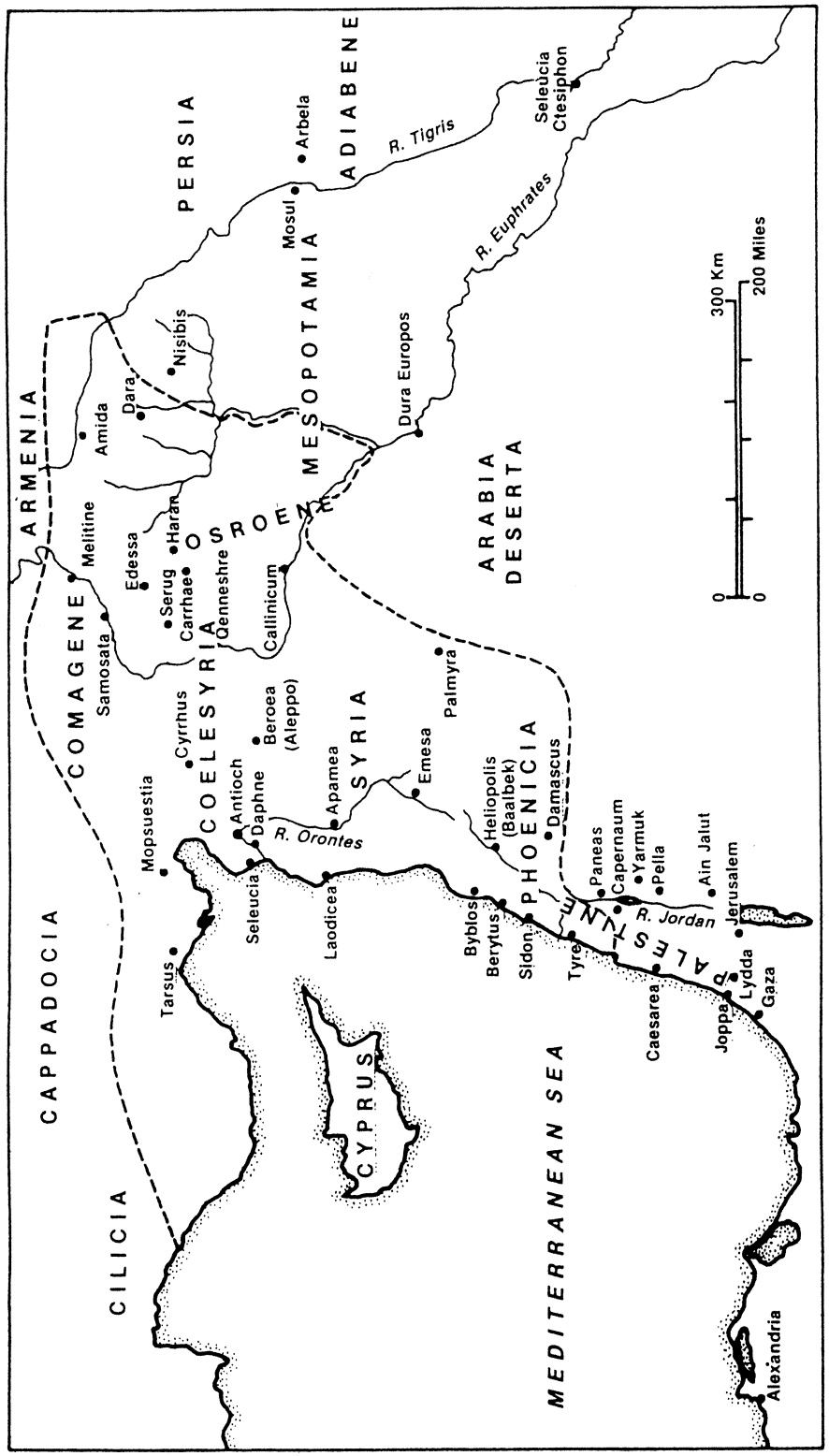

Map 1 Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia

Chapter 4

Christians in Syria and Palestine

INTRODUCTION

Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Jericho, Nazareth, Capernaum, Caesarea, Joppa, Antioch and Damascus – all are familiar names to Christians of all traditions, even if many may have problems in locating them accurately on a map. Even without the background of the Old Testament record, the New Testament itself is replete with references to these and other locations in Palestine and Syria. We are equally familiar with the fact that organized Christianity had its origins in this area, as Jesus' followers 'filled with power' became his witnesses 'in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8).

It is also apparent to all that the nucleus of the Church consisted at first of Jews who accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah, despite his crucifixion and the seeming impossibility of his resurrection. That some of these Jewish Christians were conservative Aramaic and Hebrew speakers is as clear as is the fact that some of them were more at home with Greek and Hellenistic culture – the so-called 'Hebrews' and 'Hellenists' of Acts 6:1. The Jerusalem circle remained a focus of authority and leadership for these early Christians, led for a time by relatives of Jesus, the first being his brother James (see Mark 6:3, Gals. 1:19; 1 Cors. 15:7 and Acts 12:17, 15:13 and 21:18). That the spread of the faith was in part the result of persecution of a perceived fractious, heterodox group at the hands of the Jewish authorities is clear from Acts 8:1–4, although an apostolic core remained at Jerusalem, not always themselves safe from persecution (e.g. Acts 12:1–5). James himself was to be stoned to death in AD 62 during an inter-regnum between two Roman procurators. This prompted the Jerusalem congregation to desert Jerusalem, soon to be stormed by Titus to quell a rebellion in AD 70, and they found refuge in the Gentile city of Pella, across the Jordan River from Samaria. There they were led for some 40 years by a cousin of Jesus and James, named Simeon, and they came into contact with various Jewish sects who also had sought refuge in such areas from orthodox Judaism. Interchange of views resulted, some of

which strengthened the Jewishness of these Jewish Christians, to whose distinctive emphases we must now turn.

THE ROLE OF JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

The dependence of both Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity upon the traditions represented by the Pauline, Johannine and Petrine writings in the New Testament has been heavy indeed. So dominant has this been that there was long a tendency to disregard any other tradition as being significant. This has been corrected somewhat of late, not least through the work of the French historian Jean Daniélou and others. What is to be remembered is that what concerns us here are the forms of Jewish or Semitic Christianity found in Asia, and not whether such expressions have validity in the West. From such research has come the realisation that the Jewish Christianity to be found in Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia formed a source of Christianity 'independent of and of equal importance with Latin and Greek Christianity.'[1] Whatever the distinctions that may be made quite rightly in terms of aspects of their literary and intellectual traditions, it is very doubtful that such distinctions would have bulked large, or even small, in the minds of ordinary believers. Along with Rome and Ephesus, Antioch and Edessa are seen to be main centres of the early Church.

It has also become clear that

> 'Christianity has been interpreted in several ways, according to the genius of the peoples to whom it was entrusted: if Rome stressed the legal aspects of the new religion, and the Greeks developed an ontological interpretation of God and Christ, the Syrians were not very interested in dogmatic strife, at least until Ephrem Syrus in the fourth century, and conceived their faith rather as a Way, a way of life.'[2]

Jewish Christianity would be conceived by many Jews as less iconoclastic with respect to the Law than was the approach of Paul. They were enabled by it to bring with them into Christianity rather more of what was to them a richly meaningful heritage, however little it may have mattered to Gentile Christians. While Jewish Christians may have had initially a greater interest in orthopraxy than in doctrinal orthodoxy, as interpreted by Paul, this is not to say that they did not have their own theological emphases and concerns.

Daniélou saw these Jewish Christians as falling into three major groups –

1 those who accepted Jesus as a prophet or as a messiah, but not as the Son of God, used only the Gospel of Matthew, rejected the letters of Paul and the virginal conception of Jesus, and were called the Ebionites;

2 those at Jerusalem and after, led at first by James, who favoured Jewish ways for themselves, but were not out to impose these comprehensively on Gentile converts. They were to be called 'Nazarenes' (as in Acts 24:5) or 'Nazorees' if they were East Syrian in location and Aramaic speakers,[3] and
3 those who drew on the late Judaic thought forms of the Pharisees, Essenes and Zealots rather than on those of rabbinic Judaism.

The last of these three groups was the one with lasting influence, and among their concerns were:

- a deep interest in cosmic history, from the very beginning of all things to their end in time and across all the dimensions of sub-terrestrial, terrestrial and supra-terrestrial space,[4]
- close consequent dependence on revelation, so that the mysteries of the created order and its purpose and goal may be perceived through all the richness of apocalyptic imagery,[5]
- a resulting *gnosis*, that 'saving knowledge of what the divine action proclaimed in the Gospel message has effected for all men and all creatures for all time, and of the divinely appointed means of arriving at this knowledge in the esoteric exegesis of the Scriptures.'[6]

The whole of human existence was set within the context of God's providential design, prefigured in the Genesis accounts of creation, which creation is inaugurated afresh in the Incarnation. Much exegesis was focussed on Genesis, in which it was believed were to be discerned the foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the establishment of the Church. The beginning and the end of all things were bound together by Jesus and his cross. Indeed:

> 'For them redemption was a cosmic matter; the action of the Word extended through every region of the spiritual universe, from Sheol to the seventh heaven, and touched every creature. The Cross, the instrument of redemption, is not merely the historical and material gibbet used by God as the creative pivot of history, marvellous though that may be; it is also the double axis of the universe, transcending space by stretching out its arms to unite all nations of men and by reaching up its head to join heaven and earth, the angelic hierarchies and the spirits of them that sleep, and transcending Time by descending as a living being into the lower parts of the earth to preach salvation to the righteous who died before Christ, and by coming in the East as the glorious herald of the Saviour's final Return.'[7]

Related closely to the rite of initiation was

> 'the teachings of the Two Ways, . . . the Angel of Light and the Prince of Darkness, the spirits of the virtues and the demons of the vices, and the exhortations to steadfast singleness of mind

confronted the baptizand before admitting him to the sacramental world where the fire of Christ descended into the waters to destroy the demon, and the grains of God's wheat gathered from the mountains to await the Coming of the Lord.'[8]

Throughout all of this is a strong theme of continuity between the new covenant in Christ and the old covenant in Abraham, so that all the major features of Christianity are shown to have roots in the very beginnings of all things. From this could be drawn comprehensive assurance that, despite appearances to the contrary, all was secure in God's hands. Alongside this was to stand

- a distinctive approach to the doctrine of the Trinity, in which God was seen to have a form which may be intrinsically visible and where a female identity was assigned to the Holy Ghost, in ways virtually unknown in Hellenistic Christianity, and
- a deep interest in asceticism and the virtues of poverty and celibacy which had parallels among the Essenes and which were to have long standing influence in Aramaean Christianity, and clearly antedate any moves towards monasticism.

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE REGION

We have already noted some of the ways in which Christianity spread from Jerusalem to the north east via Pella. The Acts of the Apostles recounts the establishment of the faith among the Samaritans (8:4–25), at Caesarea (8:40 & 10:24 & 44–48) and Damascus (9:10 & 19), Lydda (9:32), Joppa (9:36–43 & 10:5 & 23), Tyre (21:4), Ptolemais (21:7) and Sidon (27:3) and Antioch (11:19–30) as well as in Cyprus (11:19).

Now while an evangelist like Philip was ready to preach to the Samaritans (Acts 8:5) and to an Ethiopean eunuch (Acts 8:26–39), it would seem that in Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch he restricted his preaching to Jews (Acts 11:19). Such a restriction was ignored by those who came from Cyprus and Cyrene and spoke to the Greeks (Acts 11:20). At very least they had the precedent of Peter's ministry to the Gentile 'God-fearer' Cornelius. Indeed what happened at Antioch in this regard became a pattern among the coastal towns and commercial centres of the region where Greek-speaking Christians predominated over those of Jewish extraction. So much was this the case that Jewish Christians at Antioch found it as much more comfortable to move to Beroea, as had those in Jerusalem found it to move to Pella – albeit for different reasons. As one author puts it,

> 'it seems that Christianity remained Greek so long as it centred in the commercial towns: the vernacular churches arose as Christianity spread outwards from the Levant among the inland population.'[9]

In such inland areas traditional pagan centres such as Emesa and Heliopolis resisted Christians to the point where some of those in the former had at first to live in neighbouring villages rather than in the town itself. They were less likely to meet obdurate opposition at Paneas and Palmyra, the royal house of the latter having within it Greek as well as Syrian blood. In due course Edessa was to become a key centre for the spread of Christianity among the Syriac-speaking population in the countryside and villages as was Antioch for those who were Greek-speaking in the towns.

As a result by the time of the Council of Nicea in AD 325 considerable headway had been made for Christianity in Coele-Syria, rather more than appears to have occurred in Phoenicia. In the process a not inconsiderable role was played by monks, who chose to settle among pagan populations and used patience, humility and perseverance as their evangelistic means. In addition it also appears that those 'God-fearers' associated with the Jewish communities in this region were no less significant than they were in centres in the Graeco-Roman world.

