



Newsletter

The Voice of the Syriacs



Chairman's Message

The year 2006 from the Syriacs point of view was an exciting year. As Turkey did not make the necessary progress in the negotiation talks with the EU, the EU decided to freeze 8 sections of the negotiation areas. The continuity of the relations between Turkey and the EU without a halt is very important for the Syriacs living in Turkey and in Europe. The Syriacs, who integrated within the European democracy, wish to return to their homeland in the Southeast of Turkey (Tur Abdin). Therefore, any step taken by Turkey towards the EU helps the development of the democracy in Turkey and opens the road before the Syriacs who wish to return to their homeland. Should the relations between the EU and Turkey come to the point of a halt or be frozen like what happened during the last year, the return process of the Syriacs to their homeland would become very difficult. Thus, there has been no enhancement in the situation of the Syriacs in Turkey during the year 2006.



Another vital part of Mesopotamia is Iraq. Iraq became the focus point of the bomb attacks in the year 2006. Baghdad, where most of the bomb attacks took place, is the city where the majority of the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldeans reside. The atrocities in the town claimed the lives of tens of Christians and caused half the number of their population to flee elsewhere. The immigration started in the direction of Syria, Jordan and the Western countries. The ESU, on several occasions attempted to draw the attention of the international community to the Christians of Iraq (Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean) and emphasized that the formation of a safe zone could stop the migration. During the last year the security situation of the Christians entered the agenda of the international community and more ideas started to be discussed about the safe zone (autonomy). After these debates, the Christian migration from the middle and south of Iraq turned in the direction of northern Iraq.

The third part of the homeland of the Syriacs is Syria. During the year 2006 there has been no negative developments against the Syriacs in Syria. In Syria, the Syriacs although on a limited scale have the freedom of developing their culture and the Syriac Orthodox Church's Patriarchate since 1931, when it was driven out of Turkey, still resides in Syria.

The changes in situation of the Middle East during 2007 will have significant effects on the future of the Syriacs. It has become clear that the new strategy of the president of the USA George W. Bush will lead in the Middle East in 2007.

The Syriacs managed to survive in the Middle East throughout many dark centuries in their history. Just surviving is no longer enough of a promising future for the Syriacs who are one of the most ancient people of the Middle East. The Syriacs also like any other people have a right to continue their lives with their culture, freely, without being threatened. Therefore, no matter how long it seems in the future, the democracy of the Middle East means a vital hope for the Syriacs.

Iskender Alptekin, ESU Chairman

ESU held a book Exhibition in Sweden

On 17th February 2007, the ESU representatives in Sweden organized a Book Exhibition in order to introduce the existing and new released books and publications about our people, as well as their authors.

The Book Exhibition was held in the Halls of the St. Peter Church of Hallonberg. As this was the first such exhibition held in Europe, it attracted a



large number of people from the Syriac community and from outside our community who attended and showed their interest in the book exhibition.

5 Professors and over 20 authors of books as well as some publishers introduced their books and publications. Some of the Professors and authors who attended the fair were: Prof. Shabo Talay, Prof David Gaunt and Prof. Yosef Bigun. Prof Shabo Talay as well as other guests were invited to hold speeches during the book fair. In their speeches



the guests generally emphasized the importance of organizing such exhibitions and the importance of promoting the authors with their publications.

The Archbishop of Scandinavia Mor Julios Abdlahad Gello Shabo also in his

speech approved the positive influence of activities such as holding book exhibitions among our people and emphasized that it is crucially important to have, not



only religious activities but also cultural and political activities among our Syriac people today, in the 21st century.

The head of ESU-Sweden Mr. Simon Oguz, in his closing speech stated that in the development program of ESU one of the aims is to hold such important cultural exhibitions of this sort about our people in the future, and promote the cultural development of the individual members of our people.



Thus, stated that this will not be the last activity of this sort to be held by ESU, but many more such activities are to be expected to be held by ESU in the future.

