

SPECIAL CLERGY REPRINT  
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# THE LINK

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Independently organized in May, 1967, Americans for Middle East Understanding believes that friendship with the people of the Middle East is essential to world peace, and contributes toward this goal by spreading understanding of the history, values, religions, cultures, and economic conditions of the Middle East.

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## CHRISTIANS IN THE ARAB EAST

### An Informal Introduction

There are millions of Christians in the Arab East. Statisticians who include children, backsliders, refugees, expatriates and "permanent non-citizen residents" come up with a count approaching 9,000,000. Those who limit themselves to active church members would pare the number to less than half of that. But even so minimal a figure is impressive. To many Christians in the West, in fact, it's downright startling. The idea that they have so much as a single co-religionist left in the lands that cradled their faith and exported it to the world comes to them as quite a surprise.

Such a one was the American lady tourist who turned up at a consulate reception in pre-1967 Jerusalem. A fellow-guest, Anton Atallah — banker, lawyer, Foreign Minister of Jordan and lay leader in the Greek Orthodox Church — was introduced to her as "a prominent Arab".

"Ooh, a real Arab!" she gushed. "How interesting! And how many wives do you have?"

Dr. Atallah's eyes twinkled as he replied, "Just one — and," he couldn't resist adding, "unlike some Americans, she's the same one I married years ago! That's the way it usually is hereabouts — with Muslims and, of course, in our Christian families".

"Ooh, so you're a Christian?" she gurgled. "And what mission were you converted by?"

Tactfully he informed her that his forebears had been Christians in Jerusalem long before the Crusades. And, yes, his local congregation claimed continuity in the faith from Apostolic times!

She thus had an informal introduction into some of what Christians of the Arab East uniquely offer to us of the West: They can give us an identification with the soil in which the seed of our faith was first sown. They can plunge us into a stream of history that takes us with the believing community back through the testings of triumphs and tragedies to our religious beginnings. They show us how minorities can serve their countries loyally while remaining true to their own special convictions. And they present us with the opportunity to accept them for what they crave to be — mediators between the rising Muslim

East and the nominally Christian West.\*

That lady was fortunate in having on-the-spot, face-to-face instruction! The printed page can't substitute for *that*. Yet I believe it can offer a framework in which warm human relations can develop meaningfully. In that conviction, I presume to offer, however disjointedly and oversimplified, these gleanings.

### In a Muslim (Moslem) Milieu

The undiplomatic lady at the diplomatic party was right in a vaguely confused way. The overwhelming majority of Arabs is Sunni (mainstream) Muslim, Lebanon being the sole national exception. Hence, one of the challenges to the Christian minorities in the Arab East — a challenge also felt among their Muslim neighbors — is the development of right relations between followers of the two faiths, including the guarantee of each other's human and civil rights.

This concern is frequently verbalized by leaders from both backgrounds. President Nasser, a Muslim, at the cornerstone laying for the new St. Mark's Cathedral in Cairo on July 14, 1965, asserted: "We are all Egyptians; Islam recognizes Christians as brothers in religion and brothers in God . . . I pray God that love and brotherhood may prevail in our land and that He may help us all."

The following New Year's Day, Lebanon's President Hérou, a Christian, gave similar reassurance to his Muslim constituents: "We

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\* Their all-important contribution to the bearing of deeply comprehended ritual upon personal and community life — bringing all the senses uniquely into play — calls for a detailed follow-up in some future LINK.

# Christians in The Arab East

(continued from page 1)

have chosen", he averred, "to live and die on this narrow stretch of land, according to laws inspired by a pact of brotherhood. With the help of the one God in whom we all believe, we are achieving a national community, a human synthesis, a universal society".

Nor were these statements simply the occasional rhetoric of support-seeking politicians. Such feelings are also common, though by no means universal, among both the intelligentsia and the general public.

## In the Grass Roots

It would, of course, be wrong to minimize the disturbances which, aired by conflict-conscious news media, reveal undercurrents of Muslim-Christian tension. This past summer Muslim fanatics vandalized Coptic and non-Coptic churches and other Christian properties in Egypt. Christians, native and foreign, have also complained of government discrimination in Nile Valley land confiscation and other matters.

In Lebanon, to illustrate from just one other country, interfaith strains have generally subsided since 1958 when Christian President Chamoun's seeking of an un-constitutional second term agitated many Muslims. Protests do continue, however, from the Shia Muslims of Southern Lebanon. They blame the dominant Christians (not to mention the Sunni Muslims) in government for discriminatorily inadequate protection against the deadly Israeli forays into their fields and villages.

But there is, at the same time, much that is positive to accentuate. Mohammed Kamel Hussein's novel, *City of Wrong* (translated by Bishop Cragg for Seabury Press, 1966), dealing with Christ's final week of ministry, became an instant best-seller among the author's fellow-Muslims in Egypt. The slogans chanted in Cairo at political rallies (and recorded in 1959 by Greek Orthodox Professor Elie Salim of the American University of Beirut) still push for Muslim-Christian harmony with such phrasings as: "Mohammed and Jesus: both prophets of one God," and, "Our nationalism stems from Gospel and Koran". And in Lebanon University, it is a Christian Arab bishop, Georges Khodr, who teaches the largely Muslim student body an appreciation of their ancestral faith.

## What's In a Name?

A significant trend in a culture that lays special store by the meanings of names is reflected by the many Muslim and Christian families who are naming their

children for the attributes and historic figures honored by both traditions. Hence: Amin (faithful), Fayez (victor), Habib (beloved), Najib (noble), Samir (companion) and Fuad (heart) seem to be in the ascendant. So do names common to the sacred pages of both the Christian Bible and the Muslim Koran; among them: Abraham, Ishmael, Solomon, Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Ibrahim, Ismail, Suleiman, Issa, Maryam and Yusuf). Interestingly, the stained-glass chapel windows in the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies (which works on joint Muslim-Christian research projects with Cairo's Al-Azhar University) feature only scenes described in both the Bible and the Koran.

These examples, like many others which could be added, are smallish straws in the wind. Yet the wind they indicate is definitely there and is being fanned by unmistakable factors. Increased education and broadened world contacts play their part. Political and religious leaders are seeking unity through "stressing the common": Abraham as a common ancestor,

and Arabic as the common tongue along with shared economic interests and cultural features. Urbanization is bringing separated communities into touch with each other. And there's a glimmer of hope that the failure to achieve Arab unity by ignoring religious roots may speed the acceptance of Father G. C. Anawati's declaration that:

*"There is nothing which brings men closer together than their faith in God. If Christians and Muslims were to work with all their hearts to overcome their egotism and to keep alive respect for vocation and for human dignity and the claims for God's Kingdom, the world would be spared many evils and, what is more, the very countenance of the God whom they worship would appear more clearly to his creatures".* (Cambridge Religion in The Middle East, Vol. I, p. 417.)

And then there are the lessons of history. The Arab East has been, through the centuries, a testing laboratory whose trials and errors offer much guidance for the moulding of a harmonious future. Thumbnail sketches of some of that history's highlights follow:

## OF MOHAMMED, MILLETS AND MINORITIES

Arab involvement in Christian life goes back to the beginnings. On the Pentecost of its birth, Arabs in Jerusalem heard the Church's earliest exuberant preachments (Acts 2:11). Soon thereafter St. Paul visited Arabia (Gal. 1:17) as did later Christians from Ethiopia. By the Fourth Century Arabia Felix (Yemen) which, in the Sixth Century, was hailing Hareth the Lame as the first great Christian Arab prince.

### A Prophet Arises

It took Mohammed in the Seventh Century, however, to win Arabia to the worship of One God (Allah) — almighty, merciful, just, eternal. Superstitious paganism, fetishist idolatry, dissolute commercialism and tribal factiousness were as distressingly rampant there as among my British and European forebears at a comparable stage of development.

Mohammed owed his effectiveness among such people to several fundamentals. The faith he summoned them to was simple in its appeal for total submission to the will of God. (The SLM in iSLaM, the faith, and in muSLiMs, its followers, is the Semitic word-root for 'submission'.) He conveyed it in unique loftiness and purity of language in the pages of the Koran (Quran). He illustrated it with the unswerving courage of his own convictions. And he incorporated it into the concept of Dar el Islam, the community bound together not by territory or sovereignty but by joint submission to God.

### Islam Expands

After his death in 632 his followers burst out of Arabia, sweeping North Africa and Southwest Asia with their military, political and religious conquests.

'Arab' was thenceforth to apply increasingly to the lands and people they 'Arabized': — the Maghreb or Arab West from Egypt to the Atlantic, and the Mashrak or Arab East which includes the Fertile Crescent countries (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine/Israel) with Egypt and the Gulf States.

Their military successes were partly due to the fact that the Persian and Roman Empires had exhausted each other by incessant warfare. Nor was there major resistance from the churches which, in the areas they overran, were largely 'nationalistic', hence hardly united except by resentment toward the frequently intolerant 'imperialist' Catholic-Orthodox Church from which they had seceded. (See "Chalcedon, 451", page 4.)