That there were in play cultural differences of significance is clear, and to a review of these we must turn.

CULTURAL TENSIONS

Passing reference has been made already to the fact that there were tensions between those whose cultural and racial background was Hellenistic and those whose backgrounds were Semitic. So e.g. Antioch had been founded in 300 BC as a colony, with a population drawn predominantly from displaced Athenians and Macedonians. While in due course there were attracted to it further 2nd century BC Greek refugees from Roman rule and considerable numbers of Jews and others, keen to share in its cultural and economic opportunities, it had about it always something of the air of an exotic Hellenistic island in a Syriac sea. Its famous theological school was Hellenistic rather than Oriental, and its great thinkers, from Ignatius through Theodore of Mopsuestia to Theodoret of Cyrrhus, were Greek-speaking and thinking Antiochenes, rather than offspring of the native Syrian soil. There were few traces in the city of indigenous Syrian cults and deities, attention being focussed rather on Zeus, Athene and Apollo. In due course these too gave way to the Christian God, whose devotees, to judge from their ridiculing of the Emperor Julian's attempts to re-establish pagan deities in AD 363, dominated the city.

In one significant area, however, the Hellenistic heritage left a lasting mark on Antiochene Christianity. In general terms, more than in detail, the approach adopted was Aristotelian rather than Platonic. This was one of the ways in which it differed from its great rival city of Alexandria, with

its Platonic air and approach. It was also one of the causes of disagreement between the two centres on Christological doctrine in the 5th and later centuries. It accounts, in part, also for the Antiochene concern for the observable, concrete, and historical in the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth, as mentor and saviour. This is not to say that Antioch was averse to many of the approaches, categories etc. of Platonism, or to deny that eventually full-blooded Aristotelianism was adopted by the Syriac-speaking Christians of East Syria, once Antioch's star had faded.

So the syndrome of a Hellenistic city set over against the indigenous population of the countryside was to be found in Antioch and Syria, as it was also to be seen in Alexandria and Egypt. It was to provide the soil in which indigenous Monophysite Churches in both areas would rise in opposition to the Chalcedonian orthodoxy of the city centres themselves.

Symptomatic of and contributing to such differences was the emergence of Syriac, as a dialect of Aramaic, in the 2nd century AD focussed on Edessa, where the Old Testament itself was translated into Syriac by Jews before the time of Tatian (late 2nd century). Syriac became the language in which Christianity was promulgated in Eastern Syria and points further east. It became the liturgical language in India and China as much as in Mesopotamia. By AD 160 there were Syriac, and Latin-speaking Christians as well as the predominantly Greek speakers. Syriac literature itself began to grow as more and more Christian writings were translated into this tongue, including the originally Greek harmony of the four gospels prepared by Tatian and entitled the *Diatessaron.* By the middle of the 4th century it was already an extensive corpus of literature, the value and quality of which was to be defended strongly by authors such as Severus of Nisibis (d. AD 667) over against attempts to denigrate it in favour of Greek. Its status as a language had been built up from ca. AD 200 by such writers as Bardaisan, Mani, Aphrahat (d. AD 345) and Ephrem Syrus (d. AD 373), notwithstanding the doubts about the Christian orthodoxy of the first two listed. What emerged from Aphrahat and Ephrem was a 'Christianity expressed in a relatively pure Semitic, and as yet unhellenized form.'[10] 'Indeed the Greek theology does not sit well on the Syriac mind, nor does it sound well in the Syriac language.'[11]

One interesting example of this is to be found in the word used as the equivalent of the Greek *soter* or saviour, with respect to Jesus. Although Syriac had several words which carried the meanings of 'to deliver', 'to protect' and 'to be made safe and sound', they chose to identify salvation with 'life'.

The 'saviour' is the 'life-giver' (Syriac *Maḥyānā*) which is reminiscent of one of the titles ascribed to the Holy Spirit in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.[12]

As F.C. Burkitt argued

> 'May we not therefore believe that this identification of "salvation" and "life" is the genuine Aramaic usage, and that the Greek Gospels have in this instance introduced a distinction which was not made by Christ and his Aramaic speaking disciples.'[13]

The Syriac language became the medium not only for transmitting the Greek Christian corpus to eastern Christians, but also that of secular Greek philosophy, and particularly that of Aristotle, to them, and later to the Arabs. It was able to provide the transition stage for technical terms which were not easily rendered directly from Greek into Arabic. Some monasteries, like that at Qenneshre on the Euphrates, specialised in such work, which also saw some reverse translation of hymns, hagiography and such a work as the *Acts of Thomas* into Greek, and later into Slavonic and Latin.

In terms of theology, the translation into Syriac of the works of the great exegete Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. AD 420), led to his interpretations becoming largely normative among many East Syrians, and to their adoption of Nestorianism. Such a move was furthered by the cultural antipathies felt towards Constantinople's attempted imposition of Graeco-Latin Chalcedonian orthodoxy, and equally against the tendency of Antioch to support a Monophysite view. Such developments are clear from the time of Severus (d. AD 538) at Antioch, where

> 'while one line looked westward to Byzantium, the other looked eastward in search of independence from the Greeks.'[14]

Indeed, nationalism, in Syria as in Egypt, expressed itself most vehemently under religious banners, not unlike the phenomena we associate today with Ulster and the Caucasus. Such banners had about them all the theological respectability of an endeavour to guarantee the divinity of Christ against perceived attempts to undermine this. An undergirding of East Syrian attitudes was provided by Aristotelian philosophy, which was taught widely at Edessa in the second quarter of the 5th century AD. Indeed, Aristotelianism, modified somewhat by neo-Platonism, provided the weapons for doctrinal disputations between Nestorians, Monophysites and Chalcedonians alike. The Nestorians in particular, centered as they came to be further east at Nisibis, depended on Aristotle's *Metaphysics.* To this they added elements of Pythagoreanism, Stoicism and Platonism.

> 'They absorbed what Greek had to give, because they needed it, and it became integrated into the older structure of their religion.'[15]

THREE KEY CENTRES: JERUSALEM, ANTIOCH, EDESSA

This chapter began with a list of place names made familiar to most by biblical references. But what of other centres of formative influence for Christians in Asia? We have noted already the role of *Jerusalem* in the earliest days of the Church. However, the departure of most Christians after AD 62, and the storming of the city in AD 70, was followed in AD 135 by its complete destruction and the expulsion of all Jews from Judea. A new Roman colony of Aelia Capitolina replaced Jerusalem, whose name no longer appeared on the maps of the day. As far as Christians were concerned, oversight of those at Aelia passed to the Metropolitan of Palestine, the Bishop of Caesarea. Following the victory of Constantine over the eastern Emperor Licinius in AD 324, the fortunes of Jerusalem revived, not least because of the interest of Constantine and his mother Helena in the restoration of sites holy to Christians, and the encouragement of pilgrimage.

At the Council of Nicea in AD 325, canon 7 made special provision for dignifying the Bishop of Aelia, while respecting the rights of the Metropolitan at Caesarea. Lustre was added to the reputation of Jerusalem by a Bishop such as Cyril (d. AD 386), while political manoeuvering for ecclesiastical status marked some other holders of the bishopric, not least Juvenal (d. AD 458). At the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 the jurisdictions of the Bishops of Antioch and Jerusalem in the area were adjusted and fixed, and Jerusalem became the 5th and final patriarchate in the Church, but a patriarchate of honorific status rather than of effective power.

Whatever the somewhat contested rise to patriarchal status of Jerusalem, there was never doubt about the significance of *Antioch* (modern Antakya, cf. pl. 1). Probably the source from which came the Gospel of Matthew, its role in the New Testament period is apparent, and its associations with both Peter and Paul, if not as significant as those of Rome, are not to be denied. To such apostles it could add the name of its early Bishop Ignatius (d. AD 117) whose martyrdom sealed the influence of his advocacy of episcopacy and opposition to Docetism and Gnosticism in the Church. So significant was he that later Monophysite/Jacobite patriarchs of Antioch always included his name in their titles. Next in significance and reputation for sanctity stood the ascetic Simeon Stylites (d. AD 459), who took up his pillar-dwelling near Antioch, and was buried in that city. Near in wide repute throughout the Church was the famed preacher John Chrysostom (d. AD 407), while Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. AD 457) was regarded as the outstanding Antiochene theologian of the mid-5th century. Of considerable renown throughout the middle ages was the Syrian mystic known as pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who wrote at the turn of the 5th into the 6th century. His expression of Christianity in

terms of neo-Platonism had far-reaching effects. Less conspicuous, but remembered for their apologetic works, were the Bishops Theophilus (d. ca. AD 190?) and Serapion (d. AD 211), the former being the first writer to use the term 'triad' or 'trinity' in reference to the Christian godhead.

Less acceptable to what came to be seen as orthodoxy were leaders such as Paul of Samosata (d. AD 272?); Lucian the Martyr (d. AD 312), the mentor of Arius; Apollinarius of Laodicea (d. AD 390); the exegetes Diodore of Tarsus (d. AD 394) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. AD 428); and the controversial Nestorius (d. AD 452). Antioch was also the home of the influential Monophysite theologian, Severus (d. AD 538).

So whether from the perspective of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, Antioch's place in Christian awareness was bound to be well to the fore. It remained for some six centuries at the forefront with Alexandria and Constantinople in the east, and with Rome overall.[16] The area over which it exercised patriarchial responsibility included Syria, Palestine, Cyprus, Arabia, Mesopotamia – and to a lesser degree Persia and India. Such oversight took in 11 metropolitan provinces and 127 episcopal dioceses.

While its significance as a Christian centre was apparent it was also highly significant in the socio-econo-political and military spheres. While not founded originally as a capital for the Seleucid dynasty it soon became just that, and down until its fall to the Arabs in AD 638 it continued to exercise an important role both prior to and within the Roman Empire. Subject to natural earthquakes and to social upheaval and riot, its history was by no means a consistently peaceful one. The city had a reputation for anti-Jewish riots, in protest against the privileges they were deemed to have been granted. The first such riot on record dates back to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes (175–163 BC), while others occurred in Nero's reign (AD 54–68) and as late as the reign of Anastasius (AD 491–518). Taxation, famine, army numbers and ecclesiastical disputes all precipitated riots, until after AD 500 they became almost endemic, and as late as AD 610 had to be suppressed with severity. As a consequence Antioch's status as a metropolis was removed on at least three occasions, but its strategic importance was such that eventually such status had to be restored. Again and again it became the headquarters of Roman emperors intent on securing the borders with Persia and maintaining fruitful relations with Armenia to the north-east and with tributory states to the south. Small wonder that the fourth century AD pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus called Antioch 'the fair crown of the Orient'.

If the Roman authorities found the population of Antioch less than tractable at times, they also found themselves at odds with Christians there, both before and after the conversion of Constantine. In AD 114–115, while Trajan was using Antioch as his base for his occupation of Mesopotamia and Armenia, the city was rocked by earthquakes. The population fixed on

Christians as scapegoats, for what was seen as retribution by the pagan gods. Numbers of Christians died and their Bishop, Ignatius, was despatched to Rome for execution, while Bishop Babylas (AD 240–250) died under the Decian persecution.

Within a few years Persian invaders had removed Bishop Demetrius to Persia, along with members of the city's citizens in AD 253, 254, and 260. This followed the defeat of the Emperor Valerian by Shapur I in AD 260, following which Roman control over Armenia and Mesopotamia also relaxed. Odeinath, Prince of Palmyra, seized the opportunity to demonstrate the aspirations of less Hellenized Syrians, asserted his independence and exercised rule over considerable parts of Syria. To do so he used Roman and Palmyrene forces intended for use against Persia but fell a victim to assassination in AD 266/267, being succeeded by his widow, Zenobia. With the support of the rulers of Palmyra, Paul of Samosata became both Bishop and self-styled chief fiscal officer in AD 260/261. He was deposed on a charge of heretical subordinationism with respect to the Trinity and the person of Christ by councils in AD 264 and 269, and ostensibly was replaced by Domnus. But Paul clung to his episcopal claims until after the Emperor Aurelian had defeated Zenobia of Palmyra in AD 272 and re-established Roman control. Paul was then evicted. Antioch had experienced contemporaneous rival claims to the episcopal office, not for the last time by any means.

