananjary - 317  
Madagascar  
Tel: +261-2072-941 12  
Fax: +261-2072-941 68  
E-mail: svd@vitelcom.mg

### Madagascar: Basic Bible Seminar for Young People

68 young people from various parishes in the rural areas of Madagascar met for a Basic Bible Seminar in Ambodilafa from July 25 - 29, 2001, organized by six pastoral animators (two religious and four lay persons). The five days of work were marked by a deep desire of the young people to live what they experienced "The Bible - a book of life - The Word of God - power of life".

The animation team had to adapt the program to the different backgrounds of the young people since some of them could not read. The following topics were treated: "The Bible: as book of books - as library"; "How to approach the Bible"; The Bible as Word of God and "Our Response to the Word of God".





In conclusion, a few points held our attention:

- the enthusiasm and the joy that animated these young people in spite of the difficulty of comprehension, more strongly felt at the beginning, but overcome from day to day
- through the help of activities in which all took part without complex;
- the young peoples' fervor for the liturgy;
- their desire and savoring of the search for a daily familiarity with the Word of God;
- their interest and attention, as evidenced by the questions they raised.

Alongside these positive aspects, we also noted a few lacunae that hindered the full satisfaction of the desire and eagerness of the participants:

- Given the standard of living of the families: the acquisition of a personal Bible proved highly problematical, which does not facilitate a personal or group follow through on the session, or even the work during the session.
- In addition to this, participation itself became an obstacle, because in spite of everyone's good intentions, not everyone could get to the sessions: for lack of transportation affordable to all, many came on foot, traveling a number of kilometers, which could take an entire day.
- The very low intellectual level of some, which does not facilitate a certain comprehension of the conferences given especially for the illiterate.

In order to make fruitful this biblical apostolate – which is indispensable to the life of every Christian – it is our fervent desire to organize a session for lay animators. This is a great challenge we have to face. ■



Diocese of Little Rock,  
Scripture Study Office  
P.O. Box 7565  
Little Rock, AR 72217-7565  
USA  
Tel: +1-501-664 03 40  
Fax: +1-501-664-90 75  
E-mail: sales@litpress.org  
Website:  
www.littlerockscripture.org

### **USA: Little Rock Scripture Study**

The U.S. Catholic bishops recently issued a pastoral plan entitled "Our hearts were burning within us". In this they urge all parishes to give priority to adult faith formation so that mature Catholics are disciples whose faith is living, explicit and fruitful.

Little Rock Scripture Study, associate member of the Federation, provides effective resources for ongoing faith formation. Since, 1974, people have used this method and these materials to deepen their personal faith, to grow faith communities, and to reach into the larger community in acts of service and justice.

Little Rock Scripture Study offers a variety of materials:

- Introductory packet including coordinator's manual
- Study set and answer guide for the Acts of the Apostles; Women in the New Testament; The Way of Justice and Peace
- Informational video on the essential element of Little Rock Scripture Study
- Program and materials on leadership training
- Video-based courses on introduction to the Bible; overview of the Old and the New Testament; lands of the Bible

Most of the materials are offered in English and Spanish language.

Sr. Euphrasia Simati  
BICAM  
P.O. Box 24215  
Karen - Nairobi  
Kenya  
Tel: +254-2-88 24 48, 88 43 52  
Fax: +254-2-88 29 77  
E-mail: bicam@wananchi.com

### **Kenya: Third Plenary Meeting of the Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM) in Nairobi: "The Word of God – A Blessing for all Nations"**

The Third BICAM Plenary Meeting was held at Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, from August 11-17, 2001. The 23 participants came from 11 African countries: Malawi, Benin, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Gambia, Sudan, and Madagascar. They were all agents of the biblical pastoral ministry and delegates from episcopal conferences, CBF member or coordinators of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) regions. Furthermore, there were two representatives of the CBF from Germany.

The meeting had two main objectives: First to serve as space for the preparation of the CBF delegates for the VI Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation, to be held in Beirut, Lebanon, from September 3-12, 2002. In line with the theme of the VI Plenary Assembly the participants reflected on the "Word of God – A Blessing for all Nations" in their African context. The Acts of the Apostles were used as biblical reference text. The second purpose of this meeting was to evaluate the biblical pastoral activities in Africa and Madagascar and especially the functioning of BICAM.

