

Assyrians Cannot Remain in the Dark

Fred Aprim
Dec 25, 2022

On September 14, 2021, a ceremony took place at the Franso Hariri Hall in Arbil, northern Iraq on the occasion of the consecration of Mar Awa III Royel as the new patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East (ACOE), which took place on September 13.

Assyrian professor Robin Bet-Shmuel was among those invited to make a speech for the occasion. Dr. Bet-Shmuel spoke about the history of the said Church. He mentioned about the murders of Patriarchs Mar Benyamin Shimun [1918] and Mar Eshai Shimun [1975] by saying, *if we said that the murderer of Mar Benyamin Shimun is a criminal, then the murderer of Mar Eshai Shimun is a criminal as well¹, we have to work with such mentality and fairness.* As Dr. Bet-Shmuel continued with his speech, a written message was handed to Dr. Bet-Shmuel to end his speech. Some were pleased that Bet-Shamuel's speech was cut short, others were discontented while those simple minded missed to understand the intricacy of the episode that they just witnessed. Dr. Bet-Shmuel was then stormed at and was called names by certain members of the ACOE.

Many Assyrians who are aware of the events surrounding the ACOE in the last 50 years, the strong ties between the church leadership with certain families and the ongoing ties between the ACOE and the Kurdish leadership that were established during the leadership of the late Patriarch Mar Dinkha prompted the church leaders to force Dr. Bet-Shmuel to abruptly end his speech.

After the assassination of martyred Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun in 1975, a synod of the Church of the East (the name changed to the Assyrian Church of the East after the synod) convened in St. Paul's Priory, Alton, Hampshire, in October 17 [1976]. The synod, consisting of seven bishops and two other delegates, met to elect a new patriarch to succeed martyred Mar Eshai Shimun. Mar Dinkha, the bishop of Iran, was duly selected, and consecrated at Barnabas' church, Ealing, England. Two Anglican bishops attended the consecration. Also, on November 9 [1976] Mar Dinkha was welcomed by the Archbishop of Canterbury at a session of the Church of England General Synod.² People always wondered, why gather in London. The said Church did not have a bishopcrates in England or Europe for that matter. Why not convene in Beirut (Lebanon), Hassaka (Syria), Tehran (Iran), Karala (India), Baghdad or Arbil (Iraq) where the church had bishopcrates. Did the church require blessings from the Church of England, people ask?

In 1976, Mar Dinkha checked on the remains of the charitable fund set up for the benefit of the Assyrians by officers of the Royal Air Force in World War II. The fund was under the control of the counselors on Foreign Relations in London. Contacts between the Church of the East and the Anglican Church were re-established in the early 1970s. After prolonged negotiations, the fund was disposed of for the building of a patriarchal center for the Church of the East in Baghdad. That center was never built by the church.

1 Simko had invited the Assyrian patriarch Mar Benyamin Shimun to his home for friendly talks, but murdered the patriarch as he was leaving Simko's house by giving a signal to his men that were on the rooftops to shoot the patriarch in the back.

2 Coakley, J.F., *The Church of The East And The Church of England: A History of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyrian Mission.* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992.

After the release of David Malik Ismael, the assassin of Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun³ from prison, he traveled to the US and Australia and attended church services in several diocese in the two continents where he was seated in front rows, recognized and honored by name. The ACOE leadership under Mar Dinkha failed to deal with the situation. This was not surprising, because Mar Dinkha was a weak leader who lost control over certain of his bishops and even priests who did not comply with his directions.

It is stated that when people are weak and uneducated, religion gets into their heads. Politics needs religion, because politicians have found in religion a system that could be manipulated to serve their interests and implement their plans. The Church is not the answer to the Assyrian dilemma –it will never be. Sargon Dadesho, Head of the Bet-Nahrain Democratic Party (BNDP) and President of Bet-Nahrain Inc. had said, we have always said that the church is the last fortress for the Assyrian people.⁴ Dadesho has repeated his old statement lately. Interestingly, his policies and actions have been polarized along the policies and decisions of the ACOE. More recently, Dadesho had traveled from California, USA to Arbil, Iraq to attend the Sept 12, 2022 grand opening of the new ACOE patriarchate in Ankawa, Arbil. Many argue that it is the religious tendency that dominates and overshadows the BNDP – an institution with a political facade and a sectarian foundation.

What the leaders of the eastern Syriac speaking churches have been committing in the last 45 years against their own history and people is unforgiving. For example, Patriarch Mar Sako had forged authorship⁵ and had fueled the division between the brothers who are members of the Assyrians Church of the East and Chaldean Catholic Church. Patriarch Mar Dinkha had thrown himself in the bosoms of the Kurds who massacred and persecuted the Assyrians and repeatedly called them the Assyrians' brothers. It is sad that this nation refuses to stand up and puts an end to the church interference in all aspects of life of the people while failing to truthfully fulfill their spiritual duties first. The outcome is that we keep going backwards and the Assyrian people continue to flee Assyria, the occupied homeland.



Sargon Dadesho at the grand opening of the ACOE patriarchate in Arbil, seated second row, in the center

3 <https://www.atour.com/history/1900/20000717a.html>

4 <https://www.facebook.com/ashur.giwargisnew.3>

5 <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=527196226079913&set=a.368514811948056>