During the last great persecution (AD 303–311) the distinguished teacher Lucian was martyred, his death adding further lustre to his reputation among former students like Arius (d. AD 336) and Eusebius of Nicomedia (d. AD 342). There was a civil disturbance in AD 330 when the anti-Arian Bishop Eustathius (d. AD 337) was deposed, and the Emperor Julian had little difficulty in keeping Nicene and Arian Antiochenes in fierce opposition to each other during his stay in Antioch in AD 361–362. The Emperor Valens (AD 364–378) persecuted Nicene Antiochenes, until dissuaded by the pagan scholar Themistius. Throughout this period from AD 360–370, there were at times no less than four bishops all vying for episcopal authority over the city and its area of jurisdiction. One of these schisms was associated with the attempts of Apollinarius of Laodicea (d. AD 390) to secure the acceptance of a bishop who was opposed to what was seen later as emerging Nestorianism under Diodore of Tarsus (d. AD 394).[17]

The Emperor Theodosius I (AD 379–395) restored support for Nicene Christianity, but was scandalised in AD 387 when Antiochenes, rioting against heavier taxation, destroyed imperial statues and busts, an act regarded as lese-majesty. Even the pleas of the aged bishop, Flavian, who hurried to Constantinople to beg clemency, could not avert all penalties. No more effective were the prayers of the monks who flocked to the city in considerable numbers at the time. This was one of the occasions when

the city lost its civil and military status within the empire. Then from AD 404–413 Antioch was out of communion with Rome, during the days in which Chrysostom was out of favour at Constantinople.

The support of Antioch for Nestorius, against the charges of Cyril of Alexandria (d. AD 444) at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431, proved to be fruitless. A serious schism was only settled by the Formula of Reunion in AD 433, when, with papal support, Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret of Cyrrhus were able to reach common ground. Some of the East Syrians, however, reacted against what they saw as overmuch concession to Nestorianism in the formula, foreshadowing later developments. Antioch itself felt that its views were given due weight at Chalcedon in AD 451, at which council its arch-enemy, Dioscurus of Alexandria (d. AD 454), was deposed. This was an occasion on which the Bishops of Rome and Antioch were at one in their opposition to the Bishop of Alexandria, foreshadowing an 'alliance' which was to have moderate longevity.

However, the same Chalcedonian 'solution' left a legacy of outraged supporters of the views they ascribed to Cyril of Alexandria, suspicious that Chalcedon had ceded ground to Nestorianism, and resentful of imperial rule and Hellenistic suzerainty. Those with Monophysite sympathies were encouraged in these during the reign of the Emperor Zeno (d. AD 491). This emperor, in a bid to secure his throne, in AD 482 promoted the *Henoticon*,[18] which was mildly critical of Chalcedon and allowed greater scope for Monophysite views, but led to a schism with Rome. Instrumental in its preparation was Peter (the Fuller) of Antioch (d. AD 488), who became bishop there. This allowed Monophysite views to gain ground, but not without opposition from those who adhered to Chalcedon. The orthodox bishop, Stephen, was murdered in AD 479 and during the reign of the pro-Monophysite Emperor Anastasius (d. AD 518), Monophysite monks invaded the city in a bid to unseat Bishop Flavian II, only to be expelled by citizens and orthodox monks. With Nestorians finding acceptance in Persia there were strategic reasons also for supporting Monophysite expressions in Syria, with refugees from Persia adding their weight to such developments.

Bishop Flavian was exiled to Petra in AD 512, and the patriarchate of Antioch came into the hands of the great Monophysite theologian Severus (d. AD 538), who condemned both the Council of Chalcedon and the *Tome* of Leo. Severus himself was forced to flee the city in AD 518 and a reaction against Monophysites set in until the mid-520's. By the end of that decade Persian forces were beginning a series of raids to the very outskirts of Antioch and in AD 540 the city, after reneging on a proposal to buy off the Persians, was assaulted and sacked by them. Captives were removed to Persia, after Edessa was refused permission to ransom them. Meanwhile in this period Jacob Baradai (d. AD 578) was busy laying foundations for the Monophysite Church which, from his name, was and is known as Jacobite.

Antioch's fortunes continued to decline throughout the 6th century, and the refusal of Emperor Justin II (d. AD 570) to pay due annual tribute led to further punitive raids from Persia. During AD 606–607 Persia occupied much of Syria, not without local acceptance because of resentment against the tyrannical brutalities of Phocas (d. AD 610) who had deposed the Emperor Maurice (d. AD 602) and persecuted both Monophysites and Jews. Riots in Antioch in AD 610 were suppressed savagely and both Antioch and Edessa fell once again to the Persians in AD 611–612. They remained in charge until AD 628 and endeavoured to compel adherence to the Nestorianism favoured in Persia itself.

The Emperor Heraclius (d. AD 641) tried to reconcile Monophysites to Constantinople, via the one-will doctrine of Monotheletism in the *Ecthesis* of AD 638.[19] Propounded by the Syrian born Sergius of Constantinople (d. AD 638), it gained some support from Pope Honorius I (d. AD 638) and was advocated during concurrent episcopal vacancies in both Antioch and Alexandria. But by then a new force was on the scene, for in AD 636 the Arabs had pushed northwards and defeated the Romans at Yarmuk. Heraclius was compelled to give up Syria and with it Jerusalem and Antioch, which passed into Arab hands in AD 638, and remained therein for three centuries. The city's leadership role had been in question since AD 500, and overall decline had been evident also since then. That the Monophysites of Syria should have preferred Muslim rule to that of Constantinople is evidence of feelings engendered earlier and deepened in that same period. While Antioch remained one of the five patriarchal sees, its influence was never again to be what it had been in the period up to AD 500, and its associations tended to be predominantly with Monophysitism, notwithstanding the fact there were, in later centuries, also a Chalcedonian Patriarch, a Catholic Melkite Patriarch and claimed associations by the Maronite Patriarchs – sometimes contemporaneously.

While Antioch was predominantly Hellenistic, the centre of *Edessa* (modern Urfa), some 260 kilometres to the east-north-east, was and remained predominantly Syrian in both speech and culture (cf. pls. 2 and 3). As alluded to already, Edessa played a major role in the evangelisation of Syriac-speaking areas and was a key link in the chain towards the east from Syria, being a meeting point for roads north and south, as well as east and west.

Unable to match Antioch in its associations with Peter and Paul, the necessities of the situation led to the claim that in ca. AD 35, King Abgar of Edessa had written to Jesus himself and had a reply. (The story is recounted in the *Doctrine of Addai* which dates from ca. AD 300 but contains also older material.) The origins of the Church were claimed to lie with Jesus' 'twin brother', Judas Thomas,[20] and with his disciple Addai, whom Eusebius of Caesarea suggested was one of the seventy described in Luke 10:1 & 17. However, there seems to be no historical substance for

such claims, beyond the fact that the names Abgar and Addai both refer to historical figures, and that there was considerable reading back from the late 2nd century, when it is possible to see the Church in being in Edessa. If apostolic foundation is highly improbable, Edessa had other substantial claims to fame in early Christianity. From it are reputed to have come the manuscripts which lie behind the important biblical codices Syrus Sinaiticus and Syrus Curetonianus. In addition it is associated with formative figures such as Tatian (late 2nd century), a disciple of Justin Martyr; Aphrahat (d. AD 345) and Ephrem Syrus (d. AD 373), the latter two being widely regarded in the West for their devotional writing. To them, less acceptable as far as orthodoxy was concerned, was the distinguished Bardaisan (d. AD 222), and the fact that Lucian the Martyr was a student in Edessa until he left for Antioch in AD 260. Such names, together with its history as a centre of learning, missionary endeavour and asceticism guaranteed Edessa a place among the leading centres of Christianity, east of Jordan.

The weight of scholarly opinion favours the case that Christianity reached Edessa not from Antioch in the west but from the region of Adiabene, with its centre at Arbela (modern Erbil), to the east. This was an area with a considerable Jewish population, and from AD 40, with its ruling house converts to Judaism. These Jews were largely outside rabbinic influence but open to those pious Jews, and Jewish-Christians who came from Palestine, with which good links were maintained. It would appear that Christianity took root among such Jews and associated god-fearers at Arbela towards the end of the 1st century AD. The first Bishop of Arbela reputedly dated from about AD 100 and he and his immediate successors had Jewish names, while the first martyrs there are recorded in AD 123.

From Arbela Christianity may well have travelled west to Edessa, with a Jewish-Christian called Addai, in the first decade of the 2nd century. Both cities shared trading links and the Syriac language, as well as considerable numbers of Jewish residents as the seed plots for Christian planting.

This is not to say that Christians were the only planters in the area. Local cults associated with the worship of the planets persisted down to the 4th century. Judaism maintained its hold, related somewhat to a strong and early Jewish academy at Nisibis. It would seem that Christianity at Edessa was beset with the possibilities of syncretism with native cults, with the challenges offered by followers of Marcion for decades after AD 140. Out of such challenges could emerge also a group called the Quqites, propounding a type of Samaritan-Iranian Gnosticism, and other expressions of Gnosticism, Christian and non-Christian. In many ways this situation epitomised a syncretistic age which spread as far east as China under the Han dynasty. This came to something of a halt by the beginning of the 3rd century, signified in part by the Sasanian dynasty's assumption of power in Persia.

However, within this syncretistic milieu can be placed such works as the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Odes of Solomon* and the *Psalms* and the *Acts of Thomas*. Also germane to the syncretistic 'Gnostic' context is the fact that the Nag-Hammadi works, the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Truth*, were also known at Edessa. Something of a climax in this situation is reached with Bardaisan to whom reference will be made below. Of a decidedly different nature, being a harmony of the four canonical gospels, is the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, dating to ca. AD 170 in Edessa. This harmony had wide recognition and use across Syriac-speaking areas, and its replacement by the canonical gospels in the fifth century was resisted strenuously.

Not only was Edessa subject to various religious influences. Its geographical and strategic location on the border lands between the empires of Rome and Persia made it politically significant, and subject to political change. Early in the Christian era its sympathies lay with the Persians, and the Jewish population resisted Trajan's invasion in AD 114–115 to their cost – as also did their religious compatriots at the Emperor's rear in Cyprus, Egypt and Cyrenaica. Roman might was demonstrated again by Marcus Aurelius in the war of AD 161–166, out of which the western areas of Mesopotamia passed under Roman rule. The city of Edessa was surrounded by Roman territory after AD 164, with Nisibis developed as a provincial capital, and the princes of Edessa and of Osrhoene became Roman vassals. The major Edessene ruler concerned was Abgar IX, the Great, who ruled from AD 177–212, and saw Roman sovereignty asserted afresh over against Persia by Septimius Severus in AD 198. Edessa itself was declared a Roman *colonia* in AD 213–214 and it was regarded as securely within the Roman sphere, the local dynasty retiring to Rome in AD 243.

There was something of a change in fortunes in AD 260 when Valerian was defeated by the Sasanian Shapur I not far from Edessa. This left Persia supreme as far west as Antioch for some years, but in AD 297 Rome re-took Nisibis and retained it until Julian's defeat in AD 363. Thereafter it remained in Persian hands for some 120 years and left Edessa very much a frontier city. This meant that not only was the Jewish minority in Edessa cut off from their cultural support base in Nisibis, but that the distinguished Christian school in the latter city moved to Edessa. There its presence shed further lustre on the city which became the centre of theological instruction and of Western culture for all the Christians of the east. Indeed Edessa, for all its vaunting of Syriac had never been entirely isolated from Western culture, and in upper circles was bilingual, so that Christian writings appeared also in Greek. Wealthy families sent their sons to be educated in Antioch, Alexandria or in Greece itself, so that, at least among a significant minority, Greek learning was no stranger to Edessa.

Christianity at Edessa entered a new phase with the conversion to it of Abgar IX (AD 177–212),[21] which made of the city the first Christian city-

state in the world. The king apparently maintained altars to the planet deities, but his acceptance of Christianity gave it enhanced status among his subjects. It was at about this time that the Church in Edessa also came under the aegis of that at Antioch – i.e. to say those who belonged to the congregation(s) so minded, for the Christians continued to have their sectarian disputes among themselves. This reached the level where the members of the Antioch-related group(s) took the name of the first Bishop, Palut, who was consecrated by Serapion of Antioch (d. AD 211) and were known as 'Palutians' in distinction from other Christians. Of this practice and of 'heretical' divisions Ephrem Syrus was complaining as late as the second half of the 4th century, and this may be evidence that divisions were not yet healed at Edessa – nor were they to be. However, we can see that whereas Christianity was probably a minority movement at Edessa early in the 3rd century, by the outset of the 4th century in one form or another it had captured the loyalty of most of the population.

This support was shown in striking fashion during the Diocletian persecution of the Church. Beginning in AD 303 the persecution did not touch Edessa for six years and only then over the misgivings of local Roman authorities and at the insistence of those at Antioch. Two martyrs, Shmona and Gurya, were executed secretly so as not to arouse the anger of the Edessenes, while a third

> 'Habbib was escorted to his death by a crowd of Christians, and after his death he was buried with honour and even with the participation of Jews and pagans. The Christians showed no hesitation in declaring their faith, "because those who were persecuted were more numerous than those who were persecuting." Edessa was now a Christian city.'[22]

It would appear that Bishop Iona began to build the cathedral some four years after these martyrdoms, a cathedral famed in the middle ages as one of the wonders of the world and admired by Christians and Muslims alike. He began also a line of bishops which continued unbroken for 1000 years. Nor was Edessa left out of key conciliar determinations, for from Nicea (AD 325) onwards it was represented at all such assemblies. The churches and religious institutions, relating to health and the needy, grew in number, and the responsibilities of the bishops multiplied, including some for the administration of justice in secular as well as ecclesiastical cases.