On the positive side, Islam appealed to Christians on two counts: 1.) A Christ-respecting theology, and: 2.) the millet system.\*

### Relations with Christians

1.) It has been suggested that in his youth Mohammed had had conversations with Christians in Syria and elsewhere. Whatever the explanation, however, there

\* Millet rhymes with Gillette! The Roman Empire referred to in the previous paragraph is, of course, the Byzantine — or Eastern Roman — Empire, called Rum in Arabic.



Foreign Christian communities have established churches and charities in the Middle East. Here a U. N. Relief & Works Agency ambulance, speeding refugee patients to Augusta Victoria Hospital (Lutheran) in Jerusalem, passes St. Mary Magdalene Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church of All Nations at the base of the Mount of Olives. UNRWA pre-1967 photo

is enough common ground to warrant the papal declaration of October, 1965, that Christianity has closer ties with Islam than with any other religion. Muslims honor the sinless, Virgin-born Jesus as a person more highly than their own climactic Prophet, Mohammed. Though with differences that have sometimes led to tragically violent disputes, both Christianity and Islam also believe in God's personal transcendence and providence, a final judgment, resurrection and eternal life.

2.) Then there's the millet system set up to regularize the relations of a Muslim majority to certain minorities. Regrettably, English dictionaries have not yet shoe-horned this important term into its due place between the painter and the grain that are spelled the same way! Hence a narrative definition is in order:

(If you're already familiar with the subject, skip the tiny type that follows).

Mohammed recognized Jews and Christians as 'People of the Book' who had received earlier written revelations from God. Both to Jews and to the various Christian communions, then, he granted *dhimmi* ('specially protected') status including freedom from overt government persecution. Thus 'non-Chalcedonian' Christians (see p. 4) found themselves faring better under their Muslim conquerors than they had under Persian or even Christian Byzantine rule. But there was more to it than that.

As regularized by the Ottomans, the *dhimmi* communities were called *millet*s. Their religious councils had authority among their people, in accordance with their own laws, regarding education and other civil matters (marriage, inheritances, etc.). Their patriarchs were their civil leaders and served as official links with the Muslim central government which, in turn, was expected to execute the decisions of the *millet* council. By the payment of the *jizya*, or head tax, their young men were exempted from the military service required of Muslims.

The system — which has been variously adapted by Israel, and which became the springboard for the 'confessional' proportional representation practiced in modern Lebanon — had its advantages and disadvantages for the Christian communities. It helped preserve traditional religious and social patterns and their consequent values. The contagiously enthusiastic, primitive chants as of the Copts, for instance, and the widespread practice of standing with arms outstretched and hands and eyes upturned in public prayer have linked worshippers through the ages with their spirit-

ual origins. In difficult times the *millet* has encouraged an intangible spirit of unity. At all times it has facilitated family stability, social cohesiveness and a rare intimacy of clergy-laity relations. This latter is reinforced by the fact that many priests support themselves, like St. Paul the tentmaker, with secular jobs.

The *millet*'s part in preserving bread-winning skills from generation to generation is revealed by the fact that such names as Haddad (Smith), Sayegh (Goldsmith), Najjar (Carpenter), Khayyat (cf. Taylor) and Hallaq (cf. Barbour) usually belong to Christians. And, of course, since Muslims are forbidden to charge interest, Christians and Jews, permitted by their *millet* laws to do so, have traditionally also engaged in banking, risk-capital investment and government treasury service.

The *millet* past may also have something to do with disproportionate Christian interest today in certain occupations like journalism. Christian reporters and editors of every language and political stance serve the media in Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. Calro's *al-Ahram*, the Middle East's top newspaper, was founded by the Melkite (Greek Catholic) Taqia brothers. And the multilingual needs of *millet*s may account for how many Christians develop careers in the all-important fields of tourism, international commerce and diplomacy.

### 'Don't Fence Me In!'

Still, as Robert Frost has pointed out, though good fences can make good neighbors, there's something in nature that abhors a wall. *Millet*s had their distinct values. The bounds they delineated were designed to be fair and practical. But they could not help breeding a ghetto mentality, 'minority complexes' and unhealthy intergroup rivalries. Contacts with other religious communities, fellow-Christian as well as Muslim, were handicapped. In-group attitudes ranging from stodginess and self-pity to snobbery and elitism were all too common.\*

\* There were certain built-in legal restrictions as well. Christians could not erect new churches without Muslim permission. At the same time, old churches could be appropriated for mosques — a famous example being the stately Basilica of St. John the Baptist in Damascus which became, and still is, the Umayyad Mosque. And, while Christians were allowed to convert to Islam, it was a capital offense for a Muslim to join a church. Comparable, if different, discriminations have, on the other hand, been enacted against non-Christians by the Crusaders and against gentiles by Israel.

The restless underlying desire of many Christians to break down the *millet*-born walls still separating them from their fellow-Christians was evidenced by their almost universal enthusiasm for the fact and the symbolism of the January, 1964, meeting of Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem. In a strikingly different way, some Christians, notably in Iraq, have joined the Communist Party, not because they favor Marxist atheism or want to lose their Christian identity but because they want political associations that cut across all residual *millet* lines.

With or without the *millet* system, a minority in a given area sometimes craves moral support and/or physical protection from likeminded bodies outside. Hence, the Christians of the Middle East have had longer and more intimate relations with the West than have the Muslims. Both advantages and problems have accrued from such relationships.

### Foreign Relations

The problems have risen chiefly when European, British or American powers — self-identified as 'Christian' — have had policies at odds with over-all Arab interests. Sometimes they have used the kindred religious loyalties of local churchmen for political leverage. Occasionally they have even felt it advantageous to divide the Arab world by prompting dissensions between differing religious communities. Resulting suspicions of collusion with the West have created difficulties for Arab Christians ever since the first Crusader invasion of 1099.

At the same time, Western diplomacy, commerce and missions have introduced concepts of medicine, social welfare, political equality and universal education which have enriched the life of the area. When such benefits have come from nominally Christian sources, with Arab Christians proving especially useful as mediators, the international tie-ins have enhanced the Christian reputation.

Different Western approaches to diplomacy with the Arabs should be noted here. The French pattern, broadly speaking, has preferred to deal with Christians, chiefly Catholics, because of ease of communication and cooperation with the like-minded. The British, however, (apart from their Palestine Mandate which down-played both Muslim and Christian Arab sensitivities) have favored working with Muslims in order to be on solid terms with the majority. Except in the case of Israel, American foreign policy ignores religious distinctions.

(My own thoroughly Western approach to Arab Christendom will, I trust, help make this and the following essays a more intelligible introduction for Western readers. My Middle Eastern friends will, I know, continue to tolerate my shortcomings as an in-depth interpreter of their unique and variegated cultures.)

# Churches in The Arab East - - WHO'S WHO?

## The Council of Chalcedon, 451

To Middle Easterners the varieties of Protestant Churches in America are baffling. Americans, in turn, as they hear more and more names of diverse Christian bodies in the Middle East, find themselves increasingly perplexed. For clarifying the confusions over Protestantism a grasp of the theological ferment and political turmoil of the Sixteenth Century Reformation is helpful. To appreciate the rich range of Christian similarities and differences in the Arab East, one must also go back to beginnings. Only, in this case that means backtracking over 1000 years further into history — to 451 A.D.

On October 8 of that year an influx of vociferous clerics, including over 500 bishops, all but swamped the sleepy port city of Chalcedon. They had swarmed in from Europe, Asia and Africa to clear up misunderstandings over the nature of Christ. The fact, however, that their Council had been convoked by the Roman Emperor Marcian to meet just across the Bosphorus from his imperial capital of Constantinople (ancient Byzantium, modern Istanbul) indicates the scent of politics as well as theology in the Fifth Century Oriental breezes!

Their theological debates were, of course, as important as they were heated. In the end, they reaffirmed Christ's full humanity for, if our Lord is not every bit as human as we, how can we be expected to follow His example? At the same time they reasserted His complete divinity for, otherwise, how can His spirit and truth have final authority over our lives? These were questions of life and death — of the meaning of our existence here and throughout eternity.

The Council's rulings on them were incorporated into the 'Chalcedonian Definition'. That document aimed to counteract 'Monophysitism' (literally 'single-nature-ism' — the rather vague and misleading label often given to the teaching of Eutyches of Constantinople who emphasized Christ's divinity to the downgrading of His humanity.) At the same time, it sought to correct the eloquent and persuasive pleadings of Nestorius of Antioch in behalf of Christ's humanity at the expense of His divinity.

The above summary of those three theological positions is a blatant oversimplification. A fuller study of them should reward the examiner with fresh insights into both present and ancient world scenes. For our purposes here, however — simply to become better acquainted with Arab Christians as people — I feel no need for more precise detail. The passing of over 15 centuries has, in any case, tended to blur and blend the ancient distinctions among and between the 'Chalcedonians' (who adhere to the Catholic-Orthodox-Protestant position) and the 'Non-Chalcedonians' (who split off to follow the 'Monophysite' and 'Nestorian' leads).