Following the Exhibition, a cultural reception/party was held in the Evening hours. Thus, the activity was ended by a cultural festivity that was attended by more than 300 guests and that lasted until the morning hours.

www.esu-sweden.com

The new trend in the Syriac Orthodox Church: rising

The roots of the Syriac Orthodox Church lay in the ancient Church of Antioch, which is one of the oldest Christian Churches in the Middle East. When this church was founded by the apostle St. Simon Peter in the year 37 A.D., at the beginning the Syriacs, the Greeks and the Jews of the region who converted into the Christianity joined it. Soon after, in the year 107 A.D. in a letter written by St. Ignatius Nurono to the Roman Church, he addressed the Church of Antioch as the Syriac Church.

Prior to the dawn of the Christianity, the Assyrian, Aramaic and other Semitic folk groups, living in Syria and Mesopotamia under the political reign of the Romans and the Parthians who converted into Christianity, named themselves as Syriacs. The Syriac's political centre in Northern Mesopotamia was Urhoy (Edessa) the capital of the semi-independent kingdom of Osrohone (Abgar) (132 B.C – 248 A.D.).

The Syriacs of the Church of Antioch, following the divisions and the contemporary politics of the ecumenical councils of Ephesus 431 A.D. and Chalcedon 451 A.D., divided into three denominational groups. One of the groups defended the monophysite approach to the Nature of Jesus Christ, the second group defended the Diophysite nature put forward by Nestour and the third group followed a pro-Constantinopol line (Melkite).

The separation between the three groups deepened with the time and each one of them formed independent church hierarchies for themselves. The Monophysite Syriac Patriarchate was forced out of Antioch in the year 558 A.D. However, even to day, the pro-Single Nature Syriac Church still names itself with the title of the "Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch".

The Syriac Church of Antioch, during the Abbasside era (750-1258) spread from Central Asia until India. Therefore, it is possible to call this era the Golden Centuries of the Syriacs too. The Syriacs, until the end of the Abbasside rule, were the centre of the science of the Middle East. Since the dawn of the Christianity, in the several academies that they founded (Urhoy, Antioch, Qenneshrin,

Nsibin), they developed the existing science and by translating the Greek philosophy (Especially the works of Aristotle) they presented it to the Middle Eastern Culture. Then, they translated the Greek Philosophy from Syriac into Arabic and they presented it to the Arabic Culture too.

From the beginning of the 13th Century onwards, the Syriac Church started to lose its significance. Meanwhile, the headquarters of the Syriac Orthodox Church Patriarchate was moved from Malatya to Deyrul Zafaran Monastery in Mardin (1293).

With the attacks of Timurlenk who advanced on the Middle East (1398-1402) the Church was largely scattered. Only in the Monastery of Mor Gabriel Timurlenk murdered about 500 monks. After that, the Church lost its productivity in the science and the literature all together.

Also, under the Ottoman rule the Church continued to experience a setback. In the 1915 Genocide the Church of Antioch sustained the most awesome hit in its entire history. Thus, its borders marginalized only in Tur Abdin, in Some villages around Mosul (Nineveh) and in some parts of India. The Church, who lost most of its Clerics in the 1915 Genocide, came to the verge of being dispersed and to be entirely wiped out in the history.

In 1931, the headquarters of the Patriarchate of the Syriac Orthodox Church was evacuated by the newly founded Turkish Republic and H.H Patriarch Elias Shakir was sent into exile to India. Thus, the nearly 1900 years old

Patriarchate of the Syriac Church was removed from its roots.

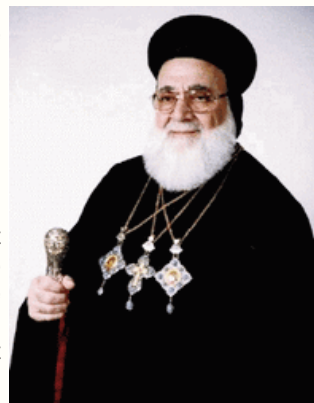
However, when Syria became a mandate of France, the Syriac Church benefited from this new development. Because, in 1933 the French authorities allowed the Syriac Church of Antioch to re-establish its Patriarchate in the town of Humus in Syria.

Under the see of H.H Patriarch Mor Afrem Barsaum (1933-1957) and H.H Mor Yakup III. (1957-1980) the Church started to recover and to re-thrive. New monks were trained for the Church service. Another development experienced in those years was that the members of the church, started to move to America and Europe. The Church also followed suit and established new Archdioceses in the USA and in Europe.