Edessa became renowned not only for asceticism, piety and learning, and the numbers of monks and anchorites in and near it, but also as a pilgrimage centre. It had its own famed stylite,[23] Theodoulos, in the late 4th century.

> 'From all Christendom, pilgrims flocked to visit the shrines of Edessa with their holy relics of Addai and Abgar, of the martyrs Shmona, Gurya, and Habbib, and the bodies of St. Thomas and St. Damian.'[24]

Associated with its reputation were copies of the letter reputedly sent from Jesus to *Abgar*, and a portrait of Jesus himself. Such relics were so important that each contending party among the Christians of Edessa needed their own 'authentic originals' until the 'genuine' articles were transferred to Constantinople in AD 994.

As a Christian city Edessa had not only a wondrous cathedral but also become a significant centre of Christian learning. While the great theological school at Edessa, 'led' at first by Ephrem Syrus, was sensitive to both Greek and Syriac traditions and emphases, there was always a strain of Syrian independence evident. This latter strain came under stress in the bishopric of Rabbula (d. AD 435) who after the condemnation of Nestorianism by the Council of Ephesus in AD 431, set about bringing Edessa into conformity with the Church at large and its predominantly Graeco-Latin approach. Rabbula's love of order and uniformity threatened the distinctive Syrian tradition, but there was a sustained endeavour to impose Greek theology, despite the fact that this did 'not fit easily with the exuberant, non-dogmatic Syriac outlook.'[25] Somewhat symbolic of this 'Hellenizing' approach was the deliberate ousting of Tatian's *Diatessaron* in favour of the canonical four gospels in the Syriac Church.

The anti-Nestorian stance and the determination of the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 led to two reactions in Edessa. Those imbued with the approach of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. AD 428), and what they saw as the emphases of Nestorius led by Hiba (d. AD 451), opposed Rabbula until in AD 489 their school was closed and they departed eastwards into Persia. Their history we shall follow later. At Edessa itself two major groups remained – that which was committed to Chalcedon and became known as the Melkites; and that which adopted Syrian Monophysitism, expressed this through the Jacobite Church, and had majority support. It is of some interest to note that the most prized relic of the latter group was 'Jesus' letter to Abgar', while the former group prized above all else the 'portrait of Jesus', the preferences themselves being reflections of the respective theologies espoused. It may be that Monophysite preferences were also behind the refusal of Edessa to support rebellion against the Emperor Zeno in the last quarter of the 5th century.

To the city's later history we shall return below.

SOME MAJOR FIGURES AND THEIR INFLUENCE

Reference has been made to already a number of those whose impact on Christianity in this overall area was significant. Like the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 11 verse 32, time forbids discussing all the leaders of thought and practice. So the focus falls on those less known to most Christians of today, without in any way wishing thereby to denigrate the contributions of such men as Ignatius (d. AD 117) and Theophilus

(d. ca. AD 200) and Serapion of Antioch (d. AD 211), Eusebius of Caesarea (d. AD 339), Cyril of Jerusalem (d. AD 386), Apollinarius of Laodicea (d. AD 390), Eusebius of Emesa (d. AD 360), John Chrysostom (d. AD 407), Theodoret of Cyrrhus (d. AD 457) and John of Damascus (d. ca. AD 754). Their contributions, positive and negative, are taken up within the forms of the faith familiar to Christians of the Catholic/Orthodox tradition. Concern here is rather with those whose influence led to forms of Christianity more familiar in Asia before 1500.

Among those whose impact was felt initially in western Syria, and associated with Antioch, were Paul of Samosata, Lucian the Martyr, Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia. We have met *Paul of Samosata* already, when he emerged as Bishop of Antioch in AD 260–261, under the aegis of the rulers of Palmyra. He accrued a reputation not only for flamboyance, vanity, and extravagance, but also for dubious morality. While our knowledge of him is limited to the comments of his critics, it is clear seven decades after his lifetime that he was regarded as the father of heresies. Nevertheless, it is clear from what we know of the events of his own period that he was

> 'a man of undoubted ability and of sufficient personal power to attract and hold widespread support including that of a number of bishops, especially in the less Hellenized areas.'[26]

The attempts of a synod in AD 264 to convince Paul to change his views on the godhead and Christology failed to produce results, and he was excommunicated for heresy by another synod in AD 268. He had enough support, from anti-Roman elements in and around Antioch to cling to his bishopric, even as a declared heretic and schismatic, until AD 272.

It would seem that Paul rejected the Origenist approach to the godhead by refusing to see the Word as anything more than an impersonal force. As he saw it:

> 'God possesses an immanent power or quality which emerges before creation into some kind of manifestation of divinity and that this manifestation was in some way effective in the act of creation which followed, and later in Jesus Christ.'[27]

This was extended to the point of denying any real divinity to the Son of Mary. Leontius of Byzantium quotes Paul as claiming:

> 'The man Jesus is anointed, the Word is not. . . . Mary did not give birth to the Word since she is not before all ages. Mary received the Word. She gave birth to a man like ourselves, though better in all respects since the grace which is in him is of the Holy Spirit.'[28]

The Word was to take possession of Jesus at his birth without substantially altering his essential humanity. In place of a substantial unity, which Paul

saw as compromising the dignity of the Word, there is simply a 'coming together', 'participation' or 'communion'. While condemned, his views reveal a desire to guarantee that such experiences of Jesus as temptation, hunger, pain and grief were truly human and not charades. Despite the condemnation of such views in AD 268 by no means did they disappear then, or even with the eventual ejection of Paul from Antioch.

Arriving in Antioch from Edessa during Paul of Samosata's episcopate was *Lucian*, who died under the persecutor Maximin Daia in AD 312. Regarded as the founder of the historical exegetical school of Antioch, Lucian eschewed the allegorical exegesis of Origen and made a careful recension of the Septuagint, comparing Greek and Hebrew texts, and of the gospels. His text became the standard version for Greek-speaking Christians and he won the praise of the scholar Eusebius of Caesarea and of the famed preacher John Chrysostom. In his exegetical and textual work he aimed at clarity of detail and account, at intelligibility combined with facility of expression. The accuracy of the historical account bulked larger than some hidden spiritual significance, as with the exegesis of Origen. This placed a distinctive stamp on the Antiochene school, which he led.

While rejecting Origenist exegesis it appears that Lucian did adopt the subordinationist theology of the Alexandrian master in one of his modes. In part this, and the support of some of his pupils for a fellow-pupil Arius of Alexandria (d. AD 336) has led to Lucian being seen as the father of Arianism. This would seem to be an over-simplification of the position, for his followers, the 'Collucianists', do not seem to have given Arius support comprehensively or consistently. Indeed the name of Lucian is associated with definitely anti-Arian statements in an AD 341 creed from Antioch. What is clear is that Lucian espoused a theology with a clear subordination in the relationship of the three personae of the godhead. He had such a theology in common with many others, and his name may well have been used posthumously by extremists with whom he would have disagreed.

Nor do later Syrian writers, for all their predilection with the probing of historical roots, associate Lucian with Arianism, as they do Eusebius of Caesarea. Indeed he is commonly praised:

> 'So strong an opponent of Arianism as Severus of Antioch (see under) writes of him as "Lucian the martyr, the blessed friend to labour", and cites his authority as equal to that of "our blessed Syrian doctors, Mar Ephrem and Mar Jacob and Mar Isaac and Mar Akhsenaya".'[29]

Despite the persecution by Arians of the Church in East Syria, the outrage of the latter is not directed at Lucian, but at the 'Eusebians'. If indeed no proto-Arian but a convinced subordinationist Origenist, Lucian's claim to fame and to influence in the exegetical school at Antioch is beyond dispute.

Significant later for his apologetic, doctrinal and exegetical writings was *Diodore of Tarsus* (d. AD 394), an Antiochene by birth, who lived an ascetic monastic life near that town until exiled by the Arian Emperor Valens in AD 372. Lauded by the Emperor Theodosius, but condemned by Apollinarius in ca. AD 375 and by Cyril of Alexandria in AD 438, Diodore was to be condemned also at Constantinople in AD 499.

While not in detailed agreement with Paul of Samosata, the fragments we have of Diodore's teaching indicate that he set out to separate the divine from the human in Christ, the two qualities co-existing in harmony. He traced moral progress in Christ, reaching perfection at his baptism by John. In no sense would he tolerate a confusion of the human Jesus and the divine Word. While holding to an essential distinction between the human and the divine, he argued for no two-fold activity in the one person, Jesus Christ – but at times distinguished sharply between the 'impassible' Word and the suffering human Jesus. At the same time he held that the indwelling of the divine Word makes Jesus necessarily different from the rest of mankind.

Repudiating accusations that he advocated two deities, one coming into existence when the Word entered the human Jesus, Diodore held that

> 'the divine Word . . . took possession of the human body and operated through it. Human occupation of a house, to use Diodore's own analogy, does not render the house human, a divine occupation of a temple does not render the temple divine. It may well be said . . . that he offers us two persons, one divine and one human, but hardly two Gods, one eternal and one temporal.'[30]

While Diodore's theology so far as we are able to reconstruct it from fragmentary remains, is hardly comprehensive or fully-rounded, we are in a better position when it comes to the most distinguished of the Antiochene exegetes, *Theodore of Mopsuestia* (d. AD 428). Like his predecessors he was given to work from a firm historical basis in his exegesis, and he is opposed to Christian exegesis of Old Testament passages, and very circumspect in the use of typology even with respect to Christ. So firm is he against allegorical exegesis that he does not hesitate to attack even St. Paul's use of it, with reference to Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4:21–31. 'In short, typology based upon historical fact is permitted, allegory is not.'[31] In due course he suffered the wrath of the Church in AD 553, when it was clear that he had denied that the suffering servant passage of Isaiah 53 referred to Christ. He held that the prophet, in using the past tense throughout must have been referring to a past event, not one to come.

Like Diodore, Theodore opposed adamantly any confusion of the two natures of Christ, which would lead to 'one naturism' (or Monophysitism). In part this was due to his conviction that in no way must human freedom

be imperilled, not least in Jesus. So firm was he on this, and on the consequent separation of the two natures that it seemed to his critics that he was in fact proposing two distinct logical subjects or 'personae' – a human Jesus and a divine Christ – or two sons. This, Theodore denied explicitly, but his use of words like 'conjunction' and 'indwelling' (cf. Diodore above) only seemed to confirm the suspicions of his critics. Indeed many of the fragments of Theodore's works which have survived indicate that the critics were not without justification for their views.

He emphasised consistently that the humanity of Jesus Christ was involved in moral struggle, analogous to our own. While it is the Word which initiates such moral effort, it is the thoroughly human will which responds and grows in wisdom. It was in part for this reason that he was adamantly opposed to Apollinarius' proposal that in Jesus Christ we have no human soul-mind, but a human body enlivened and directed by a fully divine soul-mind, that of the Word. The relationship of the two natures, one to the other, was described in terms of 'inhabitation', but Theodore always contended that the observed expression of this is *one* person. That adoration is offered to the man Jesus is justifiable only because of this indwelling Word, the qualities of which do affect the essentially human.

Theodore had difficulties with the title *Theotokos* (literally 'God-bearer' but usually rendered 'mother of God') ascribed to the Virgin Mary. As the following quotation makes clear much in the way of qualification and explanation was seen as necessary if the term was to be used validly.

> 'The Word plainly did not have his origin in Mary's womb, for he was begotten before all ages, but since the Word was already inhabiting the infant who was born, the term theotokos is not inappropriate. Then they ask whether Mary was the mother of man or the mother of God. Let us answer that she was both, the first by nature of the fact, the second [by the relationship of the Word to the humanity which he had assumed].'[32]

His problems were shared by his student Nestorius, who preferred the, for him, less ambiguous title *Christotokos* or 'Christ-bearer'.

In the process of human salvation, for Theodore, due regard must be kept for the deliberate moral action of humans. Along with other Antiochenes, he started his thinking from the humanity of Jesus and worked towards an understanding of christology which would not put in hazard human responsibility.

He framed his thought in biblical categories rather than philosophical, unlike most of those who followed him, and this was partly what led his opponents into finding difficulties in his christology. They linked him with Nestorius in one direction and with Paul of Samosata in the other direction, despite his own rejection of Paul as 'an angel of Satan' in company with Arius.[33]

If the reputation of Theodore suffered at the hands of Monophysites and many Chalcedonians, it was enhanced as the years passed, among the East Syrians and Nestorians. There he was known as 'the Interpreter', following the translation of his works into Syriac, during his own lifetime.