As generally perceived, 451 A.D. marks a major splintering of the unity of

the Christian Church. That was hardly the Council of Chalcedon's intent. But that was the end result of the theological and political factors that mingled there.

Marcian — like most of the Emperors for over a century before him — had hoped to have a united Christianity as a force to bind his variegated Empire together. With the loyal Orthodox-Catholics of Europe and Asia Minor, he was largely successful. Most of his Afro-Asian colonies — full of independence-minded, large Semitic, churchmen — however, reacted unfavorably. Handicapped by irksome travel and difficult communications, and feeling the pull of parish and regional priorities and the claims of their local cultural traditions and institutions, they would welcome a theological excuse to decentralize their relationship to the religious and imperial authorities focused in Constantinople.

This is not to belittle the difference in theological conviction. As in the modern Arab-Israeli controversy (especially in Zionist-Palestinian ramifications), such considerations were basic, crucial and emotionally charged. It is simply my suspicion that, apart from the non-theological factors, they might have been resolved. No

To this day, the churches that in 451 went their separate ways on doctrinal grounds reflect the geographical-political aspects of their origins by the nationalistic names they continue to bear. 'Monophysites' still prefer to be called Abyssinians, Armenians, Syrian Orthodox and Copts (vernacular for Egyptianians). The 'Nestorians' still refer to themselves as Assyrians.

To help understand the rich variety of these freedom-seeking 'non-Chalcedonians' along with the special forms of loyal 'Chalcedonianism' in the Arab East, I hope the following non-alphabetical relative glossary will prove serviceable.\*

## NON-CHALCEDONIANS

### 'ORIENTAL ORTHODOX'

is the label preferred by the 22,000,000 heirs, world-wide, of the 'Monophysite' tradition that declared its independence in 451 A.D. Their churches are also known as Ancient Eastern and Lesser Eastern. Though most of them are now 'in Diaspora' (scattered throughout the world), they consider themselves, wherever they are, to be the guardians of 'the Middle East ecclesiastical tradition proper'.

Forming their largest and most concentrated body in the Arab East are

### The Copts

of the Nile Valley and Delta who number between 2 and 6 million — depending on your standards of identification and who's doing the counting. No matter what you tally (and 4 million is a frequent figure) they are about half rural, half urban!

Their modern, poured-concrete cathedral on the way from the Cairo airport to

the center of town was dedicated in 1968. This was exactly 19 centuries after the martyrdom of St. Mark to whose vigorous mission in Alexandria they trace the origins of their church. To grace that dedication with a magnificent gesture of ecumenical good will, the Roman Catholic Church transferred his remains from St. Mark's, Venice, to the cubical, red granite

tomb in the undercroft of the Coptic Cathedral in Cairo.

This was not untypical of the veneration of the Egyptian past on the ward look of present-day Copts. It is, for instance, a Nile Valley farm youth, Anthony, who founded the world-wide Christian monastic movement in the 20th Century. To this day the monks trained and disciplined have provided the Coptic Church with ecclesiastical leadership.

\* This must be recognized as the skeleton it needs fleshing out from the cultural — it calls for the breath and heartbeat of the ritual-oriented devotional life — of living communities and traditions. I'd be grateful to have others more versed in these matters contribute authoritative supplements for future LINKS.



A MELKITE EMBROIDERER, A JACOBITE CANDLE MAKER, A YMCA BASKETBALL PLAYER AND A MARONITE BUSINESSMAN. ALL ARABS. ALL CHRISTIANS.

ship, including the Patriarchs ('most holy Popes').

Again: Biblical scholarship in Alexandria dates back to pre-Christian times. This makes all the more natural the enthusiastic, regular Bible studies underlying the current upsurge of spiritual vitality and social service among the Coptic laity, especially the youth.

### The Abyssinians,

who constitute the established church of Ethiopia, were until the mid-1950's administratively part of the Coptic Church and still maintain strong fraternal ties with it. However, we shall not be dealing with them here, for geographically they aren't part of the Arab East.

### The Syrian Orthodox

are sometimes called Jacobites in honor of Jacob Baradaeus, the Sixth Century monk-bishop through whose efforts they became the national church of Syria. They still make the sign of the cross with one finger in deference to his Monophysite belief in the one nature of Christ.

There are now barely 150,000 of them in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, though until the Thirteenth Century they constituted nearly a majority of the rural population there. In the cities they provided scientific, medical and classical literary leadership. But they began dwindling after the collapse of the Crusader kingdoms. Turkish massacres and starvation during World War I reduced their number still more drastically.

Some 35,000 of them in the Western Hemisphere look to the spiritual leadership of their patriarch in Damascus.

### The Armenians (Orthodox),

though thoroughly Middle Eastern, have become a significant Christian factor in the Arab East (South of their ancestral territory) only in modern times. They prefer to call themselves Armenian Apostolic in tribute to the pioneering missionary efforts of the Apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew among them. More often they are known as Gregorian Orthodox in honor of Gregory the Illuminator. It was he who, exiled from Armenia for becoming a Christian, returned to convert, among

others, his former persecutor, King Tradt (Tiridates III), who made Christianity the state religion in 303 A.D.

Armenia, which thus became the world's first officially Christian nation, anciently stretched from the Black Sea to the Caspian. But today its people are displaced and its historic settlements, fertile valleys, broad plateaus and volcanic peaks (including Noah's Ararat) are split up between Iran, Turkey and the USSR. (This separation of homeland and people makes it necessary for us to give them space here which, for other Oriental Orthodox, falls more naturally under their countries of historic origin and present concentration.)

The Diaspora, or wide scattering, of Armenians stems in large measure from the persecutions that have been disproportionately their lot. In the Eleventh and Thirteenth Centuries many of them fled from Seljuk and Mongol onslaughts to the security of Cis (Cilicia) in Southern Asia Minor. There they found themselves on the Jerusalem-bound route of the Latin Crusaders with whom they cooperated. After the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 they coexisted peacefully with these new overlords for four centuries.

However, in the 1890's, their growing nationalist sentiments and their involvement in political reform movements prompted the reactionary Sultan Abdulhamid to launch wholesale pogroms against more than 2500 Armenian villages. Later, during World War I, fearing them as possible fifth columnists for his 'Christian' (British and Czarist Russian) enemies, the Grand Vizier, Talaat Bey, exterminated or expelled a reputed 2,000,000 Armenian men, women and children.

After that war, with the authorization of the Treaty of Versailles, they established the Republic of Armenia. This filled them with hopes for reviving the ancient ideals of Tradt and Gregory that: 1.) The nation as a whole should identify its destiny with the Christian faith and; 2.) Conversely, the Church should be responsible for the character of the total government as well as of the individual citizen. But more massacres — this time by Kemalist Turks — killed that dream in 1920.

Many of the survivors of these holocausts sought refuge in the Arab world. "By 1925", says Betts, "some 150,000 Armenians were found, huddled and destitute on the outskirts of Beirut, crowded into their ancient but tiny quarters in Aleppo, Damascus and Baghdad, and resolutely building makeshift shelters in what was then the open wastes of the Jazira."\*

\* This quotation is from a manuscript by Robert B. Betts entitled **CHRISTIANS IN THE ARAB EAST: A Brief History and Contemporary Survey**, due for early publication by the Lycabettus Press, Athens, Greece. Its maps, 12 detailed statistical tables, 301 scholarly footnotes, over-all analytical approach and felicitous turns of phrase have been invaluable in the preparation of the material for this LINK.

But within a generation — thanks to the tolerance of their hosts, aid from outside and their own determined efforts — they were to become a thriving, economically influential part of the Arab East. Their influx into Lebanon was also a factor in bringing the Christian population of that country up to a majority in the crucial census of 1932. (See page 10).

Their capitalistic mercantile outlook makes them more at home in Lebanon than in such socialist countries as Egypt, Iraq, Israel and Syria. This, along with tales of woe from behind the Iron Curtain, also keeps them from migrating in significant numbers to Soviet Armenia where Etchmiadzin, site of their historic capital and cathedral, is located.

### THE ASSYRIANS,

whose ancestral Mesopotamia is now divided between Iraq and Iran, often designate themselves 'The Ancient Church of the East'. They had 25 bishops as long ago as the Second Century. Tradition points back even further to the Apostles Thomas and Thaddaeus as the pioneer preachers among them.

Their numbers swelled in the Fifth Century with an influx of followers of Nestorius whom the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon had denounced as a heretic. Hence they are sometimes called 'Nestorians'.

Though classified as 'Non-Chalcedonian' they are very different from the Oriental Orthodox. They use neither paintings nor sculpture as aids to worship, adorning their plain churches with only a cross above the simple altar. Laymen share in the leading of worship which is still conducted in Aramaic, the language of Jesus. At Communion, children — as members of the household of faith — may take the bread but the wine is reserved for full communicants.

They flourished in Assyria/Mesopotamia for centuries and produced some of the finest scholars, translators, scientists and surgeons of their time. In the Eighth to Fourteenth Centuries, their enthusiasm for the faith established vigorous missions in India, China, Siberia, Korea and Japan. They were making progress, too, toward converting Mongolia and Turkestan. Had they had more time they might have forestalled the genocidal aspects of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Mongol invasions which indiscriminately slaughtered Christians, Jews and Muslims and left the Assyrian Church in ruins.

