

## **MAJORITY & MINORITY: A CASE FOR STUDY**

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During the week of January 6th through 10th, 2003, a public campaign was organized for the support of what is called "a unique Chaldean nation." During this campaign, Bishop Sarhad Jammo, the champion of this separatist movement, presented a lecture titled Chaldean Renaissance. In his lecture the bishop basically relied on a statement by a late 19th century Chaldean Catholic Church Patriarch, Yousif Audo, who had mentioned what the bishop called "the Chaldean nation". The bishop additionally presented statements by two other Catholic clergymen - Addai Scher and Shmouel Jameel - who have mentioned the mythical geographical term Chaldo-Athur. The rest of the lecture meanwhile was about bits and pieces of some general information that has nothing to do with arguing the essence and of the so-called Chaldean Renaissance in my opinion.

An English dictionary defines the word 'Renaissance' as "revival" or "rebirth". Both meanings stress the process of a resurrection of something that was originally there but has been lost. In other words, one cannot revive something that did not exist in the first place! Historically, northern Iraq was Assyrian; our church records called Assyria's bishops as "bishops of Athur" and "bishops of Nineveh" into the Dark Ages. Historically, the region of today's northern Iraq was never presented as Chaldean, whether geographically or ethnically. Claiming that few clergymen have used that name lately (after the Chaldean Catholic Church was established in 1830 and the title Chaldean was popularized by the Vatican) does not justify legitimizing this title. Therefore, I wonder what Bishop Jammo is referring to when he calls for the revival and rebirth of something? Where was Chaldo, if Chaldo ever existed in the first place? Why would anybody legitimize and propagate the non-existent? Why would anybody emphasize the exception or the insignificant? This puzzles me.

The Assyrians can, for example, start a campaign of the Syriac language Renaissance because Syriac had a rich history, which is for all practical purposes dead. Bishop Jammo, could have spoken in his lecture about the Renaissance of the Syriac language among the Catholic congregations who in general uses Arabic and Kurdish these days due to the policies of Arabization and Kurdification! But he brought up the issue of population of the members of the Chaldean Catholic Church in Iraq and made comparisons to those of the Church of the East in a questionable attempt to justify his claims. He stated that the Christians were about 5% of the total population in Iraq and that the Chaldeans made 3-3.5% and that the members of the other groups from the Church of the East and Syrian Orthodox Church were about 1.5-2%.

Furthermore, few individuals in the Chaldean Catholic Church have in the last couple years claimed that their numbers in Iraq were around 800,000 while the other Christian groups totaled around 200,000. What do these figures represent and are they reliable? Fact is that there has been no accurate and reliable census in Iraq in the last forty years. In the 1970s and 1980s censuses, for example, the Iraqi government manipulated the numbers by forcing, sometimes under threats, the Assyrians to register as Arabs or Kurds. The Chaldean Catholic Church meanwhile asked its members to officially register as Arabs in the Arab regions and Kurds in the Kurdish regions to avoid conflict; this we know for a fact. Therefore, any reports on figures are misleading and one cannot verify their accuracy. Furthermore, issues relating to how one religious congregation is bigger than another within the same ethnic group is really insignificant when discussing national issues.

It does not take much to analyze the issue of the Christian population in and around the Mosul Province and what each sect represents and the reasons behind the population increase of one sect and the decrease of the other. Let us look at the issue and analyze some early figures.

To start, it is important to understand that for at least two thousands years the Christians in the region of Mosul and its immediate surroundings were living under one political power. There was of course an exception during the short period when part of the population fell under the Roman rule while the other under the Persian. With the coming of the Arabs, Mongols, and Ottomans the Christian communities were basically not separated from the political and geographical point of view; they lived within an identified geographical boundaries and under one political power. It was not until the conclusion of World War One and the 1919 Peace Conference in Paris that the countries of Iraq, Turkey, Syria and others were founded and new borders drawn. Therefore, to look at the Nestorian community as being from Turkey while the Chaldean as being from Iraq is really ludicrous. Additionally, the majority of the Chaldeans of the Mosul plain were Nestorians too until around the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Therefore, those who bring such arguments are impractical. Furthermore, we have to understand that the Nestorians in 1918 moved to the same region as Chaldeans did before Iraq as a country was officially founded in 1921. Therefore, the Nestorians are not some sort of newcomers to Iraq because Iraq did not exist in 1918 to start with.

