

The Holy Apostolic Catholic Church of the East

To understand the recent division in this most ancient Church of the East it is important to write something about its history since its establishment in the early days of Christianity. This church was established by the apostles the first of its patriarchs was St. Peter where in his epistle from Babylon says: "the chosen church which is in Babylon and mark, my son, salute you."

King Ogar, king of Urhai, became Christian. Urhai which was called Edessa by the Greeks, is a city in north west of Mesopotamia, and which stands to this day.

This little kingdom of Urhai remained the centre of Aramian culture after the fall of Assyrian empire. King Ogar sent a letter to Christ, this historical event is recorded in the book called doctrine of Adai, and also by Eusebius of Caesarea, a fourth century historian who says that he saw the original correspondence with his own eyes in the church of Urhai and made a copy of it and recorded it in his ecclesiastical history.

An embassy was sent by king Ogar to sabinus. The deputy of the Emperor Tiberius in Palestine. It consisted of the nobles Mar-Yabil and Shamshagram, with a scribe called Khannan. On the way home they stayed in Jerusalem where they saw and heard Jesus. King Ogar heard what they said and saw, he wished to go himself to Palestine, but was afraid to pass through the Roman domains. Therefore, he sent a letter to Jesus by hand of Khannan which read:

"Ogar Ukama, ruler of the country, to Jesus, the good deliverer, who has appeared in Jerusalem peace.

I have heard of thee and the cures wrought by thy hands, without any medicine or herbs. For it is reported that thou makest the blind see, the lame walk, thou healest those who are tormented with chronic diseases, and raisest the dead. And when I heard of thee, I settled in my mind of two things; either thou art god come down from heaven, or the Son of God.

I requested of thee that that thou wouldst trouble yourself to come to me, and cure the disease which I have. I have also heard that the Jews murmur against thee, and wish to do thee harm. But I have a city, small but beautiful, which is enough for both of us."

When Jesus received the letter. He replied to Kannan the Scribe: "Go and say to thy Lord that sent thee unto me, blessed art thou, that believes in me, though thou hast not seen me, for it is written of me that which see me

will not believe in me, and they which see me not, they will believe and be saved. Now touching what thou hast written to me that I shall come unto thee, it is meet that I should fulfill that for which I was sent hither, and I shall go up unto my Father that sent me; and when I shall have gone up to him, I will send thee one of my disciples, that whatever disease thou hast he may heal. And all that are with thee he shall bring to life eternal, and thy town shall be blessed."

This promise was fulfilled soon after the resurrection by the visit of Mar Adai, and thus became the starting point of the Church of the East and the centre of early Christian life and literature. Perhaps even more so than Jerusalem, Antioch and Seleucia- Cteseiphon, in Babylon.

Among the apostles that worked and established churches in Assyria and Babylon, was Mar Toma (St. Thomas) on his way to India, and Mar Adai who went to Phars in the heart of Persia. Among the first Patriarchs of Seleucia- Cteseiphon listed, are:

1. St. Peter
2. St. Thomas
3. Adai (or Tadai) apostle. 33-45 A.D.
4. Agai student of Adai 45-48 A.D.) Of the
5. Mari student of Adai 48-81 A.D) Seventy
6. Abris relative of the virgin Mary. 82-98 A.D.

110 Patriarchs occupied the Patriarchal See of this most ancient Church of the East including the two present Patriarchs namely; Mar Adai II whose See is in Baghdad (Seleucia-Cteseiphon) and Mar Dinkha IV whose See is in United States of America.

This Church spread Christianity in the Middle East and Far East. The fact that Christian gospel was accepted by the Assyrians was that the Christian faith is of Semitic origin and revealed through prophesies in that language, i.e. Aramaic, a language common to both the Assyrians and Jews. Some Historians mention that Aramaic language was very powerful and was known by Jews more than their own language Hebrew and this was one of the reasons that Christianity spread widely in those days.

This church expanded and by 90 A.D. had already nineteen Episcopal sees, from Mesopotamia to Caspian Sea and India. Towards the end of the first century and the middle of the second century A.D. the influence of this church extended all the way to Rome. All the fathers of the early Christian Church in Rome, later known as the Latin Church, were all Assyrians of Syrians, Aramain speaking people, missionaries of the Church of the East.

According to synodical rules the Patriarch is elected and in the 15th century hereditary patriarch was introduced not by the majority of opinions but by coincidence that a patriarch was elected from the same family. This patriarch, Mar Baba, seized the opportunity of being elected from same family, changed the system of electing patriarch and made it hereditary from same family. Similarly metropolitans and bishops followed the decision and were appointed from the same family i.e. hereditary succession. Due to this change the followers of the church converted to other Christian faiths such as Roman Catholic, Orthodox, etc. and those who remained were mostly Assyrians.

The Church of the East teaches that Jesus Christ was Perfect God and Perfect Man. It acknowledges two natures and two Q'numa in one person of the Son of God, - one authority. Q'numa is an Aramaic term whose nearest equivalent in the Western Languages is the Greek term "hypostasis", or the English word "substance" - the underlying essence of being.

The church condemns the use of the term "Yaldath Alaha" - bearer of God - in referring to the blessed Virgin Mary, and uses instead the term Yaldath Mshikha - bearer of Christ.

SACRAMENTS

The Church holds seven sacraments, namely; Priesthood, Baptism, Anointing, the Holy Eucharist (which is called Qurbana Qaddisha) Remission of Sins, Holy Leaven, and the Sign of the Cross.

In making the sign of the cross, three fingers are joined representing the Holy Trinity. The worshipper first touches the mouth, saying "Glory"; then the forehead "To the Father"; the breast "To the Son" the right shoulder, first, then the left, saying "and the Holy Spirit."

Baptism is administered by immersion, usually forty days after birth. It is accompanied by anointing with sacred oil. Membership of the Church includes all baptized persons. Auricular confession (in the presence of the priest alone) is recognized, but not generally practiced. Instead and individual absolution is given when requested, or is necessary in certain cases. A general absolution for remission of sins is given to the whole congregation, before the parking of the Holy Communion.

Holy Communion is the sacrament by which, through faith, the true body and Blood of Christ are partaken, under the forms of bread and wine. It is always received fasting, and is given to both clergy and laity in both kinds.

The blessed Virgin and the saints are venerated. We pray to them for intercession. Prayers are said for the dead.

Images or icons are forbidden. A simple cross is the only object of veneration permitted.

The Holy Leaven refers to the fact that a portion of the original Bread, used by Christ at the last Supper was brought to the East by the Apostle Thaddeus (Mar Addai) and in every Holy Communion ever since the bread used is made from meal continues with that used in the first Lord's supper.

The version of the scriptures used is in the original Aramaic in which the Gospel was first preached and written – the form known as the Peshitta version, or "Simple and True."

The Apostolic liturgy of St. James of Jerusalem brother of our Lord who celebrated the first Qurbana, or Holy Communion is still in use in the Church of the East, without variation or change. It is known among us by the name of saints Addai and Mari who brought the Liturgy from Jerusalem to Edessa.

The priesthood of the Church of the East has nine orders as the church had received from the hands of the Holy Apostles Mar Patros. Mar Toma, Mar Addai, Mar Bar Tulmai and Mar Mari.

Patriarch, Metropolitans and Bishops occupy the place of Cherubims, Serephims and Thrones; Archdeacons, Choropiscopy and priests, the place of Hosts, Dominions and Powers; Deacons, Sub-Deacons and Readers, the place of Principalities, Archangels and Angel. In other words the church on earth is one with the Church above and not separate.

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