In modern times their backing of the Allies in World War I was the occasion for Turkish and Kurdish persecutions so severe as to precipitate their almost total flight from the affected territories. 50,000 survivors of the assassinations, exposure and disease were allowed to settle in Iraq. There their outstanding service to the British Mandate and the agitation of some of them for carving out an autonomous Christian state led to their being distrusted by the nationalists. Their Patriarch was exiled to the USA in 1931. In 1933 a wave of sentiment against them culminated in the machine-gun slaughter of hundreds of them by Iraqi troops. By 1938, however, the Iraqi government could assure the League of Nations that all minority citizens would thenceforth be secure.

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WHO'S WHO? (Continued)

CHALCEDONIANS

The Christians who remained loyal to the Establishment after 451 A.D. described themselves as 'the, holy, orthodox, catholic, apostolic Church'. In 1054 they broke up into the Roman Catholic (Western) and Greek Orthodox (Eastern) bodies. Since these flourished chiefly in Europe whence they spread to the Western Hemisphere, they are sufficiently known to us to require less space here than their numbers, influence and activity entitle them to.

THE GREEK CHURCH

officially calls itself the 'holy, orthodox, catholic, apostolic, Eastern Church'. It is generally referred to as **Greek Orthodox** or **Eastern Orthodox**. In the Middle East it includes the bulk of Establishment loyalists who, after 1054, continued to look to the (Greek) Ecumenical Patriarch in the old imperial capital at Constantinople as their key ecclesiastic. Consequently, though they often opposed government policies, they were popularly known as **Melkites** (The 'Emperor's people') — a term that is used rather differently in the Arab East of today (see page 7).

When in 1453 the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople (repronouncing it Istanbul) they made the Ecumenical Patriarch their millet-style liaison man with all the Christians of the Middle East (with the later exception of the Armenians). This gave the Greek Church a unique influence in the area. As Ottoman power dwindled in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, however, that Church looked increasingly for support from 'Holy Russia's' Orthodox leadership.

The Bolshevik Revolution ended this in 1917. Hence the **Greek Orthodox** of the Arab East began earlier than other churches to explore solid relationships with the rising Arab nationalist leaders. This has given them a present psychological advantage over those churches which had tended to identify with the now defunct European administrations of post-World War I mandate days.

They have three patriarchs. The one in Alexandria (the home of their celebrated library) ministers to an Egyptian remnant of some 50,000 faithful whose numbers have declined significantly since 1956. The Jerusalem Patriarch's laity and lower clergy are mostly Arabs and have consequently had reduced influence in Israel-controlled areas. The Patriarch of Antioch, consistently an Arab in this century, has a half million relatively prosperous fol-

lowers in Syria and Lebanon, 200,000 or more abroad.

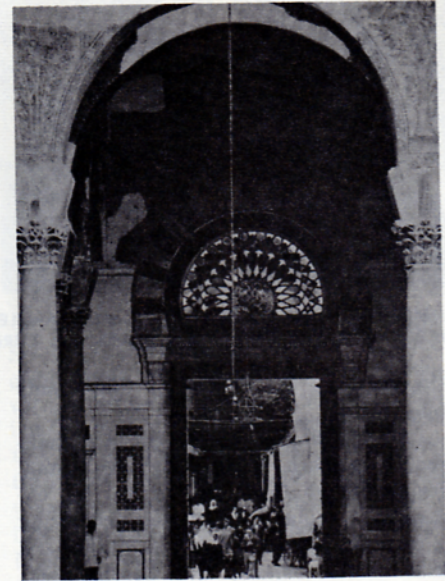
THE LATIN CHURCH

is the name which, for two reasons, is used in the Middle East for the body we call **Roman Catholic**. In that area, 'Rome' traditionally refers to Constantinople, often called 'New Rome' (Rum in Arabic), since it was for so many centuries the Roman Empire's seat of government; hence, among Arab Christians, the adjective **Roman** immediately conjures up thoughts of **Greek Orthodoxy** and **Greek Catholicism**! Secondly, most Arab World churches answerable to the Vatican are of the 'Oriental Congregations' (see **Uniates** below) who conduct the mass and other rites in non-Latin languages.

Latin-rite Catholics in the Arab East number some 50,000 souls. Most of them have resulted from conversions in recent centuries by French, British and American missionaries. A few families stem from 'Frankish' Crusader ancestry or influence. This is particularly true in Bethlehem which has had a continuing Latin community since Mediaeval times.

In 1847 the Vatican revived its Jerusalem Patriarchate. This was most attractive to Western-oriented, urban Arab Christians in commerce and the professions. Its appeal, however, is rather less with today's young Christian intellectuals, especially in the Holy Land, who tend to identify more with nationalist trends.

Monastic orders — Jesuit, Franciscan, Dominican, Salesian, Sisters of Zion, Little Sisters of Jesus, Christian Brothers, White Fathers and others — continue to send scholars, educators and social workers from

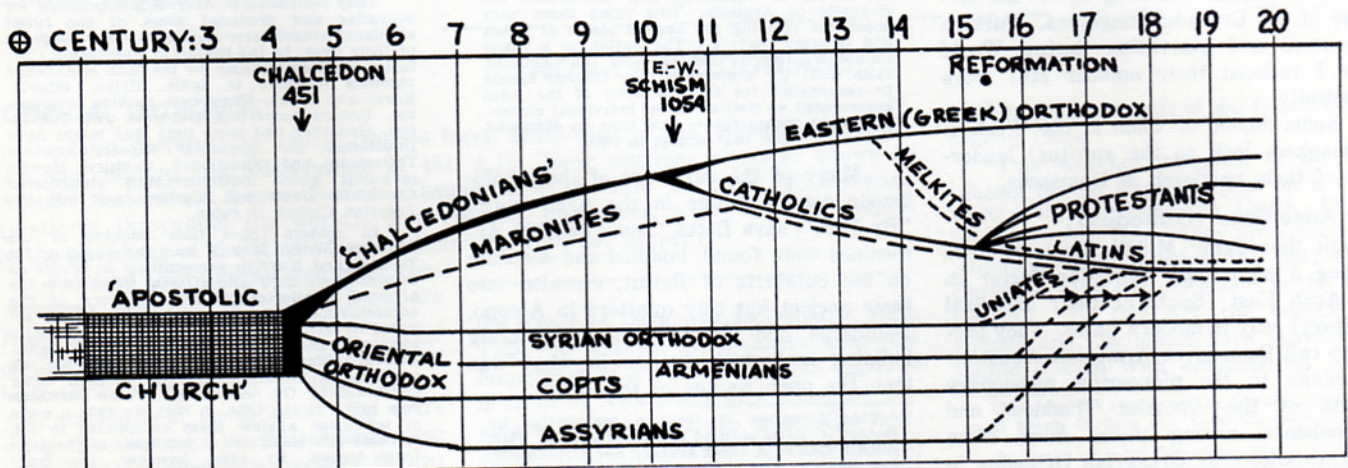


Looking out the Umayyad Mosque doorway toward the Street called Straight where St. Paul stayed in Damascus (Acts 9:11).

abroad for research and service to the lands that cradled Christianity.

THE UNIATES,

or **Uniates**, number over 8 million throughout the world. They are the product of the Vatican's efforts (amplified since 1622 by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith) to heal the divisions of 451 and 1054 by bringing the separated churches under the jurisdiction of the Pope and into conformity with Roman Catholic doctrine. While accepting papal supremacy they are allowed to continue such ancient traditions as marriage of the clergy, wine for the laity at Communion and baptism by immersion. They conduct their rites in their own historic manner and in their ancestral tongues. (Continued on Page 7)



A schematic suggestion of the historic relationships of the churches we are considering. Broken lines indicate the Maronites, Melkites and other Uniates that have come to accept papal authority.

### Churches In The Arab East — WHO'S WHO ?

#### UNIATES (Continued)

Unlike the Latins they are not organized territorially but by rite and prefer to be called 'Eastern Rite' Catholics rather than 'Uniates'. Four of their six patriarchs are Cardinals. Their largest single body is the **Ukrainian Catholic** which is suffering far more than better publicized ethnic and religious groups in the Soviet Union. Their major communions in the region of our concern are as follows:

#### The Maronites,

numbering some 750,000 in the Arab East, derive their name from St. Maro, a Fifth Century friend of St. Chrysostom. Anciently they were sympathetic with, but organizationally apart from, the Church Establishment of Constantinople. They are dominant in Lebanon, in which setting we deal with them more fully (page 10). Under Crusader influence, they became, about 1180 A.D., the first of the Oriental churches to accept papal supremacy. To this day theirs is the only one to have done so completely, their full status having been spelled out in 1736.