Post-Chalcedon tensions in Antioch between those who favoured the council's determinations and those who, out of Monophysite sympathies, regarded it as too concessive to Nestorianism led to a double episcopate from the time of *Severus* (d. AD 538). This great Monophysite theologian was consecrated as bishop in AD 512, after some 3 years spent in Constantinople. His first act as bishop was to condemn both Chalcedon and the *Tome* of Leo, to the embarrassment of the Emperor Anastasius I and the outrage of the Pope. The situation remained volatile, and in AD 518 Severus was forced to flee secretly to Alexandria, but was able to resume a significant role in Constantinople between AD 531–532 and 536, in the reign of Justinian and Theodora.

During his exile he had developed a philosophically grounded defence of Monophysitism, depending not a little on others' tendencies to confuse the *ousia* (universal generic essence) with the *hypostasis* (single entity or specific subject) in which the *ousia* is encountered. By his careful definition of terms Severus showed his awareness that the Monophysite position had philosophical roots and was to be defended with philosophical argument. Against both 'Nestorians' and 'Chalcedonians' he argued that the union of the natures in Christ is closer than the sort of partnership which Peter and Paul have in their both being apostles. For Severus the humanity and divinity in Christ cannot be regarded as having distinct individual existence after the union. It is impossible to regard the human will as functioning apart from the divine will, or as being free to reject God's demands.

So the constituent elements of Christ are regarded as one, not two, and the sort of union which Severus envisaged meant that Christ could not have been ignorant in any way. While he claimed that the essential humanity of Christ was not lost in his divinity, as a drop of water is in the sea, the humanity for which he argued was radically different from that argued for by Theodore of Mopsuestia or the Chalcedonians. However, he won the support of the Empress Theodora, and throughout his life he

> 'not only restored the situation of his party thanks to his energetic action in Syria; he likewise gave it doctrinal equipment and determined its theology: we can say that the Monophysitism of history, the doctrine which has lasted until modern times is Severian Monophysitism.'[34]

While it was Severus who played the key intellectual role for Monophysitism, the key organisational task fell to *Jacob Baradai* (d. AD 578). Inveigled from east of Edessa to Constantinople by Theodora, he was confronted

with dispirited, harried and somewhat divided Monophysites, when he was consecrated as one of two new metropolitans in AD 542. (The consecration took place at the express requests of the Empress and of the ruler of the Ghassanid Arabs, who occupied the border area between the Roman and Persian Empires.) While technically set apart as Bishop of Edessa, he travelled widely, frequently disguised as a beggar, and via ordinations and consecrations kept the Monophysite cause alive. He did so not only within the Roman Empire, but also within Persia, travelling to Seleucia to gain tolerance for them and to consecrate their own Catholicos in AD 559. Fluent in Greek, Syriac and Arabic he was one of the great figures of his day, and gave his name to the Jacobite (Syrian) Church which resulted. His work took in not only Syria and Persia, but also mediating in divisions among the Monophysites of Egypt. He consecrated succeeding Monophysite patriarchs in Antioch, some 27 bishops, and, reputedly, 100,000 priests (!). While not successful in all his efforts to build Monophysite unity, he nevertheless put that Church on a firm footing.

When the focus shifts eastward it lights first on *Tatian*, who seems to have returned from Rome to Mesopotamia under something of a cloud after the death of his teacher Justin Martyr in AD 165. From the four canonical gospels and the AD 140 *Gospel of Thomas* Tatian produced the harmony called the *Diatessaron*. This remained virtually the only version of the gospels in use among Syriac-speaking Christians for nearly 250 years, being replaced only in the 5th and 6th centuries. It also existed in other translations, thus spreading widely the influence of Tatian. He seems to have fitted readily into the predominantly Jewish-Christian groups at Edessa and from the east, not least because his ascetic and near-encratite emphases matched theirs.

Believing that humanity had lost its true spirituality and immortality, Tatian held that it now sought out the inferior, and that all forms of human life and activity are corrupt as a consequence. So he inveighed against procreation as a sure way to perdition.

> 'In Tatian's understanding the people of this world marry, but Christians do not: "the people of this world take a wife and make marriages; but they who shall be worthy of the life of that other world and of the resurrection of the blessed, will neither take wives nor make wedding feasts".'[35]

In this he was expressing views common among his East Syrian contemporaries, to be found also in the *Acts of Thomas* and given further affirmation in the writings of Aphrahat. He called on all Christians to imitate Christ, who

> 'as God's only-begotten son . . . lived a single life, asexual, demonstrating man's original unity and immortality. . . . Man

> becomes an immortal son of God when he is united to God's beloved Son, who is represented as the Spirit of the Lord.'[36]

In Judas Thomas, the one identified with the heavenly brother, Jesus, we see the example *non pareil* for us.

Tatian saw the Holy Spirit dwelling in us as in a temple, and in this and in the emphasis which separates what Christ did as a human being from what he did as God, he prefigures what was going to emerge in Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia. His emphases were also to be exploited by Mani, especially those which focussed on the activity of the divine Spirit, which was seen to have found an ultimate dwelling place in Mani himself, the promised Paraclete.

Overlapping in time with Tatian was the eclectic philosopher *Bardaisan* (d. AD 222), who came of noble, possibly Parthian, stock in Edessa. Raised in the royal court and subject to the various Jewish-Christian and Iranian-Zoroastrian influences abroad in Edessa, he became a Christian in the last quarter of the second century. As a scholar he sought to reconcile Christian beliefs with the Hellenized astrology of Babylonia, within his own philosophical system, a system with much in common with the concerns of contemporary fellow philosophers of the second century, as e.g. in the *Hermetica* of Hermes Trismegistos.

It is clear that he gathered a number of disciples, possibly from the upper social classes, and was strongly opposed to the Marcionite group, which with his own group, probably represented 'Christianity' in its earliest days in Edessa. Bardaisan seems to have left Edessa after the intervention there of the Emperor Caracalla in AD 216. For the rest of his life it appears that he lived in Armenia, continuing his study and, inter alia, meeting in AD 218 members of an Indian embassy sent to the Emperor Elagabalus.

From the most interesting of his extant works, the *Book of the Laws of the Lands*, we learn of Christians in India, Persia, Media and Parthia, and of laws which apply from India to Germany and Britain. Such laws are depicted as ways in which human free will has set limits to the ways in which astrological fate determines the destinies of men and women. We learn also of the ethic which distinguished Christians from their heathen neighbours, and accounted for at least some of the attraction of Christianity for not a few.

Much given to a love of liberty, Bardaisan set out upon his own distinctive path, drawing the teeth of astrological determinism and yet making room for astral influence in his system, an inclusion rejected by later critics. Indeed, it was virtually inevitable that he would run foul of later orthodoxy, and indeed among the Greek fathers, he is seen as an arch-heretic and a Valentinian Gnostic. Not a little of the condemnation lacked basis in fact, but even his compatriot Ephrem Syrus was strongly critical of a number of the aspects of his teaching.

As for his theology he held to one God, described in terms of Father, Mother and Son, with the former two probably not unrelated to sun and moon deities, and the Mother being related also to the Holy Spirit and to wisdom. In his emphasis upon one God he was clearly different from Marcion, as Ephrem admitted. The Son is identified with Jesus who comes less as a saviour than as an enlightener, or giver of wisdom. Bardaisan was docetic in that he did not hold that Jesus had a truly human body, for the latter was regarded as inherently impure. So he denied the resurrection of the body while holding to that of the soul.

His cosmology combined Jewish-Christian and Zoroastrian concepts, with the light set over against the darkness, but in no way is God responsible for evil or for matter. The four elements of earth, water, fire and light, through contact with darkness, emerge as created matter. A time of the cleansing from darkness is anticipated, so there is an eschatological emphasis in Bardaisan's approach.

As to humanity he held that the soul descends to the body through the spheres of the planets, each of which affects the soul and thus helps determine human weal and woe in the world. Adam made wrong use of the gift of the spirit, and, consequently, the soul is prevented from donning again its primal celestial robe in the 'Bridal-chamber of Light'. Evil is present in the body through mixing with darkness in creation, but that evil can generate no activity of its own. The impetus for this must come from human free will which Bardaisan held as captive ultimately neither to nature (or law) nor to fate (or chance). Given knowledge and faith, humans were challenged to strive after good in this world. The knowledge is brought into the world by Jesus, and this via human reason (or *nous*) delivers us from the impediments to our returning to the intended celestial state.

This view of cosmology is different in important aspects from 2nd century Gnosticism, like that of Valentinus. There are a number of similarities with the systems of Poimandres and the Hermetic *gnosis*, but it is not just to class Bardaisan with the Gnostics against whom Irenaeus and Hippolytus contended. His *gnosis* is acquired not by revelation but by intellectual insight. He has no tradition of secret *gnosis* of his own, and matter is not evil in its own right. There is no place for the 'Demiurge Creator', nor are humans divided into the spiritual, psychic and carnal categories of Gnosticism.

Nor as we have seen, may he be identified with Marcion, against whom he wrote. Instead of ascribing evil to creation, itself an accident, as did Marcion, for Bardaisan it is the substructure of salvation. Less pessimistic about humanity than was Marcion, he places more reliance on human endeavour.

Rather it is closer to the mark to realise that Bardaisan's system provided an avenue of thought which Mani exploited. The latter was a passive

ascetic, but Bardaisan was an active combatant against evil. Each of them cast the struggle in terms of the liberation of particles of light (Mani) or the expulsion of darkness (Bardaisan). As Ephrem Syrus summed it up:

> 'Because Mani was unable to find another way out, he entered, though unwillingly by the door which Bardaisan opened.'[37]

Or as F.C. Burkitt put it

> '. . . the religion of Mani becomes more comprehensible if the ideas of Bardaisan are recognized as one of its formative elements.'[38]

He was a groundbreaker, whom Mani was to follow, and left behind him a school which revived Syriac literature and philosophy. Some of these moved on into Manichaeism, while others joined the more Gnostically and astrologically-shaped 4th century Audians. However, some Bardaisanites remained in the time of Jacob of Edessa (d. AD 708), retained their interest in 'science' and played a part in conveying the sciences of antiquity to Islam. By then Muslims and Christians alike detected in them a dualism akin to that of the Manichaeans and the Gnostics, a dualism acceptable to neither Islam nor Christianity.

Working some 400 kilometres east-south-east of Edessa was the 'Syrian sage' *Aphrahat* (d. AD 345). Described as a monk and the Bishop of the convent at Mar Mattai, near Mosul, Aphrahat was born of pagan Persian parents ca. AD 280, and became a convert to Christianity in adulthood. He lived under Sasanid rule in Persia and witnessed Shapur II's persecution of Christians. At the same time he lived in an area which had become a focal point for Judaism, and it is clear that he was influenced by Jewish ideas far more than by those associated with Greece.

Because Jews seemed to have been treated less harshly than were Christians in Persia, doubtless in part because of the favour shown to the latter by the Roman emperors, apart from Julian, later Aphrahat was stridently critical of the Jews. However, a Jewish scholar, Jacob Neusner, absolves him from vilification of the Jews and regards him as a well-informed critic who used the scriptures in a rational, historical and mainly non-allegorical way to make his points.[39] Nevertheless, he used every text he could press into service to demonstrate that the old chosen people had been replaced by the new Israel, the Church of the Gentiles. He departs into allegory, when in discussing the woman in the parable in Luke 15:8, who lost one of ten pieces of silver, he claimed that she

> 'represents the house of Israel, who had lost the first of the ten commandments on which the remaining nine depend, and so in effect has lost all.'[40]

We know that between AD 336 and 345 he wrote some 22 '*Demonstrations*' or '*Homilies*' or '*Treatises*', in which he displayed a profound knowledge of

Scripture – and of Christian theology, as interpreted through Syrian eyes. He contends against Marcionites, the Valentinian Gnostics and Manichaeans, but is strangely silent about Arius and Sabellius. It may be that he found the Greek approaches of Athanasius and Basil, e.g., uncongenial to his Syrian outlook. To him Christianity was not so much about speculations concerning divinity as about the revelation that the divine spirit was ready to indwell humanity and enable it in its struggle against moral evil.

