

## **HISTORY OF THE CHALDEAN CHURCH OF THE EAST**

While several apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ preached in Mesopotamia e.g. St. Thomas the Apostle, between 35-37 A.D., St. Peter the Apostle in 54 A.D., the Church of the East, which the Chaldean Church is a daughter, gives much credit for its formal establishment to the efforts of St. Thaddeus (Mar Addai), one of the 72 Apostles, who preached in Mesopotamia between 37-65 A.D. After the martyrdom of Mar Addai, two of his disciples continued the missionary work, they were Mar Agai (65-87 A.D.) and Mar Mari (88-121 A.D.).

The Church of the East was the most vibrant Christian Church in the world for several centuries and to it goes the credit for spreading Christianity in India and China. Actually, the Christians of India were under the direct jurisdiction of the Church of the East from the 4<sup>th</sup> till the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the colonial Portuguese, under Rome's instructions, forcefully severed that relation. Actually, Rome only rised to supremacy during the fourth century when the Roman Empire embraced Christianity as its official religion. That had an adverse effect on the Church of the East, where by its territory became divided between the competing powers at the time, the Roman and the Persian Empires (Mesopotamia under the Persian, while current days Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan under the Roman). Also as a consequence of that, the Persian rulers of Mesopotamia unleashed several massacres against their Christian subjects who now became suspected of sympathy with their Roman adversaries. To avoid those massacres, the Christians of Mesopotamia severed their relations with their brethren in the Roman ruled territories.

The rivalry between Mar Nestorius and Cyril of Alexandria resulted in the excommunication of the former in the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. Persecution of Nestorius followers was magnified which resulted in many leaving the Roman territories and into the Persian. In Edessa (Urhai) they build one of the best renown theological school, and with it their influence on the Church of the East grew. While the Church of the East never officially adopted the Nestorian teachings, however, Rome considered it "Nestorian", hence, a "heretical" Church that's worth "cleansing".

The growth of the Western colonial powers during the sixteenth century brought with it the influence of the Christian Churches. Rome, never liking a competing Church that goes by the name "Church of the East", eyed those "Nestorians" of Mesopotamia and sent several missionaries among them. Ironically, its original plan was to convert the "heretical" Muslims, however, facing a doctrinal Ottoman law of executing any Muslim converting to another religion (still is followed in Islamic countries), Rome decided to concentrate its "cleansing" efforts on the unprotected and politically weak Christians of Mesopotamia. It's chance of establishing its own "Catholic" Church among them finally gained fruit in 1551.

In 1450 the elected patriarch of the Eastern Church enacted a law which restricted his office to members of his own family (a result of Timorlink's holocaust that left a new reality, with the patriarch concluding that the remnants of the Church could survive only within its core Chaldean/Assyrian following and their social structure). Since the primate was a celibate, his office passed on to his nearest relative, usually a nephew succeeding his uncle. Hereditary succession, however, was contrary to the canons of the Church, which provided that "no Bishop may nominate his successor"; consequently, the new arrangement became a fruitful source of dissension among the people. But the ordinance was not seriously challenged until a whole century had elapsed, when the dispute erupted into a schism.

In 1551, when Simon Dinha succeeded his uncle, some influential families, encouraged by the recently arrived Roman Catholic missionaries, elected a monk from the monastery of Rabban Hurmizd, Yohanna (John) Sulaqa, as a more suitable person. With the aid of the Franciscan missionaries in Mosul, Sulaqa was sent to Jerusalem and thence to Rome where he was accepted as Catholic and ordained as the first Uniat patriarch.

Contrary, to the common belief, John Sulaqa was not a Catholic convert prior to his trip to Rome which originally was undertaken to seek its help against the 12 years old boy who was appointed as the new Patriarch. It was in Rome where he was kept for 3 years undergoing a strict Catholic indoctrination. Sulaqa was martyred 3 years after his return at the hands of the Muslim governor of Diarbakir, in current days south east Turkey.

In some accounts more to satisfy his "Nestorian" subjects who never forgave Sulaqa for his Catholic conversion and the splitting of the mother Church. The Sulaqa line, which started in 1553, came to an end after about a century and a half, in 1692, when the patriarch then in office renounced Catholicism [...].