Restless under Ottoman rule, they sought French protection for their first moves toward complete Lebanese independence. They have had a special affinity for France and the West ever since and some 300,000 now live in Europe, Australia and the Americas. At the same time, their unique and united devotion to Lebanon has been forged by the alternate dangers and security of the centuries. Except in Beirut and abroad, they are largely agricultural, their monasteries being among Lebanon's largest landowners.

#### The Melkites,

or **Melchites**, or **Greek Catholics** are, next to the **Maronites**, the largest and most prosperous Uniate community in the Arab East. With high educational standards for clergy and laity, they are the former **Greek Orthodox** who, since 1724, have accepted the authority of the Pope, though they have their own Patriarch. It is these people of

whom the Arab thinks when you say 'Roman Catholic' (**Rum Kathulik**), 'Rome' in this case referring to Constantinople, whose Byzantine rites they still use.

The 24,000 **Melkites** left West of the Jordan have been among the most vigorous defenders of the rights of the Palestinian gentiles now under Israeli domination. Their patriarchal headquarters are in Damascus.

The Uniate churches that follow were formed from 'Non-Chalcedonian' communions, all of them except the **Chaldaean Catholics** having been **Oriental Orthodox**.

#### Syrian Catholics

are those who have left the Syrian (**Jacobite**) Church for Rome. **Roman Catholicism** was established rather precariously in Syria by Bishop Akhidjan of Aleppo in the Seventeenth Century. Their Uniate church did not, however, come into being until 1783. They suffered severely from the holocaust of 1914-18 but — thanks largely to their skillful, ecumenically minded, post-war patriarch, Cardinal Tappuni — they have achieved a remarkable recovery in prosperity, morale and education. They now include some 70,000 in the Fertile Crescent.

#### The Coptic Catholics,

numbering about 83,000, trace their seeding back to St. Francis of Assisi's Egyptian preaching mission of 1219. In 1741 Athanasius, the **Coptic Bishop** of Jerusalem, joined the **Roman Catholic Church**. However, too few others followed his example to make a **Uniate Coptic Church** feasible before 1895. Like the **Coptic Protestants**, they are on remarkably good terms with the much larger **Coptic (Orthodox)** community from which their membership has come.

#### Armenian Catholics

are more influential than their 30,000 membership would suggest. Their late Cardinal Agagianian was twice a leading candidate for Pope.

#### Chaldaean Catholics

are those who have gone over to Rome from the **Assyrian ('Nestorian')** Church. Attempts to bring that Church fully into the Roman fold go back to the Thirteenth Century. Their **Uniate church**, however, was not established until 1830 and only became effective after 1854. Their sound organization accounts largely for their multiplying many times to exceed the membership of the **Assyrian** body from which they've sprung. Their high degree of security in Iraq is partly attributed to their determined non-involvement in politics. There are some 20,000 in Iran, 10,000 in Syria and Lebanon and 25,000 in the Americas.

#### PROTESTANTS,

who use more restrictive statistics, officially number less than 250,000 in the Arab East. Under their own Arab leadership most of them are **Presbyterian (Evangelical)** in Lebanon and Syria (where the American Mission sponsored their first congregation in 1848) and **Anglican (Episcopal)** in Jordan and Palestine. **Anglicans** and **Presbyterians** are also active in Egypt where two-thirds of their membership is located. Missionary-established hospitals, clinics, and schools — notably the American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo — though founded more to serve than to convert — have inevitably added to the winsomeness that has built up the Protestant Arab community.

Other Protestant fellowships — **Quakers**, **Baptists**, **Adventists**, **Pentecostals** and **Jehovah's Witnesses** — are tiny but should not go unnoticed. They, especially the **Quakers**, have provided bridges of understanding with the West.

**Armenian Protestants**, though numbering barely 10,000, have exercised disproportionate influence through Hagazian College, Beirut, the only Armenian institution of higher learning in the Middle East.

#### OMISSIONS

For the fullest understanding of Eastern Christianity one must go far beyond the sketchy presentation above and study about the Patriarchs, ecumenical cooperation, missions and refugee services.

Ancient Christendom was divided into the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Rome and, later, Jerusalem. Many aspects of present-day church administration and functioning — especially among the Orthodox and Uniates — can only be understood against this background.

The ecumenical spirit has amazing and heartwarming expressions throughout the Arab East. My past observations on this theme — syndicated in English, French and German by the Ecumenical Press Service in February, 1971 — need to be expanded and brought up to date.

Missions and refugee aid have stimulated many mutually enlightening relations between the Western and Arab worlds. Much more needs to be known about them.

Expanded appreciation of the people summarily dealt with in the above "WHO'S WHO?" is also in order. For this I can heartily recommend Dr. Carnegie Samuel Callan's major article on the Eastern-Rite Churches and shorter articles on the Uniates projected for the new edition of the **Encyclopaedia Britannica**.



The Virgin Mary Coptic Church of Maadi (Suburban Cairo) has three domes to honor the Trinity. — WCC Photo

# Christians in The Arab East — WHO'S WHERE?

## People, Places and Statistics

Program hawkers at football stadiums shout, "Y'can't follow the game without a score card!" So you buy a program with score card to help you identify the individual players by their numbers and to learn their relations to the rest of the team by their assigned positions.

Budgetarily and promotionally, of course, Middle Eastern Studies and Departments of Comparative Religion rank considerably below football on American campuses! To question the values which have produced this situation would be un-American! However, there is one basic parallel: You can't understand what's going on in history's often crucial playing field, the Middle East, without at least a smattering of knowledge of the people involved.

The Middle East is larger than its Arab portion. And Christians are but a small part of its population. Therefore, studies of Cyprus, Turkey and Iran, and of the varieties of Muslims, Jews and other faiths need to be pursued. However, the Arab world is vital to our future and the Christians in its Eastern portion are significant. Hence, the accompanying scratches on portions of the surface should have some value.

In the WHO'S WHO section on pages 4-6, I've tried to introduce the Christian bodies individually, *communion by communion*. Herebelow I'm suggesting something of their relation to each other and to their neighbors *country by country*. Space makes sketchiness essential so I've little more than hinted at the deep roots of the churches in each country, and the modern social and political settings in which Christians find themselves.

In the process, I've made considerable use of statistics. Lest their limitations be misunderstood, it should be pointed out that in the Middle East statistics are much less worshipped than in the West. In fact, their value is so suspect that precise figures are unusually hard to come by. David's census was seen as prompted by Satan (I Chronicles 21:1). And Jesus noted how readily a measuring device can cut off the light (Matthew 5:15)!

Statistical tables do lose the individual in a mathematical blur. And overemphasis on indicators of largeness and smallness, shrinkage and growth can induce pride or depression, admiration or contempt. These can, in turn, cut off the light of faith, hope and appreciation.

The figures interwoven below are therefore submitted diffidently and, for the most part, in appropriately smaller type. Their precision may be questioned. And where accurate they may lead to misinterpretations of the human beings they lump together. Still, I believe that to the Western mind they can convey something of the vitality and interrelationships so

144,000 Christians (cf. Rev. 7:4, 14:1-3) for their faith. The resultant triple dating of Cairo's daily newspapers (which also denote the years since Christ's birth and Mohammed's *hegira*) testifies to the multiple nature of Egypt's religious heritage.

In that land today Copts outnumber other Christians 15 to 1. Out of a national population of 26,000,000, the official 1960 census numbered almost 2,000,000 Copts. Certain enthusiasts believe that a millet-type count could push the figure as high as 6,000,000. Robert Betts, after studying various informal data like the religious ratios in obituary columns, supports the popularly accepted claim of 4,000,000.

More important than accurately numbering them is their relationship with their Muslim fellow-citizens. This reached its heyday after World War I when the "Cross and Crescent Movement" and the Wafd party (for national unity and independence) welded Christian and Muslim political thought and action into a "holy, patriotic alliance." Egypt's constitution of 1922 thus came to be the first in the Arab East to grant freedom of religion and equality to all citizens before the law. *Ulamas* (Muslim religious scholar-judges) then paraded arm-in-arm with Christian priests. And Coptic Father Sergios' frequent preaching from the historic pulpit of the al-Azhar University mosque eloquently heralded the dawn of a new interfaith solidarity.

The turmoil attending World War II, however, combined with other factors to diminish some of this solidarity. The coming of Nasser to 18 years at the helm of state with his emphasis on the unifying power of Islam could not help further eroding Coptic influence. His first republican elections — on a district basis, without a millet-style selection of candidates — sent only one Coptic representative to the legislature. Nasser, who was permitted to appoint 10 legislators, helped redress the balance by placing 8 Copts in office, but this still fell short of a proportionate 25. There are signs that under Sadat a more nearly representative balance will be struck. How this would be affected by

important to understanding the Christians of the Arab East. So here goes!\*

### EGYPT

The Holy Family's oft-depicted Flight into Egypt as refugees from Herod's wrath might be construed as the beginning of Christianity along the Nile. So might the ministry of St.



### EGYPT

Mark who died as Bishop of Alexandria c. 68 A.D. The separation of the Copts from the larger church of the Roman Empire in 451 to become a purely Egyptian Christian body might also be called a beginning of sorts.