Unlike Marcion or Theodore of Mopsuestia, Aphrahat was ready to see prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament. So he was given to see Old Testament 'types' pointing forward to Christ, and was ready to press some references into service in a way which seems forced to later readers. So e.g., he linked the reference to Zechariah 3:9 to 'a single stone with seven facets, or eyes' to the reference in Isaiah 11:2 to the seven aspects of the spirit of the Lord, of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. He went on and

> 'interprets the seven eyes (facets) as the seven gifts of the Spirit [as in Isaiah 11:2] . . . and goes further to interpret these as the seven eyes of the Lord which look upon the whole earth.'[41]

At the same time, possibly within a tradition established by Theophilus of Antioch (d. ca. AD 190), a Syrian by birth, he kept a strong emphasis on historicity, and that historical event provided the links between the Old and New Testaments. This approach has caused Neusner to comment that

> 'from the Apostolic Fathers to Nicea, Aphrahat remains very much by himself in his concentration on Scriptures as fundamentally historical documents.'[42]

Within the ascetic tradition we met in Tatian, Aphrahat plays a significant role. If humanity is to be a fit dwelling-place for the divine spirit, then celibacy is a prerequisite. He himself was a member of the group called the 'Sons of the Covenant', which he regarded as the backbone of the Church, a Church faced with persecution by a world for which he had but little regard. 'Virginity' is made virtually synonymous with 'holiness', and eremitic monks set out to live this out, in company with the animals, in what was seen as a return to primal Eden. To this were added mortifications and even the casting of oneself into fire or the jaws of wild animals, as a sort of martyrdom.

Baptism was not the common seal of the faith of every Christian but was reserved for celibates or those prepared to embrace celibacy for the rest of their lives. They thus made themselves 'single' for the Lord, or thus accepted 'circumcision of the heart'. It was in this way that you joined the 'community of the Covenant', or 'holy war'. As Aphrahat put it:

> 'He whose heart is set on the state of matrimony, let him marry before baptism, lest he fall in the spiritual contest and be slain. He also that loveth his possessions, let him turn back from the army, lest when the battle wax too fierce for him he remembereth his property and turn back and he that turneth back then is covered with disgrace.'[43]

Those who were unprepared for this life, remained as unbaptised 'hearers', while those who were baptised lived as ascetic celibates in their own homes, or accepted lives as hermits, anchorites or coenobitic monks.

Such stringency may not sit easily with us today, but it would be unfair to leave the reader with the impression that Aphrahat is an unattractive fanatic. As, e.g., the references from Neusner illustrate, even those whose sympathies lie with the targets of Aphrahat's criticisms find much to admire in the man, not least the love he has for the Church and his opposition to arrogance and abuse of authority.[44]

If Aphrahat represents a Syriac approach with little sympathy with that of the west, in *Ephrem Syrus* (d. AD 373) we meet someone who from Edessa exercised much more of a mediating role, even between Antioch and Alexandria. Through quite early translations into Greek his works, poetry and hymnody in particular, became quite well known in the west.[45]

Most probably born in Nisibis, Ephrem came under the influence of leaders such as the Bishop Jacob of Nisibis who attended the Council of Nicea in AD 325. He appears to have been baptised and to have embraced the solitary life at the age of 18 years and to have been ordained as a deacon. Opposed to the emphases of the Emperor Julian, who visited Nisibis in AD 362–363, Ephrem was caught up in the upshot of Julian's defeat and death in AD 363, in that Nisibis was ceded to the Persians. After a relatively short time there following this change in the city's status, he joined others in exile. He settled on the outskirts of Edessa, lived in a mountain cave and became a 'Son of the Covenant'.

While remaining interested in developments in Edessa and in particular in the foundation there of a theological school among the refugees, the so-called 'School of the Persians', it seems doubtful that he was the school's founder or its first principal. If literary work took up most of his time he still gained and retained the confidence of the Edessenes, to the point where, not long before his death he was asked to superintend the relief of the needy following a famine.

He was appalled at the minority status accorded to what he saw as orthodox Christianity on his arrival and took up his pen to attack the heretics in both prose and verse, most prominently in a work entitled, like that of Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*.[46] Not only did he oppose those heresies which were the objects of Aphrahat's polemic, but he also sought to combat Arianism, which had strong support from the Emperor Valens,

who visited Edessa in AD 372. One is tempted to believe that Ephrem played a part in so influencing the Edessenes that when Valens is said to have

> 'threatened the orthodox Christians there with a choice between death and apostasy to Arianism . . . the people went out in multitudes to await martyrdom at the "famous splendid shrine" of St. Thomas, outside the city.'[47]

Only then could the Emperor be induced to revoke his order, but some three months after Ephrem's death in June AD 373, the bishop, Barsai and a number of others were expelled from Edessa, only to return after the death of Valens in AD 378 to regain their churches from Arian control.

Ephrem, while probably bi-lingual, was clearly acquainted with classical Greek philosophers. But he does not appear to have been ready to follow some Greek theologians in their attempts to use logic beyond what was, in his view, the reach of the human intellect in theology. In many ways he reflected earlier Syrian theological emphases on the free will and on a view of salvation in terms of 'recapitulation' (cf. Irenaeus) and the recovery of 'paradise lost'.

He was firmly opposed to syncretisms, of the type he detected in Bardaisan and his followers. To condemnations of magic and a reliance in astrology, he linked denunciation of shameful sexual conduct.

> 'When Ephrem, in his *Hymns contra Haereses* warns against the Books of the Chaldeans, because they make people err (V:14), or against sorcery that turns us into pagans (V:19), or against the cult of the Venus star in whose honour lewdness is committed (VIII:IX:8), these are exactly the same objections that the Church fathers formulate against the Bardaisanites and the Manichees.'[48]

More specifically Bardaisan was attacked for denying true monotheism, creatio ex nihilo, the resurrection of the body and for the subjection of God to planetary powers. Strongly monist in his approach, he condemned the elaborate cosmologies of the heretics. In many ways he marked the close of an early stage in Syrian theology and the opening of a new one.

Continuity with predecessors is seen in his approach to exegesis, in which he resembles Aphrahat. He is ready to find prophecies of Christ and of the Acts of the Apostles in the Old Testament, but is restrained in his use of typology, and even more restrained in his use of allegory. However, like Aphrahat, he is ready to apply allegory in instances where the obtuseness of the Jews is under focus. Thus, e.g. the blind and dumb man in Matthew 12:22 is said to represent the Israel depicted in Isaiah 6:10, while his healing points to those who believe. On the other hand he explicitly rejects Paul's allegorization of Sarah and Hagar, as was Theodore

to do, or the allegorization of the six days of creation. In the usual Syrian tradition, even before Theodore of Mopsuestia's approach became *normative after* AD 428, Ephrem set out to apply historical common sense as a guiding principle.

Linked to this is his concern, along with Aphrahat once more, with those in the Old Testament who prefigure the sufferings of Jesus, from Moses, through Elijah and Elisha to Samuel, David, and Jeremiah. For him suffering was at the heart of the Christian life, as he saw it reflected in Colossians 1:24. So in his commentary on the *Diatessaron* he wrote:

> 'Jesus died to the world in order that no one should live to the world, and He existed in a crucified body in order that no one should walk sensually by it. He died to our world in His body in order that He may make (us) alive by His body to His world. And He mortified the life of the body in order that we may not live carnally by flesh. He is made the Master, a teacher not in tribulations of others but by his own suffering. And He Himself first tasted bitterness and (thereby) He showed us that no one can become His disciple by name but through suffering.'[49]

This he links with the condemnation of all that is flippant, especially laughter, which he calls

> 'the beginning of destruction of soul . . . laughter expels the virtues and pushes aside the thoughts on death and meditation on the punishment. O, Lord, banish from me laughter and give me weeping and lamenting, which Thou demandest from me.'[50]

Here we meet a typical Syrian stress on asceticism, linked to the ideal of the life of the anchorite, a life which parallels that of Jesus, not least in mountainous and desert areas. Christ dwells wholly in his disciples, and most particularly is this so among the anchorites in the wilderness. The elite of such anchorites are those

> 'who lived as though they were children of nature without a dwelling-place, and who used only grass, roots and fruits.'[51]

Ephrem provided great advocacy for the solitary monastic life, perhaps in the face of criticism of it. While he allowed for the fact that two or three monks may wish to live in community, it was no norm for monastic life in his view. This was in spite of the fact that the coenobitic or communal type of monasticism was growing in popularity towards the end of the 4th century. At most, Ephrem would see such a form as but an initiation into a monastic life which could only be realised in its fulness in solitude. However, he did stress the importance of study for the monk, as one of the ways towards spiritual maturity. Study and ascetic rigour combined to enrich the monastic ideal which he held up for others.

The rigour of Ephrem's approach may not appeal to many today, any more than does that of Aphrahat. However, there is no denying his achievements or the fact that translations of his works introduced Western Christians to the poetry and hymnody of the Syrian Church. He remains the most celebrated Father of that Church, a scientist as well as a theologian, with a regard for learning wherever he found it. He combined awareness of the importance of pastoral duties with a mastery of Syriac style. One scholar sums him up thus:

> 'I do not hesitate to evaluate Ephrem . . . as the greatest poet of the patristic age and, perhaps the only theologian-poet to rank beside Dante.'[52]

The new age heralded by Ephrem is clearly in evidence in the work of *Rabbula* (d. AD 435). Born of wealthy parents near Aleppo he travelled to Jerusalem and at his conversion, was baptised in the Jordan. He foreswore his wealth and family, and embraced the life of a recluse, until chosen as Bishop of Edessa in AD 411.

In Edessa itself Rabbula found much to which to bring his passion for order. The nobility in fact had clung to the old 'pagan' ideas associated with Bardaisan and had even been granted some tolerance for assembly, but not for sacrifices, by the Emperor Theodosius in AD 382. Rabbula set to work to demolish pagan shrines and to replace them with churches and infirmaries for the sick and needy. While Bardaisanites were still to be found at Edessa as late as AD 700, such moves, along with action against remaining Arians and Marcionites, brought greater attachment to Christianity amongst the population.

As to the Church itself, Rabbula, a great lover of order and conformity, set out to bring the Church at Edessa more into line with other major centres of the Church. Himself an austere man with a simple life style, he demanded the same from his clergy and the monks – the 'Sons and Daughters of the Covenant'. He promulgated canons to govern the lives of both groups – failure to conform entailed exile from his diocese.[53]

In his quest for conformity with Christianity at large, Rabbula at first was prepared to back John of Antioch (d. AD 441) and those favourably inclined towards Nestorius. However, the fact that Theodoret of Cyrrhus was able to show that the *Diatessaron* was open to a Nestorian interpretation, was enough to spur on Rabbula in his efforts to have it replaced by the latest Antiochene version of the four gospels. In the 'School of the Persians' at Edessa a leading figure was Hiba (d. AD 457), who was to succeed Rabbula eventually and who was the major translator into Syriac of the works of Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Hiba and his bishop came into conflict with each other, as Rabbula more and more distanced himself from the pro-Nestorius camp and allied himself with that camp's chief enemy, Cyril of Alexandria (d. AD 444). The

die against Nestorianism was clearly cast at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431, the same year in which Rabbula summoned a council in Edessa, which consigned the writings of Theodore to the flames and expelled Hiba from the city. Cyril sent one of his works to Rabbula for translation into Syriac, thus beginning the corpus of 'Monophysite' writings in that language, referred to by the Jacobite Church. Rabbula himself spent considerable periods of time in these last years of his life promulgating anti-Nestorian ideas in the area around Edessa. This campaign set the Nestorians against him, not least because they regarded his attitude towards Theodore as persecution of the dead. At the bishop's death there was considerable bitterness among his opponents and foreboding about the future among his supporters.

Such foreboding was justified, for Rabbula was succeeded by Hiba, who was suspended for his pro-Nestorian views at the 'council' of Ephesus (AD 449) and reinstated conditionally at the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451). His death in AD 457 saw the Monophysites, who were rising to power in Antioch also, regain the bishopric at Edessa via the moderate Cyrillian, Nuna. The leading Nestorian scholar Bar Sauma (d. AD 490) was expelled from Edessa and went to Nisibis where he founded a school and eventually became bishop. The 'School of the Persians' at Edessa was closed in AD 489 and the staff and students, along with craftsmen and merchants who sympathised with them, migrated east to Nisibis.