The original line of patriarchs, successors of Simon Dinha, continued as Nestorian primates. Some of his successors, who called themselves Mar Eliyya (Elias), tried to reconcile with Rome in order to bring to an end the rival branch started by Sulaqa. In 1607, Mar Eliyya VI was accepted as Catholic and received into union, thus creating two "Chaldean" patriarchs, both Uniat. The successors of Eliyya VII, however, renounced Catholicism, thus creating after 1692 two "Nestorian" patriarchs, one residing in Azerbaijan, a Mar Shamoun from the Sulaqa line; the other in Elqosh near Mosul, a Mar Eliyya from the old and venerated "Bayt al-Ab" (House of the Father).

As if to add to this confusion, Yusuf, the Chaldean Archbishop of Diarbakir, a particularly Catholic center, followed the advice of the Capuchin missionaries there and withdrew from communion with Mar Eliyya in 1672. In 1681 he was granted the title of Patriarch (without specifying of where or of whom) by Pope Innocent XI and was known as Mar Yusuf. His successor, Mar Yusuf II, received the title of Patriarch of Babylon and the line continued until 1828 when Yusuf V died. For a short time before 1692, therefore, there were two Chaldean Uniat patriarchs: the Mar Shamouns from the Sulaqa line and the Mar Yusufs of Diarbakir.

Of the two “Nestorian” lines, the older one came to an end in 1804 when Mar Eliyya XIII died without having a nephew to succeed him. His brother, Hanna Hurmizd, had turned Catholic and was granted license “to minister and perfect the office of patriarch” but was not allowed to use the patriarchal seal. When Mar Eliyya XIII died, Hurmizd was tempted to renounce Catholicism in order to occupy the still popular office which his brother had left vacant. For a time, the Catholic Church suspended Hurmizd from his office and it was not until 1838 that he was recognized as Patriarch of the Chaldeans and only after he had agreed that he would abstain from admitting any of his relatives to the Episcopal order. Having thus abrogated the law of lineal succession, the Vatican appointed a stranger to the Chaldean patriarchate to succeed Hurmizd. The new Uniat patriarch was not only the first primate who was not from the Nestorian “Bayt al-Ab,” but in 1844, he became the first to obtain (through the influence of the French government) an imperial firman recognizing him as Patriarch of the “Chaldeans” instead of the “Nestorians”, the term used in all the previous firmans. Thus it was as late as 1844 that the Chaldean Uniat Church was finally established on a strong foundation, independent of the Nestorians, and its members, as Catholics, were legally recognized by the Ottoman government as “Chaldean millet distinct and separate from the Nestorians”.

In spite of these formal distinctions, at the beginning of the nineteenth century the people of the plain of Mosul were more Nestorian than Catholic in sentiment as well as in legal status. The desire to join the Catholic Church was partly politically motivated because of the protection which the French government afforded to the Catholics of the Ottoman Empire. Although relations between the Roman Catholic and Mesopotamian Churches go back to the sixteenth century, it was not until the middle of the eighteenth that Catholic missionary work started on an organized basis. According to a historian of nineteenth-century Catholic missions, when the Dominicans arrived in Mosul in 1748 the name of Catholic was hardly known. It was not until 1840, most probably as a result of Protestant missionary activities in this region, that Catholic work (slowed down and interrupted by the French Revolution) was taken up in earnest. Until about the end of the last century, the people, and even some of the Chaldean patriarchs, were still emotionally attached to their old Church and were growing jealous of the too many alterations in their ancient customs. As late as the eve of the First World War many Chaldeans, would have gladly rejoined the old Nestorian Church under Mar Shamoun if he could only provide foreign protection equal to that which they received through the Papal delegate. With that in mind, and to exert a better control on the Chaldean priesthood, the Catholic Church developed a program by which Chaldean priests were encouraged to study Catholicism in Rome itself. At the moment, most of the Chaldean hierarchy has gone through this “Roman Indoctrination”.

*Notice taken from: <http://www.chaldeansonline.org/church.html>*