The Coptic calendar, however, dates back to 281, the 'Year of the Martyrs,' when the pagan Roman Emperor Diocletian reportedly slaughtered an apocalyptic

\* The maps are reproduced from *The American Heritage Dictionary* by permission of the copyright owners, the American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc. For much of the modern data accompanying them, my deep indebtedness to Robert B. Betts and Norman A. Horner will become evident when their researches are published.

	Arab and Non-Arab Mideast	Egypt	Iraq	Israel	Jordan	Lebanon	Syria
Total population	120,324,000	26,080,000	7,160,000	2,153,850	1,729,926	1,636,800	4,561,000
Greek Orthodox	} 2,688,774	89,062	100,000	18,000	10,000	149,000	172,873
Oriental Orthodox		1,186,353++				69,000++	164,396
Uniate & Latin Catholics	1,709,000	169,915	211,745	39,189	46,437	683,761	257,988
Protestants	334,921	153,914	1,164	1,933	9,124	20,149	44,648
Jews	2,045,950	13,500	6,000	1,880,000		7,000	5,000
Muslims	87,384,336	17,397,946	4,508,779	159,000	1,700,000	536,000	3,286,243

These conservative statistics — extracted from Clemmer and Rycroft's *A Factual Study of the Middle East* (Presbyterian, 1962) — are the most recent available in a single published source. Norman A. Horner is now in the Middle East doing detailed research on Church membership, trends and their implications. When published, his figures should be the fullest and most up-to-date ever.



closer union with Qaddafi's Muslim-dominated Libya, however, is anybody's guess.

52% of Egypt's Christians are in Upper Egypt North of Luxor, the remainder mostly — and increasingly — in the ancient quarters and modern suburbs of Cairo and Alexandria. They are thus more urban (47%) than the Muslims (31%) which, together with their tendency to later marriage, helps account for their somewhat lower birthrate and higher rate of survival to maturity.

The 'socialistic' nationalism of the United Arab Republic (reportedly being diluted under Sadat) may have been responsible for the emigration of many non-Coptic Christians with capitalistic inclinations or foreign ties. Armenians who, under Mohammed Ali after 1805, became the majority in the cabinet, have in recent years lost some 20,000 of their 30,000 members to Australia and the Americas. The Greek Orthodox whose forebears made Alexandria one of the three major Christian cities of the ancient world now number a bare 7,000.

Of the 148,000 Catholics the vast majority belong to the six Oriental rites, the largest of which, the native Coptic Catholic Church, has grown in this century from 5,000 to 83,000 while the Latin and Greek-rite churches are shrinking. Evangelicals (Protestant) number some 30,000 communicants and possibly 120,000 constituents; of Cairo's 200-plus churches, 23 are Evangelical. During the British ascendancy, Anglicans (mostly foreign) needed the immense All Saints Cathedral for their 25,000 followers, but that number has dwindled to 1000 who can hardly protest the replacement of their cathedral with an access ramp to a new Nile bridge.

## IRAQ

Mesopotamia which anciently spawned the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires is now mostly Iraqi territory. Large numbers of Jews were exiled there in the Sixth Century B. C. Those who preferred to stay on after they were permitted to depart for Palestine prepared the soil there for early Christian growth. The church of "Babylon" referred to by St. Peter (I, 5:13), however, was presumably at Rome. At any rate, the vigorous Assyrian Church flourished in Mesopotamia until the Fourteenth Century when the Mongol invasions had destroyed so much of that area's life and productivity.



## IRAQ

At the time of Iraq's independence in 1932, its 111,000 Christians constituted about 4% of the population. Almost half of these were Armenian, Syrian Orthodox and Assyrian refugees from Turkish Anatolia. Since Iraqi Christians reproduce faster than their co-religionists elsewhere in the Middle East we need not cast unusual doubt on the claim that they now number 275,000 out of a total of 8,000,000. Probably two thirds of them are Chaldaean Catholics, 10-15% Syrian Catholics, with some 20-25,000 Syrian Orthodox and Assyrians. Except for the latter, as noted below, there has been little tendency to emigrate. Many of the emigrants, in fact, have returned to apply their foreign-born prosperity and broadened experience to the enrichment of their homeland.

The post-independence massacres of 1933 prompted some 10,000 Assyrians to flee the country. However, those uprooted from their villages after the 1963 collapse of the 1958 pro-Communist revolution stayed on in Iraq, finding refuge in its urban centers. In this latter affair many Christians had believed the promises of social progress made by the leftist leader, Kassem. Hence they became deeply involved in the communal strife that culminated in the 1959-60 "Mosul Massacres" in which Communists murdered many conservative Muslim and anti-Kassem partisans. Tarded thus as fellow-travellers, and reputed to sympa-

thize with the desires of some Kurdish tribesmen to secede, many Christian villagers felt impelled to seek security in the cities. By 1965 the Chaldaean Catholics of Baghdad, where the traditional religious segregation by neighborhoods is giving way to integration, had consequently doubled to more than 150,000.

Iraq's constitution of 1924 guaranteed "freedom of conscience and . . . worship" along with "equitable representation to racial, religious and linguistic minorities." Thus 4 Christians and 4 Jews — 6 each by 1946 — were assured election to the legislature. After the 1949-50 general exodus to Israel — alternately blamed on Zionist and anti-Zionist stimulation — the Jews had only one legislative representative.

Kassem's revolution supplanted parliament with military councils which made no provision for confessional representation. After his overthrow, the 1966 appointment of a Syrian Orthodox cabinet member and the opening of diplomatic relations with the Vatican seemed to indicate a trend back to religious equality.

Nonetheless, popular suspicion of Christians was aggravated in the same year by the highly-publicized flight of an Iraqi pilot — a Catholic — to Israel with his MIG-21. Then, of the first 14 Iraqis hanged in 1969 as spies for Israel 2 were Christians. There were actually more Mus-

## WHY A SPECIAL REPRINT FOR CLERGY?

The Link which first carried these three essays reached its readers in the aftermath of the October outbreak of Israeli-Arab hostilities.

The United States military alert had increased our isolation from our European and Japanese allies; it had further revealed how close the Middle East's tensions could bring us to armed confrontation with Russia. Chilly homes and reduced driving speeds were giving us a foretaste of what was in store for America until our relationships with the people of the Middle East were improved. Thus new dimensions had been added to the usefulness of what we had originally conceived simply as a handy reference work on "Christians in the Arab East."

Clergy particularly asked for reprints. Among their reasons have been the following:

1. Their prayers for peace in the lands which first heard the gospel of the Prince of Peace have been enriched by fuller knowledge of the continuing Christian presence there.
2. Their concern for unity in Christ (John 17:21) has been enhanced by awareness of those who, in the Church's original home-lands, have kept the faith.
3. Their ability to correct the anti-Arab bias so common in news reports and to protest unwarranted Congressional attacks on Arabs in general was facilitated by this sharable documentation on the Christian stake in even-handedness, compassion and humility (to paraphrase Micah 6:8).
4. They were reinforced in their determination to sign only such statements on the Middle East as take full account of Christian perspective.
5. They have been stimulated to broaden their understanding still further by seeking out people with first-hand experience in the Middle East: Educators, businessmen, missionaries, exchange students, immigrants, diplomats and others.

In addition, AMEU hopes that this reprint will help you point up, in your sermons and public statements, how justice toward, and friendship with, all the peoples of the Middle East can make world peace more achievable. Do write us for free, pertinent, reliable information and program material, and for our list of books at discount prices.

John M. Sutton  
Executive Director

## Christians in The Arab East — WHO'S WHERE? (Continued)

lms, but the relative smallness of the Christian community made the alleged treachery of 2 disproportionately high. In spite of the emotions which such events can trigger, however, nothing has happened to make any more Christians feel insecure enough to want to leave.

### SYRIA

Among the first gentile churches founded by the Apostles were those in Syria (cf. Acts 15:23). In early Christian scholarship the Syriac language was important and continues to be used in the worship of some 'Monophysite' and Uniate churches.

From the time of Hadrian (Roman Emperor, 117-138) to the post-World War I territorial surgeries by the victorious Allies, Palestine and Lebanon were parts of Syria. Whittier's familiar hymn, therefore, calls the Sea of Galilee "the Syrian Sea". And the American University of Beirut was founded in 1866 as "the Syrian Protestant College".

The modern Republic of Syria is geographically smaller. Its cities, though interspersed with almost every variety of Oriental Christianity, are strongly Muslim.



### SYRIA

Small towns are usually overwhelmingly of one faith or the other. In the Valley of the Christians (Wadi al-Nasara), many totally Greek Orthodox settlements are still dominant. North of Damascus such thriving villages as Saydnaya (with its ancient and imposing convent), Malula (which still speaks a variant of New Testament Aramaic) and other Christian communities dot the Eastern slopes of the Anti-Lebanon range. Along with Byzantine monasteries and Crusader castles they bespeak the antiquity of Syrian Christianity.