The upshot of this was that Rabbula had succeeded in bringing Edessa more into line with the Western Church, albeit eventually into its Monophysite expression of Christology. No longer was it cut off from the other Churches of the Roman Empire by its gospel version, its liturgy and its doctrine. But this was at the cost of the loss of individual identity of life and thought. After Rabbula the theology of Edessa and East Syria became derivative from Greek theology, despite clashes in both cultural background and linguistic formation. And:

> 'While Monophysites looked to Antioch with the empire, the Nestorians segregated themselves in Kurdistan and Upper Mesopotamia, within the orbit of Persian domination.'[54]

And as for Edessa itself, it never again reached the status it had during the time of Ephrem, even with its association with the polymath *Jacob of Edessa* (d. AD 708) whose scientific, theological and philosophical interests showed increasing dependence on those of Greek thinkers. However, it was Jacob, after the decisions of the third Council of Constantinople in AD 681 to reaffirm Chalcedon and denounce the attempts to reach out to Monophysites through Monotheletism (i.e. that the Christ had only one will) who set about consolidating Monophysite doctrine. Lost to the Roman Empire by Arab triumphs in Egypt and Syria, the Monophysites felt free to be even more open in the condemnation of Chalcedon. There it

was claimed, using the pretext of the madness of Eutyches, the 'Nestorian worship of a man' had been brought into the Church. Jacob claimed that the unity of the nature of the Trinity depended on the unity of the nature of Christ. In addition, in explicit opposition to Chalcedon, he held that the incarnation 'from two natures' rather than 'in two natures' was the crucial anchor of all true Christology. In addition he reminded all that the humanity, or as it was commonly called 'the flesh of Christ', had no existence of its own prior to the incarnation, and therefore that only the divine nature was a true hypostasis or logical subject of the Logos. So it was held that the person of Jesus Christ was of 'one incarnate nature of God the Logos', which Jacob saw as prefigured in the creation of 'man' as body and soul. In consequence Jacob's confession held that

> 'the holy, almighty, immortal God was crucified for us and died. Nor do we maintain, as do the Nestorians, those man-worshippers, that a mortal man died for us.'[55]

In such ways Jacob consolidated the earlier work of Severus of Antioch, and the lines between Monophysites, and Chalcedonians and Nestorians became clear to all concerned, despite reminders that they dealt with mysteries which were beyond adequate formulation.

THE ASCETIC SPIRIT OF SYRIAN CHRISTIANITY

Doubtless enough has been said already to alert the reader to the peculiarly ascetical tone of Christianity in Syria and Palestine. As one author summed up the situation:

> 'Early Syriac Christianity is permeated with asceticism.'[56]

It would seem probable that much of this had its roots in various Jewish groups like the Essenes, but there does seem to have been something of a propensity for mortification and fasting within the Syrian spirit long before the appearance of Christianity

> 'The same psyche which was formerly devoted to pre-Christian deities, was now placed at the disposal of the aims of Christian asceticism.'[57]

So the soil itself, within the Syrian countryside, was receptive to such seed.

The seed itself may be seen within Jewish Christianity in Jerusalem, in its first leader James. According to Hegesippus, as reported by Eusebius of Caesarea, James

> 'drank no wine nor strong drink nor did he eat flesh. No razor came upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath.'[58]

There are echoes here of the attitude of the Nazarenes, and at very least James ensured that the determinations of the council of Jerusalem, in Acts 15:29, included provisions concerning types of meat which could be eaten. Out of such a source could emerge, amongst those influenced by Jewish Christianity, features such as abstention from meat and wine, and various sorts of purification.

To the figure and influence of James could be added that of John the Baptist, whom Tatian, in the *Diatessaron* had on a diet of milk and honey, which was reputedly the food of heaven. It was clearly more difficult to make an ascetic of Jesus, who, it seems, was accused of being 'a glutton, and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners' (Luke 7:34; cf. also 7:31–50). However, that did not prevent particular use being made of other references in the same gospel, as well as of such passages as 1 Corinthians 12 and 2 Corinthians 11:2 and Matthew 19:12. So Luke 6:20 & 21 were taken literally to exalt actual physical poverty and hunger, devoid of the references in the parallel Matthew 5:3 & 6 to the spiritual dimension of each. Such an approach was bolstered by reference to Luke 6:24 & 25. Along with these went the references in Luke 20:34–36 which favour celibacy as being 'angelic', and becomes even more explicitly so in the Old Syriac version. (Here we are reminded of what was said above about the emphases of Tatian and Aphrahat.) In similar vein, as far as the Syrian Church was concerned, the women in the parable of the bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1–13) are 'virgins', not just young girls, as in some modern English translations (e.g. R.S.V. and N.R.S.V.), and the virginity could be applied to men as well as to women. James of Jerusalem was cited as favouring virginity and, along with Essene influence this seems to have been sufficient to ease aside Judaism's support for marriage.[59]

We have met already a number of the later key contributors to the stress on asceticism. That the ascetic was regarded with the same respect as the martyr is clear, and even in the time of Ignatius of Antioch asceticism was an option for devoted Christians. A contemporary of the bishop at Antioch was Saturninus (d. AD 135) who, as a pupil in the school of Simon Magus and Menander, advocated celibacy and the rejection of animal food in his form of Gnosticism. Another Syrian Gnostic teacher of that period was Cerdo of whom it was reported that Marcion was a pupil, and who pushed Syrian dualism. Even when such 'Gnosticisms' were rejected by Christians, the ascetic stress remained and gained a sympathetic response from those who favoured rescuing the baby from the bathwater – to use a somewhat unfortunate figure.

A major influence was exerted by Tatian, who was subsequently regarded as the main protagonist of encratism, a system which places severe restrictions on the use of material good things along the lines represented already in James, but carried to extremes. As we lack a copy of

Tatian's *Diatessaron* in the original Syriac it is difficult to determine just how encratite it was. However, the views of Tatian are reported by Jerome, inter alia, to have been that he used the statement that

> '"if one seeds on flesh, he will reap perdition from the flesh" as an argument and interpreted it as meaning that he who seeds in flesh is none else than a person who enters into union with a woman, and that whoever has intercourse with his wife will reap perdition from the flesh.'[60]

> 'The people of this world take a wife and make marriages; but they who shall be worthy of the life of that other world and of the resurrection of the blessed, will neither take wives nor make wedding feasts.'[61]

Vööbus sums up thus:

> 'All the available sources are unanimous in their testimony that the fundamental conception around which the Christian belief was centered was the doctrine that the Christian life is unthinkable outside the bounds of virginity.'[62]

While the *Doctrine of Addai* depicts asceticism, including poverty, as a feature of the early Edessene Church, such an approach is very obvious in the *Acts of Thomas*, which was written at Edessa in all likelihood before AD 250. So in section 12 of this work the readers are reminded thus:

> '. . . know this, that if you abandon this filthy intercourse you become holy temples, pure and free from afflictions and pains both manifest and hidden, and you will not be girt about with cares for life and for children, *the end of which is destruction*. . . . But if you obey, and keep your souls pure unto God, you shall have living children whom these hurts do not touch, and shall be without care, leading an undisturbed life without grief or anxiety, waiting to receive that incorruptible and true marriage (as befitting for you), and in it you shall be groomsmen entering into that bridal chamber <which is full of> immortality and light.'[63]

The symbol of the 'bridal chamber', but not that of the Church as the bride of Christ, was much beloved of Aphrahat, who clearly preferred virginity to marriage. Ephrem was to make more of the latter image and so to develop it that Mary and the Church have the status of a 'second Eve', to parallel that of Jesus as the 'second Adam'. However, as A. Baker points out, the Syrians did grasp the gospel principle that it is

> 'not physical continence that avails anything but the single-minded dedication to Christ.'[64]

Undergirding all of this were convictions such as:

- the possession of anything is itself tantamount to sin
- the cross of suffering is to be borne by every Christian
- the sins of mankind are to be mourned
- all are called to mortification, to the point of virtual suicide.

Solitary ascetics were known in Syria from the mid-third century, and the eremitic form of monasticism was obvious also from early in the fourth century led by Hilarion (d. AD 371). The ascetics included women, as Eusebius reported, and they gathered others who would share in lives of meditation and service to others, with the aim of attaining a vision of God. Some of the more extreme ascetics adopted what appear to later generations as somewhat bizarre life styles, including those who ate only grass, herbs and roots, and exposed themselves naked to the bitter cold of winter and the searing heat of summer.

Doubtless the most famous of such ascetics were the stylites, who made their solitary homes atop stone pillars. The most celebrated of such was *Simeon Stylites*, who in AD 410–412 located himself some 50 kilometres east of Antioch and from AD 417–459 lived on top of a pillar (see pl. 4). Theodore reported that Christians came to consult the Stylite from as far away as Britain and Spain. Clearly he was regarded as someone who continued the office of 'prophet' in the Church and provided the model of the 'holy man' of later generations, down to and including the *startsi* of Russia.

Early in that same 5th century we have references aplenty to the 'Sons and Daughters of the Covenant', whom we have encountered already, when reviewing the lives of Aphrahat and Ephrem.

> 'They were neither hermits nor monks, and yet they are distinct from the common people, and belonged in a broad sense to the clergy . . . Virgins, dwelling apart from their families, would choose as their protectors ascetics of the opposite sex, travelling about with them, and even living in the same house with them. Such virgins were known as *syneisaktoi*. The practice of continents living together in this state of so-called "spiritual marriage" was vigorously opposed by the authorities of the Church.'[65]

Constituting an elite group, they were allowed to have modest possessions, and were forbidden to engage in any money making activity. At baptism, it was required that 'the heart be circumcised' and that a life of continence be embraced. Very much second best was the life which was governed precisely by the Ten Commandments. What had developed was a form of monasticism quite independent of that which appeared in Egypt under Antony. Equally second best in the eyes of this group were forms of coenobitic or communal monasticism, but these grew in popularity, along

the model established by St. Basil the Great (d. AD 379) in the 6th century. Such a growth was against the condemnations of such as Isaac of Antioch (ca. AD 500), who regarded such coenobites as 'monks who had turned into merchants.'[66]

The ascetics' role was not entirely one of self-concern. Simeon Stylites, as well as being the spiritual mentor of many, was regarded virtually as the patron and protector of Antioch. His death, so soon after a particularly destructive earthquake at Antioch, was seen as a double penalty on the inhabitants of the city. The ascetics took up causes of social justice on behalf of the homeless, the needy, and poor and the powerless. Seeing themselves as outcastes, they campaigned for the suppressed and the powerless. In this they undertook roles quite different from those of the elite among the Manichaeans, even to the point of praying for barren women and for the restitution of marriages facing disruption – despite their own preferences for celibacy. It appears also that they opposed the institution of slavery as a denial of human dignity, and were ready to offer refuge, food, clothing and consolation to those in need. In all, asceticism was joined to concern for others in their attempts to imitate Christ and be joined with him.

SYRIAN MYSTICISM AND MONASTICISM

There was a close synergistic relationship between asceticism and mysticism as means towards the ultimate goal of vision of and union with God. The mystical emphasis was highly developed on Hellenistic and Jewish sources by *Dionysius the 'Areopagite'* in Syria in the 5th–6th centuries. While his influence was to be widespread in the West, after John Scotus Eriugena (d. ca. AD 877) had translated him, it was also significant for his influence among his Syrian countrymen.

Influences were not only homegrown for it is clear that the Egyptian *John of Lycopolis* (d. AD 394) was widely read in the Syriac translation, in which only are his works extant today. His treatise *The Spiritual State of the Soul* lays great stress on the ascetic preparation of the soul that seeks perfection, i.e. the life lived in conscious union with its Lord. John kept the focus on Christ for

> 'it is the "light of Christ" which dawns upon the soul, the "love of Christ" which cleanses it from sin, and the Path is the "way of Christ". It is through Christ . . . that the soul of the mystic comes to look upon the very essence of God, to be changed into his likeness and is made Godlike.'[67]

That renunciation of the material world is an integral part of the Way is made clear by John in many places, e.g.:

> 'Everything which is of this world is opposed to that which belongs to the Way of Christ. . . . As long as the mind is a captive to, and dominated by, the things of this world, whether they be great or small, so long will the light of the truth of the Way of Christ be hidden from it. . . . If a man does not, as far as is possible, keep his soul apart from the world, and renounce all that is in the world, both manifest and hidden, he cannot attain to the perfection of Christ Our Lord, to Whom be glory, and on us His mercy, for ever and ever. Amen.'[68]

Used as a guide to mystical doctrine and practice for more than 1300 years was the *Book of the Holy Hierotheos*, ascribed to the monk *Stephen Bar Sudayli* of Jerusalem ca. AD 500. With neo-Platonic and Alexandrian Christian emphases, the work set out 'to teach the Way of Perfection which leads to Heaven.'[69] It became the main source of western Syrian mysticism, as *Isaac of Nineveh* (d. ca. AD 700) became the chief representative of eastern Syriac mysticism. A bishop for only five months, Isaac became a mountain solitary, and sometime after AD 650 wrote his *Mystical Treatises* to guide other solitaries on the mystical path. In doing so he made use of Hierotheos, and of the 6th century solitary *Dorotheos* who established a laura near Gaza and stressed humility as the chief virtue in his *Instructions*. Also drawn upon were the Life of Anthony, St. Basil, Dionysius and Evagrius Ponticus (d. AD 399), the last being the first monk to write extensively.