In 1980 H.H Mor Ignatius Zakka Iwaz was ordained to the Holy See of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch's Patriarchate. Under his see the Church re-institutionalized itself in many parts of

the world. The monastic system of the monks was re-thrived, thus, in the last 15 years many new monks were trained. Mor Ignatius Zakka Iwaz ordained 45 new Bishops and Archbishops between the years 1980 and 2007. These Bishops established new archdioceses and dioceses in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Germany, Switzerland, Austria,

Belgium-France, The Netherlands, Latin America, Canada, the USA, and Australia. Some of the re-thriven historically important centers are Deyrul Zafaran Monastery (Turkey), which housed the Patriarchate for 640 years and Malatya (Turkey). The Syriac Church started to re-fill the centers, which was forced to evacuate in the past. All these new developments show that the Church who came to the verge of being wiped out from the surface of the history in 1915, since 1980, especially under the Holy See of H.H Mor Zakka Iwaz, gained a significant acceleration in being re-flourished.



The National Council of Mesopotamia (MUB)

On 28th-29th December 2005, the representatives of the Syrians, including the European Syriac Union ESU, held an important meeting in Sweden. In this meeting the ESU represented the Syrians living in Europe, the Syriac Union of Lebanon represented the Syrians of Lebanon, the Syriac-Assyrian-Chaldean Organization HBA from Iraq, as well as representatives from Iran, Syria, Turkey representing the Syrians of their countries



and Suroyo TV representatives from Sweden jointly founded a United Council. This formation is called the National Council of Mesopotamia (MUB).

The National Council of Mesopotamia is made of the representatives from all the Institutions representing the Syrians of each of these individual countries. The MUB aims to improve the co-operation among all these institutions that are representing the Syriac people and to promote a united political stance among them.

In the first anniversary of its foundation, the member institutions of the MUB held their first annual meeting on 26-30 January 2007 in Sweden. In their first annual meeting, the representatives of the member institutions studied the situation of the Syrians living in Europe, in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Lebanon and

unanimously agreed that in the future the Syrians living in these countries should have closer relationship with each other. The MUB also during the last year carried the working system and the political stance of the ESU to the Syriac institutions of the Middle East. In the annual meeting of the MUB, the ESU and the other institutions agreed to become closer to each other and undertake joint project together. Accordingly, on this basis it is aimed that the Syriac representation around the world would be strengthened.



Thus, it is expected that in the coming days the member institutions will share a united ideology and move in harmony in representing the Syriac people.

ESU plans to improve its diplomatic relations

In accordance with its program, the European Syriac Union (ESU) decided to start a series of diplomatic relations, in order to draw the attention of the international community to the situation of the Syrians in the Middle East. Especially, following the coldness that has started in the EU Turkey relations, a need to keep constant attention to the situation of the Syrians has emerged, in order to avoid the existing and possible issues that may harm the Syrians. Similarly, it is of crucial importance to draw



the attention of the EU countries to the Syrians- Assyrians-Chaldeans of Iraq in order to take the necessary measures for their protection. Thus, ESU has decided to submit a contemporary dossier about these two issues to the representatives of the EU countries in a series of meetings that will be held with them.

The first meeting was held on 4th-5th December 2006 in Austria. Firstly, from the Austrian Foreign Affairs Commission the member responsible for the Human Rights Mr. Heidl was met. Secondly, a meeting was held with the Austrian Green Party MP Miss Terezija Stoistis. In

both meetings ESU requested from the Austrian government to be aware of the latest developments in Turkey, of the new developments that may arise in Iraq such as the possibility of an undesirable civil war that may have abominable effects on the Syrians.



The success of Suroyo TV expands to the United States of America

Following months of hard work and preparations, since 15th October 2006 our channel Suroyo TV is now being watched by its viewers from the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Thus, the success story of Suroyo TV continues by reaching the homes of the Syriac people in North America.