Syria's electoral law of 1947 apportioned seats in the Chamber of Deputies by religious identification: 1 Jewish, 18 Christian (7 Greek Orthodox; 2 each Armenian and Syrian Orthodox and Melkite; 1 each Syrian and Armenian Catholic and 2 for other Christian bodies) and 116 Muslim (100 Sunni, 12 Alawi, 3 Druze and 1 Ismaili). Unlike Lebanon, its cabinet positions weren't allotted along sectarian lines. Nonetheless, Christians have served as ministers of finance, education, agriculture and health as well as in diplomacy.

The Constitutional Crisis of 1950, right after the Arab defeat in Palestine, made Islamic law basic and restricted the presidency to Muslims. 4 years later, over Christian and secular resistance, Islam was made the state religion. Though Greek Orthodox Faris Khouri was promptly made Prime Minister, some quarter million Christians read the message of Islamic

Arab Nationalism and emigrated. The fact, however, that an equal number of substantial Muslims also left suggests other political and economic, as well as religious, anxieties.

In 1965 the National Revolutionary Council (which took over after the Baathist Party coup of 1963) made type of work rather than religion the basis for proportional representation. Its first 26-man cabinet included 1 Christian. The rest were Muslim: 1 Druze, 1 Ismaili, 3 Alawis and 20 Sunnis.

In World War I the Christian population was about 200,000 or 10%. This number was swollen between 1918 and 1938 by streams of some 100,000 refugees, destitute and unskilled in Arabic, fleeing Turkish persecution. These, mostly Armenian and Syrian Orthodox, were joined in 1933 by 7,000 Assyrian escapees from the army massacres in newly-independent Iraq. The speed of their absorption is a tribute to both the newcomers and their host country. An appreciative nod also goes to French and other foreign assistance.

The population estimate in 1943, on the eve of independence, was 2,860,500 of whom 403,000 were Christians. Of these, 137,000 were 'Byzantine' (Greek Orthodox and Melkite), 151,000 'non-Chalcedonian' (mostly the new immigrants) and 102,000 Catholic.

The 1960 census, reflecting the emigrants of the previous decade, showed a Christian statistical decline to 361,000 in a total population now expanded to 4,353,600. 'Percentage-wise' this was a decrease from 16% to 8%. Lebanon, North America and, to a much lesser extent, Soviet Armenia were the chief gainers.

### LEBANON

Its snow-capped peaks have given Lebanon its name — meaning "the White Land." Its mountain fastnesses, rugged coastline and protected valleys have enhanced its historic function as a sanctuary for the oppressed.

When the Hebrew prophet Elijah was in danger from King Ahab of Israel, he escaped to Lebanon — to Zarephath, modern Sarafand — where a local widow offered shelter (I Kings 16:33-18:18). Jesus, after His disciples warned Him that "the Pharisees were offended" at Him, "departed into the Coasts of Tyre and Sidon" for Lebanese security (Matthew 15: 12-21). And it was to Lebanon ("Phoenicia") that early Christians, scattered from Jerusalem by the persecutions surrounding the martyrdom of St. Stephen, turned for asylum (Acts 11:19).

Most Lebanese are, in fact, from refugee stock. 30% are Maronites — Christians whose forebears in the Fifth, Sixth and Ninth Centuries sought safety in the Qadisha, or "Holy Valley". The Druzes — whose relationship to Islam is rather like that of Mormons to Christianity — took similar advantage of the Southern mountain strongholds in the Eleventh Century.

In the Twentieth Century, Armenian refugees have found hospitality in Lebanon. So have other World War I survivors of the wrath of Turkish and Kurdish militants — Jacobites, Syrian Catholics, Chaldeans and Assyrians. When, after the establishment of Israel, successive waves of Palestinians straggled into neighboring Arab countries 164,000 made their way into

Lebanon. And political uncertainties or the possibility of socialistic expropriations of property have also brought immigrants from Arab countries.

In 1920 the extension of the boundaries to make present-day Grand-Liban



### LEBANON

(“Greater Lebanon”) added a largely Muslim supplement to the previously overwhelmingly Christian citizenry. The religious mix resulting from the above and other factors naturally needs a political system that will produce both representativeness and cohesiveness. Lebanon's answer has been 'confessionalism' — an interesting modernization of outgrowths of the millet experience.

It bases its proportional representation on the population percentages of its first (and last) census in 1932 which revealed Christians to be in a slight majority. Since its 1944 independence from the French Mandate, therefore, its Chamber of Deputies has maintained a ratio of 6 Christians to 5 Muslims (counting the Druze as Muslim). Of the present 99 Deputies, 54 are Christian (30 Maronite, 11 Greek Orthodox, 6 Melkite, 4 Armenian Orthodox and 1 each Armenian Catholic, Protestant and "other Christian") and 45 are Muslims (20 Sunni, 19 Shia and 6 Druze).

By a 'gentlemen's agreement' the President is regularly a Maronite, the Prime Minister a Sunni, the Speaker of the House a Shia and the Vice-Speaker Greek Orthodox. Other posts are similarly, though less rigidly, distributed.

There is some feeling that high Muslim birthrates and Christian emigration may have reversed the population proportions in the decades since 1932. Betts, however, cites recent sociological studies of birthrates, mortality, immigration and emigration which indicate that (apart from the Palestinian refugees) a majority of Lebanon's people are still nominally Christian. Whether or not this is the case, most Muslims — especially Shias and Druze — seem content with the present framework, preferring not to upset appercarts with a new census. The 1958 Constitutional Crisis seems to have justified this. President Chamoun's seeking of an unconstitutional second term at that time precipitated some nastily violent Christian-Muslim fracasces. These were made more bitter by Chamoun's having refused to sever relations with 'Christian' Britain and France when those countries joined Israel's 1956 invasion of 'Muslim' Egypt. Pro-Chamoun Muslims and anti-Chamoun Christians, however, revealed the criss-crossing of traditional confessional lines, and other elements combined to stimulate greater interconfessional trust than ever before.

Moves toward orderly change, on the other hand, are receiving reasonable consideration. One proposal is that a Christian President with a Muslim Vice-President should alternate with a team in which the religions are reversed. At the same time, there are new modifications at work within the old system. While confessional ratios remain the same, the former domination of the House of Deputies by landlords and lawyers is giving way to other types of business and professional men. And younger, less traditional, Deputies are introducing innovations.

Practical testing, however, is the proof of the political pudding! The government has maintained stability since 1958 despite

problems generated by Palestinian commando activities within Lebanon, by the Intra-Bank scandal, and by Israeli raids interpreted as aiming to conquer and annex South Lebanon. And Lebanon continues to produce double the per capita income of any 'non-oil' Arab country!

To get down to data about the individual communions:

The 149,000 Greek Orthodox (as of 1962) have the greatest claim to continuity with the New Testament church (cf. Acts 21:2-6). They are strongest in the North where their Balamand Seminary and most of their convents and monasteries are located, but in Beirut they make up 10% of the population. Their Bishop Khodr is very strong for personal commitment, for the solution of social problems (including those within the Church) in a Christian spirit, for expanding educational opportunities and for ecumenical cooperation. Their numbers are being increased (some think to as many as 190,000) by Christian emigrants from Egypt, Syria, Israel and Turkey.

Maronites — the country's largest minority — though loyal to the Pope, conduct their own liturgies in Syriac and Arabic. Their priests are free to marry and many have secular jobs on the side. The Antonines, their most active monks, maintain 53 religious houses, 8 missionary centers, 17 schools, 4 periodicals, 3 hospitals and a printery.

The Melkites constitute about 6% of the population of 2,152,000. Though also in union with Rome, they use Greek-style icons instead of religious statues in their worship, which is conducted in Arabic.

Syrian, Armenian and Chaldaean Catholics are much fewer. Latin-rite Catholics, though few, have a tremendous influence through their extensive publications, two seminaries and St. Joseph's University.

Of the Oriental Orthodox, 135,000 Armenians and 7000 Assyrians are discussed elsewhere. The small Syrian Orthodox is the only 'Non-Chalcedonian' body in the Near East Council of Churches.

Americans have, since 1819, been the largest foreign Protestant stimulus. The early tendency to convert local Christians was resented, but their 'ed. and med.' undertakings have been highly appreciated. George Antonius (*The Arab Awakening*, p. 47) credits the Syrian Protestant College (known since 1926 as the American University of Beirut) with having had an "influence on the Arab revival, at least in its earlier stages, . . . greater than any other institution".

## JORDAN

Trans-Jordan was the Biblical home of Edomites, Amorites, Ammonites, Gad and Reuben. Jesus repeatedly preached and healed there (John 10:40). And, under the Crusaders, with Kerak as its capital, it became the chief fief of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem. Under both the Romans and the Turks, its fertile portions belonged to Syria from which Trans-Jordan was separated after World War I. With the Hashemite Emir Abdullah as its king it then became a British mandate.

After gaining its full independence in 1946 it established a Council of Representatives in which 4 of the 18 seats were guaranteed to the Christian minority.