The resolutions and recommendations expressed in the Final Statement show how much has already been achieved and is being done in the field of biblical pastoral ministry in Africa and Madagascar and, at the same time, they reflect the need of an even better coordination of these activities. The participants of the Nairobi meeting returned to their countries convinced of the necessity to intensify all efforts to promote biblical pastoral ministry on all levels. The pressing question at present is: what can the people and institutions involved in this enormous task do in order to maintain this spirit, expressed in the Final Statement, and to help bring to fruition the resolutions passed there in this crucial time for the biblical pastoral ministry in Africa?





## **The Final Statement of the Plenary Meeting**

### **1.0 Preamble**

1.1 We, 25 agents of the Biblical Pastoral Ministry (BPM) from 10 countries in Africa and Madagascar, have met together at Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, from 11th - 17th August, 2001, to evaluate our pastoral activities and to deliberate on the extent to which the Word of God has been a blessing for all nations, in line with the theme of the 6th Plenary Assembly of the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) to be held in Beirut, Lebanon, from 3rd - 12th September, 2002.

1.2 We note the pluralism of today's world and recognise the opportunities and threats posed by globalisation. We are also aware of the growing challenge of Islamic and Christian Fundamentalism. However, we are certain that the unchanging Word of God has power to create the right changes in individuals and communities of all times (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-17).

1.3 We view with great concern, the numerous cases of conflict and injustice that riddle our vast continent but we note that they could challenge us in our prophetic role, with Jesus Christ as our model. Our Lord was a great observer of real life situations of his people; he analysed these situations and did not remain passive. He condemned injustice and negative ways of thinking, proclaiming the values of the Kingdom of God and acting in conformity with his own teaching.

### **2.0 Word of God – A blessing for all nations**

2.1 We have reflected on the Acts of the Apostles from the perspective of the Word of God as a blessing for all nations. The great Pentecost event, empowering the Apostles to witness to the Risen Lord and, the series of episodes that followed, are indicative of the abundant blessing that the Lord bestowed on people through his ministers. The words of Peter to the lame man: „I have neither silver nor gold...” (Acts 3: 6), are a challenge to some of our approaches to the BPM. Though, far from being a self-supporting Church, we have become convinced that inadequate funds should not be a major obstacle to effective BPM.

2.2 We recount the major in-roads that the BPM has made since the promulgation of Dei Verbum in 1965. Today, the Word of God is being made accessible to the faithful. „There is a great interest in the Bible; an eagerness to know it, an openness to hear about it, and to draw from it solutions to felt needs.” (Bishop C. F. Esua, 25th Anniversary of CBF, 1994). This is a great blessing for the Church.

2.3 We continue to note that through Bible translations, the Bible has become a pioneer in literacy for many communities. The people's ability to interact with the Word of God has been a blessing to very many nations. Moral codes as well as legal and judicial systems of many nations have their roots in the Word of God. The Word of God has been of real help in the time of need for victims of crisis and conflicts in various parts of the world. Indeed, it has been a catalyst in bringing peace and reconciliation to many communities. We appreciate the partnership and co-operation of the United Bible Society in our mutual effort to help our people interact with the Word of God.



### **3.0 Resolutions**

In the light of the above, we resolve:

3.1 To foster collaboration amongst ourselves and be more co-ordinated and committed to the task as we intensify our efforts at ensuring that the Word of God becomes central in all spheres of life.

3.2 That the Word of God shall be our daily companion to illumine our path and guide us so that our people will be enabled to actualise their prophetic role in building a new world order based on unity, truth, love, justice and peace.

3.3 That the Bible shall be the source, centre, and inspiration of evangelisation, catechesis, spirituality, and pastoral ministry by using all available traditional and modern methods to bring the Word of God into the hands, minds and hearts of our people.

3.4 To work hard to provide Bibles widely, at prices people can afford and in languages they can understand, study guides to the Bible, teaching and learning materials; commentaries, research findings, audio and video cassettes etc., to enable our people know, appreciate, understand and live the Word of God in a liberated manner.

3.5 To foster co-ordination and unity among ourselves, other agents of the BPM, our dioceses, conferences and regional bodies, the hierarchy and the clergy, priests and the lay faithful, the religious and secular, rulers and their subjects.

3.6 To re-echo the numerous commitments previously made to make BICAM effective as contained in our memorandum to SECAM concerning BICAM at the First Pan-African Seminar in Nairobi – Kenya on 24th January 1990.

