

Church of the East
Committee on Iraqi Question

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April 14, 1969

The Reverend Dr. Eugene Carson Blake,
Secretary General, World Council of Churches,
150 Route De Ferney,
1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland

Dear Sir,

We, the President and the Secretary of the "Committee of the Church of the East on the Assyrian Iraqi Situation", appointed to deal with this question by the General Convention of the Church of the East which met in San Francisco, in November 1968, under the presidency of His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, Catholicos Patriarch of the Church of the East, have read with much sorrow and perplexity the publicity given by the Secretariat of the World Council of Churches to the unfortunate situation which has been created by the Iraqi Government for the Church of the East and the Assyrian people in that country. Here is the statement which we quote from the London "Church Times" of December 27, 1968, and which is attributed to a report emanating from the WCC and which was given world wide publicity by your office: "The Church of the East-the National Church of the Assyrian people has split, following action by its assembly in Baghdad repudiating the Patriarchal authority of Mar Eshai Shimun... The Assembly, meeting in Baghdad on September 25, denounced the hereditary system under which the leadership of the Church has passed from uncle to nephew in a single family since 1515. The present Patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII, was consecrated in 1920 at the age of twelve. He now lives in San Francisco, California.

The assembly maintained that the hereditary system was contrary to the canons of the Church. They complained that the Patriarch had shown "haughtiness" in not calling a synod and had acted autocratically. They also objected to innovations such as the adoption of the Western date of Easter, relaxing of Lenten fast and excusing priests from ecumenical daily services. Mar Thoma Darmo, Bishop of the Assyrian Church in India was elected as the new Patriarch by a gathering of bishops, clergy and representatives on the Church presided over by Mar Adai Gewargis, Assyrian Metropolitan of Iraq. It appears that the great majority of

Assyrian Church members in Iraq and Syria accepted the new Patriarch, while those in Iran, Lebanon and India retain allegiance to the Mar Shimun. The latter protested to the Iraq Government."

FACTS MISREPRESENTED

It has been noted that your report has been taken from a report distributed by Mr. Mansour Darmo and his associates in Baghdad, Iraq, under the title "Assyrians repudiate the Patriarchal authority of Mar Eshai Shimun", which was widely circulated, but apparently the Secretariat of WCC was the only body which for its own reason considered it worthy of circulation without even ascertaining of the facts of the case.

Notwithstanding, the very fact that the Secretariat of the WCC did not release to the press the full text of Mr. Darmo's allegations which any rational being would find to be childish and, therefore, unworthy of any serious consideration, bespeaks of the fact that the Secretariat itself was convinced of the falcity of these statements most of which were of a libelous nature and, therefore, the Secretariat appazently wanted no part of them. What the Secretariat has actually done in this case is the well known and worn out trick of taking a text out of its context. It has presented to press a few of the many garbled statements in a unified manner so that they would look more convincing. You may be interested to know Sir, that Mr. Darmo has been for years publishing these lies among the Assyrians, but the members of the Church of the East being able to distinguish between truth falsehood have paid no attention whatsoever to these allegations.

However, we wish to briefly correct the false publicity appearing in the press:

1. Mr. Mansour Darmo, the former suspended bishop of the Church of the East in India, was brought to Iraq by the Iraqi Government for its own political reasons and not by the request of the Assyrians in Iraq, as alleged in your report. The Iraqi Government itself has declared the fact to be of great political importance.

2. All the churches were forcibly taken from the bishops, the clergy and the faithful by the same government and handed over to Mr. Darmo and a handful of puppets led by an ex officer of the Iraqi Army, Mr. Yosip Khoshaba, who is not a member of the Church of the East but a Presbyterian. This man whose

father murdered his wife and two daughters and was therefore considered a pariah among the Assyrians is now avenging himself in this manner. Any of the clergy or laity who resisted were jailed and some beaten mercilessly.

3. All complaints mentioned in your publicity are without any foundation, and as to the change of calender from the Julian to the Gregorian Mr. Darmo himself (then a bishop in good standing) had given his full consent to the change.

For those who are interested to know the truth of this whole sad and unfortunate matter, especially the unstable character, the utterly reckless and untruthful nature, the almost sick and scheming mind, and the distortion of facts habitual to Mr. Darmo, can learn it from the enclosed photostat copy of the letter written by the Reverend M. O'Shana, dated March 15, 1963, addressed to the clergy of the Church in India, consignatories to a letter dated February 1, 1963.

4. As regards the hereditary succession of the Patriarchate, this system was adopted by the Church in the 14th century, and if Mr. Darmo were against this procedure, as he now professes to be, then why did he consent to be ordained and consecrated under this system and take oath in the name of God, professing unqualified loyalty and obedience to His Holiness the Patriarch, his consecrator ? There may be those who believe that oath is given to be broken, but not so in the Church of the East which has always been mindful of God's commandment: "You shall not take a false oath in the Name of the Lord your God; for the Lord will not declare him innocent who takes an oath in His Name (Exodus 20.7).

5. No assembly of clergy ever met in Baghdad, as asserted in your statement. The fact is that Mr. Darmo, supposedly consecrated three bishops and they in turn consecrated him patriarch. The complete irregularity of this action can be gauged from the fact that all the Christian Churches in Baghdad, whether Roman Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant who had been invited by Mr. Darmo and his associates to this pseudo political consecration refused to attend.

Furthermore, since all this farce was enacted in September 1968, it is indeed amazing that despite all the publicity given it by the Iraqi Government and the reports which must have come from the various Christian Churches in Baghdad, that the Secretariat of the WCC should have remained uninformed and ignorant of these facts till now.

In addition to all this His Holiness had last November related the whole story to Mr. Andre Dominique Michely Commission of Churches on International Affairs, (who personally sought the interview with the Patriarch) and he must have sent his report to the Secretary General of the World Council in Geneva. Mr. Michely further stated that the purpose of his inquiry was to relay the information to the WCC which was anxious to help a member Church. Is this the kind of help that he was referring to ?

And lastly, your report to the press omitted to mention the focal point of all this unjust policy of the Iraqi Government which has accused His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII of being an agent of the Imperial policy of Western powers. We are sure, Sir, that you yourself as an intelligent and well informed person cannot possibly believe the truth of this allegation!

REGRETTABLE PUBLICITY

Because of the critical nature and the hopelessness of the situation had been decided to avoid all publicity until such time as all other diplomatic means had been exhausted, but since the Secretariat of the World Council of Churches has for reasons of its own given this false and detrimental publicity to the matter, this committee is forced to make this public statement.

We must also add, Sir, that the action of the WCC cannot but be viewed as extremely unwise whether done with or without the knowledge of the facts, but it is hoped that the Middle East countries in general, and Iraq in particular, in their wisdom and understanding will realize that neither His Holiness the Patriarch, nor the faithful Assyrians, who are loyal and law abiding citizens of their respective countries, had any hand in this false and unwise publicity.

UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE BY WCC

Furthermore, we wish to state that it is felt that the World Council of Churches, or more correctly to say-certain interested parties in the Secretariat of that body-has played an important part in the events leading to the situation which the Church of the East in Iraq now finds itself in. By that we refer to the invitation extended by the former Secretary General