In 1950, with the annexation of the 'West Bank' Arab remnant of Palestine, including Old Jerusalem, it changed its name to "H a s h e m i t e Kingdom of Jordan". This called for the addition of 20 seats, at least 3 of them to be for



## JORDAN



Throughout the centuries refugees have been sustained by, and borne witness to, their faith. Here, in the foothills of Mount Lebanon, Palestinian Christians built a chapel even before replacing tents and shanties with more substantial homes.

Christians. Currently Christians occupy 10 seats, 3 more than the guaranteed minimum. The Senate, appointed by the King, is usually generously sprinkled with Christians, as are the Cabinet, the Foreign Service and the military.

In 1944 the British estimated that there were 30,000 Christians in Trans-Jordan, mostly Greek Orthodox. The Jordanian census of 1964 listed 115,000. In the same two decades, the growth in the capital city of Amman (New Testament Philadelphia) was from 5,000 to over 40,000. Contributory to that change was the arrival of a sizeable portion of the 55-60,000 Christian Palestinians who fled or were driven from their homes when Israel was created. More arrived in 1967 when Israeli control was extended to Bethlehem, Old Jerusalem, Nablus and other ancient centers of Christian life.

64% of Jordan's Christians, most of them Palestinian Arabs, belong to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Candidates for the priesthood who used to get their training in Jerusalem must now travel to the more distant Balamand Seminary in Lebanon.

Of the Oriental Orthodox there are some 1500 Armenians and 1000 Syrians, mostly in the Ashrafiyeh Hill section of Amman. Their ties with North American relatives make emigration tempting as they face the economic hardships stemming from the June, 1967, war and the Black September, 1970, Palestinian uprising.

There are some 40,000 Latin Catholics on the two banks of the Jordan — roughly ten times the number when, in 1847, Pope Pius IX restored the Jerusalem Patriarchate. Much of this growth may be credited to the persistent ministrations and educational programming of the Franciscans. 90% of Jordan's Latin clergy are Palestinian. Their Bishop N. J. Simaan is also an Arab.

Among the Uniates, the Melkites have an Archbishop, Bishop, 27 priests and 4 schools in Amman. Some 1000 Armenian Catholics and fewer Syrian Catholics are dwindling through emigration to the U. S. and Canada.

The 1000-member Arab Episcopal congregation in Amman is Jordan's largest Protestant church. There are also a very few Baptists, Nazarenes and Adventists.

## PALESTINE/ISRAEL

As with Dixie, Araby, the Free World and the Bible Belt, the borders of the Holy Land have been vague and varied! We deal with it here as the geographic area which in 1923 came under the British Palestine

Mandate — between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan Valley.

The Church was born in Palestine. Starting as a movement for spiritual renewal within Judaism, it soon burst its ethnic bonds and opened its arms to all who would take Jesus Christ seriously. Spreading across the civilized world, it also had a phenomenal early growth and prolonged vitality in the Land of its birth. Even before the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine in 312 A. D., most Palestinians had, despite intermittent persecutions, become Christian. They remained in the majority there for about 9 centuries thereafter.

They prospered for a variety of reasons: Their patriarchs were masterly administrators. Christian Emperors gave them a 'most favored' status. And the spots associated with significant Biblical events, especially in the life of Christ, gave to residents and pilgrims alike the 'on-site feel' for the significance of religious history.

The Seventh Century brought the Holy Land under Muslim conquerors. Then, in the Twelfth Century — with their strange mixture of chivalry and savagery —



## PALESTINE

the European Christian Crusaders established their dominance. But Saladin recaptured it for the Muslims who, reinforced by conversions and settlers, remained the heavy majority there until after the creation of Israel. The boundaries claimed by Israel from 1948 to 1967 appear on the accompanying map. Contrary to

# Christians in The Arab East — WHO'S WHERE? (Concluded)

international agreements, Israel uses Jerusalem, not Tel Aviv, as its capital.

Anciently there were sizable rural Jacobite communities and smaller Armenian and Assyrian settlements. When the Ottoman Empire classified all Christians in the region as a single millet, however, many of these were absorbed into the dominant Greek Orthodox fellowship.

A reverse trend began in the late Nineteenth Century. Within that body thus enlarged, clergy disputes over loyalty to the Patriarch of Jerusalem or of Constantinople, together with a communications gap between the hierarchy and local parishes, had contributed a degree of stagnation. More than half the Greek Orthodox membership, including the most active and forward-looking, defected. Impressed by the fine schooling and dedicated clergy introduced by Catholic and Protestant missions, most of them transferred to Melkite, Latin and Anglican congregations. Present youth and intellectuals, moving in currents of nationalism, are again looking to the strongly Arabic, historically deepest-rooted, Greek Orthodox Church for their identity.

The 1918 census revealed that, of approximately 700,000 Palestinians, 574,000 were Muslim, 70,000 were Christian and 56,000 Jewish. The British Mandate census of 1931 showed that, of the new 850,000 total, the Christians were still 10%. Their affiliations were: 38,100 Greek Orthodox, 18,000 Latins, 12,500 Melkites, 5500 Protestants, 3500 Maronites, 3000 Armenian Orthodox and 1000 Syrian Orthodox. The Greek Orthodox Palestinians were strong in Jerusalem where half of the Arab population was Christian. In Haifa they constituted half the Christian population, in Nazareth 10%.

The final Mandate census reported that in 1947 there were 2,877,340 souls in Palestine of whom 145,060 were Christian. The Jews, including immigrants from Europe, had increased to 608,230, or 31%, and owned slightly over 6% of the real estate. Since May 15, 1948, when the State of Israel was proclaimed, the population percentages have changed radically. The large-scale disappearance of Christians from their traditional centers along the coast came almost immediately. Their departure from the North (which Isaiah 9:1 calls "Galilee of the Goyim") has, however, been slower. In fact, their right to stay there is strongly defended by anti-Establishment Israelis.

The over-all percentage of Christians, especially those in business and the professions, who are leaving the country seems to be high. This is difficult to confirm in detail as the Israeli government's emigration figures — allegedly to avoid revealing the proportion of departing Jews — are not released on a sectarian basis. The census of 1961, which did not include the West Bank, reported 50,500 Christians in Israel. Composite statistics from Jordan and Israel in 1970 totaled over 190,000 in the two countries.

The Greek Orthodox, with 14 bishops and a Patriarch, have the largest membership, claiming some 80,000 Palestinian adherents on both sides of the Jordan River. The Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem, which did so much for survivors of the Turkish massacres

of 1915-16, has dwindled in a few years from 10,000 to less than 2000. Other Oriental Orthodox — Syrian, Coptic and Abyssinian — are even fewer.

The Latins numbered 36,000 West of Jordan by a 1971 estimate. They are reinforced by their religious orders from the West. Uniate Catholics — except for a few Maronites, Armenians and Syrians — are Melkite, with 24,000 adherents whose clergy struggle vigorously to protect their people's rights.

Of the Protestants, the Anglicans are the most numerous, with their excellently staffed St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. There are also a few Presbyterians, and foreign-related congregations.

Some churches suffered heavy property losses after the establishment of Israel in 1948. The new government confiscated some \$16,000,000 worth of Lutheran property as "German" and therefore "enemy", but finally settled for \$850,000. Russian Orthodox churches and monasteries were handed over to the Soviet government in apparent appreciation for its help in establishing the Zionist state. Such tactics have not been repeated in connection with the conquest of the West Bank in 1967.

Christians, with their international affiliations, probably fare better than most gentiles under Israeli rule. Still, the reports to the U.N. on discrimination against Palestinians inevitably involve untold Christians. These reports — on the commandeering or demolishing of thousands of Arab homes with inadequate warning, on the imprisoning of Muslim and Christian breadwinners without charge or trial, and on the exiling of Palestinian leaders (like Anton Atallah whom you met on p. 1) without recourse — the Israeli government denounces as prejudiced. It will not, however, permit a U.N. commission, Amnesty International or any other outside body to investigate on the spot.

## THE GULF STATES

The Arab lands along the Persian/Arabian Gulf have had almost no indigenous Christians since the Seventh Century Muslim conquest. Kuwait has some 200 Christian citizens including its commander of internal security and one of its ambassadors.

There are also foreign missions — notably those of the American Dutch Reformed Church in Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman — but these have concentrated more on establishing schools and hospitals than on forming native congregations.



## THE GULF

The ruler of Bahrain, a Muslim, contributed heavily to the building fund for the church completed in his island sheikhdom in 1971.

Gulf churches have primarily expatriate congregations. The discovery of oil has brought in American, Asiatic, British and European workers, many of them churchgoers. It has also proved a godsend to skilled Palestinians, Christian and Muslim, in search of homes and work. During and after the 1950's other Arabs, with a generous sprinkling of Christians, added their energies and expertise to the expanding economy. The U.S. naval base at Bahrain brings in military chaplains and personnel.

## ENVOI

We have had our introduction to the Christians of the Arab East. It is also important to become better acquainted with their non-Christian neighbors. The young ladies below should make that prospect pleasing. Clockwise from top left, they are: Syrian, Circassian and Bedouin Muslims and an Iraqi Sephardic Jew.



AMEU is incorporated as an educational organization in the State of New York and has been granted tax exemption by the Federal and State governments.



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