Now let us look at some figures.

In the middle of the 19th century, and before the Kurdish Badr Khan Massacre of the Assyrians in the Hakkari Mountains (1842-1847), Perkins (1843: p.10) estimated the population of Nestorians in Hakkari at 110,000 (H.L. Murre-Van Den Berg, "From Spoken to a Written Language", Leiden, 1999, p. 39). Still, Fortescue (The Lesser Eastern Churches, p. 159) estimated the number of the Nestorian Assyrians in Hakkari to 100,000 prior to 1914. Yohanan, however, gives the figure at 190,000, but it is not clear if this figure includes those who became Catholics (John Stewart, "Nestorian Missionary Enterprise: A Church on Fire", Trichur, India, 1961, p. 314). Meanwhile, Badger estimated total numbers of Nestorian Assyrians in Turkey and Iran before the Kurdish massacres at 100,000-140,000 (H.L. Murre-Van Den Berg, "From Spoken to a Written Language", Leiden, 1999, p. 40).

In the same period, Badger counted some 10,458 Chaldeans of which the majority lived in the Mosul plain. Towards the end of the 19th century the number had risen to about 17,700 in the southern part and 16,700 in the Salamas region (total 34,400). In 1913, according to Chevalier (Chevalier 1985: p.132), based on the Annuario Pontificio of 1914, the number of Chaldeans had risen to 24,000 and 19,200 respectively (total 43,200) (H.L. Murre-Van Den Berg, "From Spoken to a Written Language", Leiden, 1999, p. 40).

Speaking about the city of Mosul in late 19th century, while still under Ottoman Turks, Sarah Shields writes:

"In 1886-1887 the government tried to figure out how to deal fairly with the dispute between the Nestorians and the Chaldeans. The Catholic conversion effort had been so effective that the Nestorian Patriarch was left with 550 adherents, two churches, and four priests in the city, while the Roman-connected Chaldeans had 650 adherents, two churches, a bishop, and six priests and monks" (Sarah D. Shields, "Mosul Before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells", State University of New York Press, p. 47]). Even in the city of Telkaif, the center of the population that calls its self today Chaldean, the author reports that the Nestorian Patriarch still had 750 people, one church, and seven priests, while the Chaldeans had 1,150 people, two churches, and eight priests (Sarah D. Shields, "Mosul Before Iraq: Like Bees Making Five-Sided Cells", State University of New York Press, fn. 66, p. 221).

From the above we can conclude that until the middle of the 19th century the Nestorian community was still relatively bigger than that of the Chaldean in the Mosul Province and the localities around it, i.e. south of Turkey and Urmia regions. It seems too that around the end of the 19th century the two sides were almost even. All historical accounts attest the fact that it was only in the beginning of the 20th century that the Chaldean side surpassed the Nestorian and this was due to the continuous conversion of the Nestorians to Catholicism and the perishing of a much larger Nestorian population compared to the Chaldean population during WWI. This does not belittle from the lost of life of many Catholics in regions of Saart, Mardin and Jezira during WWI.

## Inside Iraq

The population of Mosul according to the census of 1849 was as follows:

Mohammedans 2,050 families,

Christians 1,100 families (350 Chaldeans, 450 Jacobites, 300 Papal Syrians)

Jews 200 families.

(Rev. George Percy Badger, "The Nestorians and their Rituals", vol. I, Darf Publishers Limited, London, 1987, first published in 1852, p.82)

The question here is if the Chaldeans were 1/3 (one-third) of the total Christians in Mosul in 1849, how did the Chaldeans become 3.5% of the 5% while the Assyrians and Suryanis combined shrunk to 1.5% of the total Christians in Iraq in 2000?