The technical details of Satellite frequencies for North America are as follows:

Satellite: AMC 4
101 degrees West
Transponder: 21
Frequency: 12120 mhz
Symbol Rate: 30.000
FEC: 3/4



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IMPRINT

Information bulletin about the social position of the Syriacs in and outside the Middle East. It appears periodically, published by the European Syriac Union (ESU) in Brussels-Belgium.

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Ephrem the Syriac

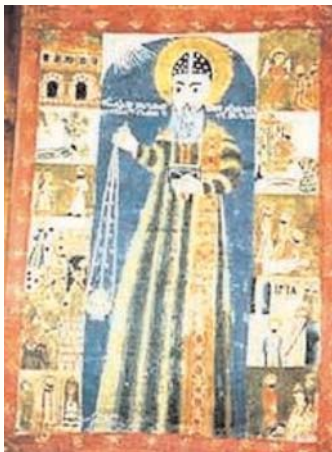
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Ephrem the Syriac (Syriac: *Afrem Suryoyo*; Latin: Ephraem Syrus; c. 306 – 373) was a deacon, prolific Syriac language hymn writer and theologian of the 4th century. He is venerated by Christians throughout the world, and especially among Syriac Christians, as a saint. Ephrem wrote a wide variety of hymns, poems and homilies in verse, as well as prose biblical commentaries. These were works of practical theology for the edification of the church in troubled times. So popular were his works, that, for centuries after his death, Christian authors wrote hundreds of pseudepigraphous works in his name. Ephrem's works witness to an early, vibrant expression of Christian faith, little touched by the European modes of thought, and more engaged with eastern methods of discourse.

His life

Icon of Ephrem the Syrian from Meryem Ana Kilelesi.

Ephrem was born around the year 306 in the city of Nisibis (the modern Turkish town of Nusaybin, on the border with Syria). Internal evidence from Ephrem's hymnody suggests



that both his parents were part of the growing Christian community in the city, although later hagiographers wrote that his father was a pagan priest. Numerous languages were spoken in the Nisibis of Ephrem's day, mostly dialects of Aramaic. The Christian community used the Syriac dialect. Various pagan religions, Judaism and early Christian sects vied with one another for the hearts and minds of the populace. It was a time of great religious and political tension. The Roman Emperor, Diocletian had signed a treaty with his Persian counterpart, Nerses in 298 that transferred Nisibis into Roman hands. The savage persecution and martyrdom of Christians under Diocletian were an important part of Nisibene church heritage as Ephrem grew up.

The newly excavated Church of Saint Jacob

in Nisibis, where Ephrem taught and ministered.

Jacob, the first bishop of Nisibis was appointed in 308, and Ephrem grew up under his leadership of the community. Jacob of Nisibis is recorded as a signatory at the First Council of Nicea in 325. Ephrem was baptized as a youth, and almost certainly became a son of the covenant, an unusual form of Syrian proto-monasticism. Jacob appointed Ephrem as a teacher (Syriac *malpānā*, a title that still carries great respect for Syriac Christians). He was ordained as a deacon either at his baptism or later. He began to compose hymns and write biblical commentaries as part of his educational office. In his hymns, he sometimes refers to himself as a 'herdsman' (*ʿallānā*), to his bishop as the 'shepherd' (*rā'yā*) and his community as a 'fold' (*dayrā*). Ephrem is popularly credited as the founder of the School of Nisibis, which in later centuries was the centre of learning of the Church of the East.

In 337 Emperor Constantine I, who had legalized and promoted the practice of Christianity in the Roman Empire, died. Seizing on this opportunity, Shapur II of Persia began a series of attacks into Roman North Mesopotamia. Nisibis was besieged in 338, 346 and 350. During the first siege, Ephrem credits Bishop Jacob as defending the city with his prayers. Ephrem's beloved bishop died soon after the event, and Babu led the church through the turbulent times of border skirmishes. In the third siege, of 350, Shapur rerouted the River Mygdonius to undermine the walls of Nisibis. The Nisibenes quickly repaired the walls while the Persian elephant cavalry became bogged down in the wet ground. Ephrem celebrated what he saw as the miraculous salvation of the city in a hymn which portrayed Nisibis as being like Noah's Ark, floating to safety on the flood.

Church of Saint Jacob in Nisibis



To be continued in the next issue ...