3.7 To be active members of the CBF who support and implement its programs and activities.

3.8 To fervently pray and work tirelessly for the success of the forthcoming Sixth Plenary Assembly in Beirut.

### **4.0 Recommendations**

#### **4.1 To SECAM**

4.1.1 Having observed that for about three years now the Biblical Centre for Africa and Madagascar (BICAM) has been without a Director and that the Centre has not lived up to its promotional and inspirational expectations, we humbly appeal to SECAM to appoint a Director for the Centre.

4.1.2 In line with the need to make the Word readily available to the people (cf. DV. 22), and the desire of our people to read the Word of God, SECAM find ways of subsidising the printing of Bibles to make them affordable to the people.

4.1.3 Considering the importance of the BPM in the mission of the Church, especially, here in Africa, we appeal to regional bodies of SECAM, Episcopal Conferences and to each individual Ordinary to encourage BPM by appointing Regional, national and, diocesan co-ordinators.



4.1.4 We recommend that there be three representatives from the regional bodies of episcopal conferences (from the anglophone, francophone and lusophone groups) to the BICAM Executive Committee.

#### 4.2 To BICAM

That the new Director of BICAM, when appointed by SECAM, finds ways and means of revamping the Centre for it to be an effective instrument for promoting Biblical Pastoral Ministry in the Region.

#### 4.3 To Catholic Institutes of Higher Learning

While appreciating the tremendous efforts and contributions of our Catholic Institutes of Higher Learning in the training of personnel in Biblical Theology, we will appreciate better if these Institutes could use African categories to make the Gospel intelligible to the people. By this, the Africans would see themselves as African and Christian at the same time.

#### 4.4 To the Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF)

We appeal to CBF to consider giving the opportunity to the Africa and Madagascar region, to host the 2008 Plenary Assembly on the theme: „The Word of God – A New Pentecost“.

### 5.0 Conclusion

We thank God that the Third Plenary Meeting of BICAM has successfully ended. We are grateful to our funding agencies, the current and immediate past Secretaries-General of CBF for the immense contributions they made to enable this meeting take place. We pray that the good Lord will continue to bless and sustain their efforts.

May the Holy Spirit inspire us as we continue our journey of preparation for the Sixth Plenary Assembly in Beirut, Lebanon, in September, 2002.



The Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) is a world-wide association of Catholic organizations committed to the ministry of the Word of God. At the present time, the CBF membership includes 90 full members and 219 associate members coming from a total of 125 countries.

The activities of these organizations include the preparation of Catholic and interconfessional Bible translations, the propagation of Bibles and in general the promotion of a deeper understanding of Holy Scripture.

The CBF promotes the biblical-pastoral activities of these organizations, provides a forum for the world-wide sharing of experiences in this field, searches for new ways of bringing the joy of God's Word to the faithful throughout the world. The Federation seeks collaboration with the representatives of biblical scholarship as well as with Bible Societies of various confessions.

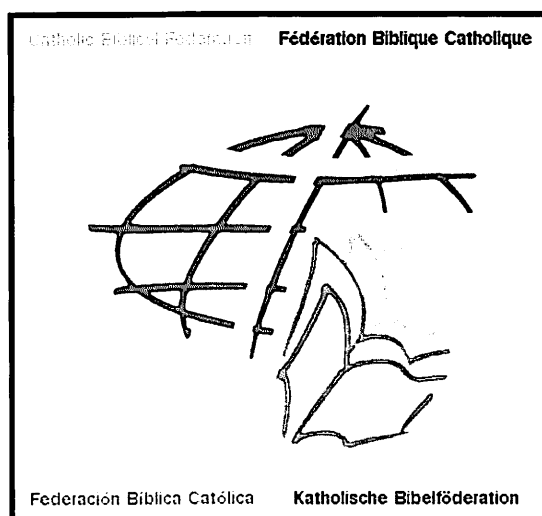
In particular, the CBF works towards the promotion of the reading of the Bible within the context of concrete life situations and the training of ministers of the Word in this direction.

The ministry of the Word of God is ministry to the unity of and communication between human beings. A world which grows together with the help of modern communication, and yet continues to show signs of hate and destruction, needs more than ever words of peace and of fellowship with God and with each other.

**Wilhelm Egger, Bishop of Bolzano-Bressanone, President of the CBF**

[www.c-b-f.org](http://www.c-b-f.org)

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