Abd Al-Razzaq al-Hussayni writes that the Governorate of the Mosul Liwa sent an official letter numbered S-200 dated July 12, 1933, to the Interior Ministry indicating the Assyrian families who accepted and rejected the League of Nations decision dated December 14, 1932 regarding the Assyrian issue and their settlement in Iraq. According to this official letter the number of the Assyrian families 'polled' were 5,650 families (Abd Al-Razzaq al-Hussayni, "The History of the Iraqi Cabinets" or Tareekh al-Wazarat al-Iraqiya, Part III, in Arabic, 2nd edition, Sidon, 1953, p. 243). If 5,650 families have expressed their sentiments from the decision of the League, there must have been other families who did not care to express their opinion for one reason or another or they were simply not contacted. Hence, it is reasonable to conclude that there were at least 7,000 or 8,000 Nestorian Assyrian families in Mosul Liwa in 1932 according to the Iraqi figures at the time. If the average family consisted of 6 members, a moderate figure considering that Assyrian families in the villages were bigger in those days, therefore, Mosul Liwa alone had between 42,000 and 48,000 Nestorian Assyrians in 1932. This figure is not unreasonable because we know that more than 80,000 Christians, mainly Nestorians, fled Urmia in 1918. We know too that some of these were massacred and others perished because of hunger among other conditions. Still, a large percentage of this population entered a region, which became later known as Iraq. Therefore, it is reasonable and safe to assume that there were at least 50,000 Nestorians in the newly founded country Iraq in 1921.

After the Semele massacre of the Nestorian Assyrians in 1933 in Iraq, many others converted to Catholicism and became hence Chaldeans. This was due to the well-known reason that the Chaldeans were in good terms with the Iraqi government, while the Nestorians in general were persecuted with the exception of certain group of malik Khoshaba who was on good terms with the government. The Chaldeans had representatives in the Iraqi parliament and ministers in government and the Chaldean Patriarch was a Senator in the Iraqi Senate. Other Nestorian Assyrians escaped to Syria, for example, and their numbers decreased ultimately compared to that of Chaldean Assyrians.

Yusif Hermiz Jammo (Sarhad Jammo's father) wrote on page 113 of his book that the Chaldean population in Iraq in 1937, was 100,000 (Yusif Hermiz Jammo, "The Remains of Nineveh or the History of Telkaif", Baghdad 1937, reprint in 1993 Detroit).

If we consider all variables that play a factor in the growth of any specific population, including birthrate, natural and non-natural deaths, one-way immigration and others, could the Chaldean population have increased 8 folds within 3 generations (from 1940-2000), which means an increase of approximately 3 folds during any given single generation? In other words, how did the 100,000 Chaldeans figure of 1937 reach 800,000 in 2000, as few claim today?

Previously I explained that there were some 40,000 to 50,000 Nestorians in Iraq in 1921. If we apply the Chaldean Assyrians example on the Nestorian Assyrians then the 50,000 Nestorians within 4 generations (1921-2000) should have then increased 12 folds. Therefore, with simple math we can conclude that today the Nestorian population in Iraq should be around 600,000. If Bishop Sarhad Jammo claims in his lecture that the Assyrians and Suryanis make 1.5% of the total Christian population in Iraq, i.e. the Nestorian Assyrians alone are some 100,000 or 150,000, what happened to the remainder of the 600,000?

From the above revelations many conclusions can be reached. It is obvious that many Nestorian Assyrians (members of the Church of the East) continued to convert to Catholicism and be labeled Chaldeans even in the early 20th century. The Chaldeans did not make the Christian majority in the region until later in the 20th century. Furthermore, to claim that this Christian religious sect known as Chaldean is an ethnic group and that it is separate from the Assyrians is a myth according to a ton of historical evidence, including Bishop Sarhad Jammo's own father (in his book "The Remains of Nineveh or the History of Telkaif") and our beloved Chaldean Catholic Church Patriarch, Mar Raphael I BiDawid (in his live interview on the Lebanese Broadcasting Company), who attested to the fact that the Christians of northern Iraq were Assyrians.

Finally, one has to mention the figures recorded by Yusuf Malek, a member of the Chaldean Catholic Church and a civil employee in the government. In 1932, Malek records in his book "Les Consequences Tragiques Du Mandat en Iraq" (The Tragic Consequences of the Mandate in Iraq) that the population of the Mosul Liwa (province) was as such:

Race	Population
Arabs	80,000
Kurds	80,000
Others	182,000
Total	342,000

Malek breaks down the category "others" above as such:

The Others	Population
Yezidis	40,000
Jews	9,000
Mandeans	300
al-Shabak	16,000
Armenians	5,000
Assyrians	111,700
Grand Total	182,000

It is obvious that the Assyrians, Malek recognizes as Nestorians, Chaldeans, and Jacobites, were a majority if Mosul province. Not even the Arabs nor the Kurds matched the Assyrian population.

I only hope that our people would reinvestigate these matters in a more logical manner using all the historical, archaeological and church records available to us today. We cannot build our history on the foundation of what one or two clergymen stated; our study must be thorough and inclusive.

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