Isaac was less concerned with the nature of the Godhead and with the final goal of union with God than with the Way of purification and illumination. His whole approach was eirenical, and once his particular references to Nestorian mentors were removed, his works had wide use among Monophysities and considerable influence on Muslim mysticism, being translated into both Greek and Arabic. This is not in anyway to gainsay his influence on Chalcedonian mysticism, but it was the Jacobites who preserved his writings, Nestorian as he was, for later generations. Isaac held that

> 'God is the only real Being; that man is made in the Divine image, and by purification can cleanse the soul from the defilements of sin, so that the image of God within it will once more be revealed. The soul, thus purified, can look upon God in all His Beauty, and once again be joined to That from Which it first came forth. He was plainly influenced by the teachings of the Alexandrian Hellenists and the Stoics – who taught that God was with man and within him – and to some extent by Philo, who also regarded man as the reflection of the Divine, and whose description of the soul rapt away from consciousness of itself when it has penetrated into the Holy of

Holies, is very like Isaac's description of the Vision. From Plato, no doubt through the writings of Plotinus, he has taken the idea of the ascent of the soul.'[70]

One 7th century Nestorian withstood all the blandishments of Alexandrian mysticism. He was *Sahdona* first of Nisibis and then of Edessa. In his *Book of Perfection* we see a restrained, deeply human spirituality, contrasting sharply with the ecstatic visionariness and esoteric intellectualism of his contemporary mystics.[71] In due course his Nestorian orthodoxy came under question and Sahdona found refuge in Edessa, where, in all probability the above work was written.

Such writings set a strong mystical mark alongside that of asceticism on Syrian monasticism. In contrast to the emphases on manual labour to be found in Benedictine, and also in Basilian, monasticism, the Syrian monks saw such labour as something fit only for weaker brethren. The emphasis was heavily on contemplation and no work was regarded as being more profitable than 'vigils'.

Monasticism itself, in its various forms, i.e. that of the solitary anchorites, that of those who pursued the solitary life in proximity to others in lauras or groups of dwellings, and that lived communally in the coenobitic fashion, grew in Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia along organized lines from ca. AD 306. It was in that year that *Hilarion* (d. AD 371) began a solitary life near Gaza, and continued it until the crowds of people wishing to consult him caused him to leave for Egypt in AD 353. In Palestine itself in and around Gaza and Jerusalem monasticism flourished under the guidance of leaders and teachers such as *Euthymius* (d. AD 473) who established a laura at Khan-el-Ahmar in AD 426 and taught *Sabas* (d. AD 532). The latter founded a laura between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea and in AD 492 was made superior of all the monks in Palestine, being throughout a strong opponent of Origenism and Monophysitism. Leadership continued to be exercised by such as Dorotheos (6th cent.) who headed a monastery at Gaza.

While Palestine was thus a great centre of monasticism, much the same could be said for Syria. By AD 380 monks were settled in large numbers in the deserts, just beyond the limits of settlement in Syria and within the next 100 years Syria was dotted with monasteries and was to remain so up to the 11th century. As such, from the middle of the 4th century the monks exercised considerable influence in the countryside, not least in the displacement of paganism.

'At all times the monks, either as solitary holy men, or gathered in large communities, were in a position to influence people in all classes of society. In other words they could assist or harm in the same way as patrons whose influence was purely secular.'[72]

While further east such a figure as Ephrem seems to have had an anti-coenobitic approach, East Syrian anchorites often chose to live in proximity to each other in lauras. Some see *Jacob of Nisibis* (d. ca. AD 338) as having introduced monasticism into Mesopotamia by the end of the 3rd century. Located at first in the mountains near Nisibis the movement was marked always by that asceticism which abhorred death by natural means, and preferred to be destroyed through sufferings and torments which would fill up the sufferings of Christ (Colossians 1:24 and Hebrews 11:37). Be that as it may, the growth in numbers and in establishments caused Isaac of Antioch (4th cent.) to comment that the primitive housing stage had been left behind. Further consolidation occurred under the leadership of Abraham of Kushkan (d. AD 586), but the movement from eremitic to coenobitic monasticism was no easy one, nor was it welcomed by all monks. Indeed some opposed what they regarded as a retrograde development, and uniformity was impossible to effect, meaning that Syrian monasticism had to be marked by compromise.

The propensity towards asceticism or whatever the form of monasticism, was an emphasis shared by the Manichaeans, and may have been confirmed in Mani himself by experiences in India.

Indeed:

'Reports of the primitive monks give us a picture which is astonishingly congruous with the familiar portrait of the monks in India.'[73]

This led to strong condemnation from Ephrem who wrote:

'In Mani the lie from India has again come to domination.'[74]

That this had to be said is a measure of the fact that Manichaean emphases were all too obvious in Syrian monasticism. After all the Manichaeans claimed to be true Christians and many of their emphases were congenial to Syrian Christians. So widespread did the influence, and even the intermingling, become that when Manichaeism came under persecution in Persia ca. AD 275 Christian leaders were hard put but anxious to distinguish their faith from that of Mani. The same tactic had to be repeated in AD 410–415.

One group closely related to the Christians and marked by Mystical asceticism were the 4th to 7th century Messalians, who were accused by Theodoret of suffering from Manichaeism. Having varying relationships with the institutional Church

'common to the whole movement, in its various shades and ramifications, is a deep and determined discontent with the ordinary attainments in the outward forms and in the mechanization of the religious and ascetic life. It is the conviction of the Messalians, that

the outward turning of the back upon the world and the reliance on external asceticism, does not automatically result in a turn into the inner world. Their emphasis is laid on an awareness of the all-pervading power of the Evil One and on longing for the coming of grace and mystical illumination, as a source of renewal.'[75]

Nevertheless, we must not forget the social concerns shown by the Syrian monks, who were admired for more than their famous ascetical devotion, as we have seen above. Syrian Christian schools, whether attached to monasteries or located within town bounds, were active as centres for the promotion of learning. At the more popular level they reached out to the boys of the urban communities. As one account has it of a school at Amid:

'The blessed [monks] . . . chose for themselves to teach boys. This they did out of the window since a seat was placed inside the window and hours were fixed for the boys to come, that is, in the morning and in the evening; and when they had taught one class to read the Psalms and the Scriptures, and these had withdrawn, another came in of little infants, thirty of them; and they would learn and go to their homes, for it was a populous village. And so the old men continued to do until the time of their end; and the boy pupils supplied their needs.'[76]

At a deeper level the scholars of the Syrian monasteries kept Greek learning alive during the 7th and 8th centuries, when it was at a low ebb in both the Latin West and the Greek East. A monastery like that at Qenneshre in North Syria produced a number of boy scholars and must have been one of the main centres of Greek learning at the time. Key figures produced by such schools were Severus of Nisibis and Jacob of Edessa. Probably the first among such distinguished schools was that at Nisibis, which we have met already and will meet again later. There the tutors were monks,

'and the students underwent a three years course, mainly theological, though Greek philosophy was studied as the foundation of Christian theology.'[77]

While Greek learning was thus preserved, it had a greater and seemingly more inhibiting influence on Syrian culture than on that of the Arabs. The native Syrian creative spark seemed to have dimmed, not least in the field in which it had shown exceptional skill, that of religious poetry. However, the reputation of the Syrian schools stood high and they were envied elsewhere. For example, Cassiodorus (d. AD 580) set up a theological college in the monasteries he founded at Vivarium, along the lines of those at Nisibis and Edessa, but they did not survive his death.

Overall, the Syrian monks were the sources of much learning and instruction not least on those things which belong to eternal peace. Increasingly the guidance of the religious and moral life of many people moved into their hands. They promoted the publication of key works, provided leaders for the Church and after AD 450 were instrumental in shaping the monasticism and religious life of Ethiopia. In addition they made an impact on the lives of the Arabs in the border lands and to the south.[78]

Very clearly the Syrian monks were imbued also with a strong missionary zeal, which we shall follow in some detail in later sections. Here we need note further only two examples, their impact on Armenia and Georgia to the north.

'What we have of the Armenian sources testifies to how deeply Christianity in this area became the operation field for Syrian monasticism. This is mirrored in many-sided activities in all the fields of Christian life and work. The Syrians created the tradition, ecclesiastical discipline, architecture and the beginnings of a religious literature before the rise of the indigenous literature – this for the purpose of instruction and worship. Syriac, too, became the language of liturgy and worship.'[79]

Pre-Christian inscriptions found in Georgia add their testimony also from the 4th century, and these inscriptions are of official character, but they are not written in Georgian, as we might expect, but in an Aramaic dialect. The inference is that the official language of the country was not Georgian at that time but an Aramaic dialect. If so this would have been a factor which must have facilitated the missionary enterprise of the Syrians in such a way that it would have been incredible had the Syrian monks stayed in Armenia, and not entered Georgia.[80]

COMMON RELIGIOSITY AND DISTINCTIVE COMMUNIONS

References have been made already to those religious approaches which made Syrian Christianity distinctive. The capacity of the Syriac language to absorb other dialects fostered the belief that the language itself smacked of heaven. Partly in reaction against what was regarded as Graeco-Roman presumption and arrogance, and partly via translations and other contributions of monasteries and schools, a distinctive Syrian approach was hammered out. Decades after Nicea it had a fierce advocate in Aphrahat (d. AD 345). That the approach could find its expression via asceticism and mysticism we have seen already.

It also produced its own emphases re symbols favoured in reference to the Church. While relatively little seems to be drawn explicitly from the Apostle Paul, under such as Aphrahat and Ephrem there are stresses laid on:

- Christians as the 'Church of the Gentiles', the 'new people' who have replaced the Old Testament 'chosen people'
- the physical body of Christ, not least via the sacrament of the Eucharist, probably to counter the anti-material views of the Gnostics, Marcion and Mani
- references to the body of Christ as temple or church
- Christ as the 'second Adam', a figure treated as a corporate personality, as was the first Adam
- images such as the vine, the vineyard, the tree of life and the rock, the last having considerably greater prominence in the Syriac Peshitta than in the Greek New Testament
- spiritual marriage, with the early stress on the Holy Spirit as 'mother' being replaced later by the Church having a maternal role – indeed relatively little is recorded about the role of the Holy Spirit
- the Church as a pilgrim group on the way to the fulfilment of the kingdom, along with an expression of the Church as both 'visible' and 'invisible'.

Following the condemnation of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in AD 431 life became less and less attractive for those who adopted Theodore of Mopsuestia as their great mentor. The efforts of Bishop Rabbula at Edessa to bring that Church more into line with the Church in the West, and subsequent events, saw the Nestorians begin to move east, their leader Bar Sauma doing so in ca. AD 460 after expulsion from Edessa. The Nestorian chapter at Edessa effectively concluded in AD 489 with the closure there of their school, which transferred to Nisibis within Persian territory. Consequently, Nestorians ceased to be a major concern for the Roman Imperial authorities.

While decisions of the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 were regarded by its supporters as against Apollinarianism, Nestorianism and Eutychianism, those whose sympathies lay with what they took Cyril of Alexandria to have been arguing regarded Chalcedon's decisions as pro-Nestorian. Those who had shaped the council's declarations were not attuned to the ethos of either the Egyptian or the Syrian countrysides. To the populations of both areas most of Chalcedon was anathema, and increasingly a Monophysitism, attributed falsely to Cyril, was advanced.

At first, some effort was made to accommodate Monophysite concerns, as, e.g. in the *Henoticon*, proposed by the Emperor Zeno in AD 482. Its implied criticism of Chalcedon led to strong reactions from Rome, and eventually to the excommunication by the Bishop of Rome of the patriarchs of Alexandria and Constantinople and the Emperor. The resulting schism lasted until AD 518, when Justin I succeeded as Emperor and set about re-affirming Chalcedon. As part of such policy military and bureaucratic pressure was brought on the population of Syria, futher

hardening it in its opposition to things Chalcedonian and Graeco-Roman both. Liturgically, this was expressed by the addition by Bishop Peter the Fuller (d. AD 488), of Antioch, to the *Trisagion* of the Monophysite clause 'who was cruficied for us', so that it read:

> 'Holy God, Holy Almighty, Holy Immortal, who was crucified for us, have mercy on us.'

Fifty-four Monophysite bishops were removed from their sees, and monks and priests pressured to conform to Chalcedon between AD 521 and 525. To preserve a Monophysite clergy one bishop, John of Tella (d. AD 538), engaged in clandestine ordinations as far as was practicable. In so doing he provided a model for similar activity later by Jacob Baradai. Out of this persecution there came renewed devotion to the Monophysite cause.

The persecution eased somewhat with Justinian's accession in AD 527, although the continued activities of John of Tella did not go unnoticed or approved. In effect he was building up an alternative communion with its own canons and structures for the future. Nevertheless, exiles were allowed to return, and with the support of the Empress Theodora some talks aimed at reconciliation occurred at Constantinople in AD 533. (Those involved include Severus, and John of Tella himself.) Papal opposition and the misgivings of Justinian led to the failure of these attempts by AD 535.

In AD 536, under the advocacy of Pope Agapetus I, the persecution of Monophysites was renewed. Their leaders were anathematised, Severus was gaoled, supporters were replaced in positions of leadership, and Monophysites were banished from Constantinople. Severus' works were burned and copying of them made a punishable offence. John of Tella was unable to ordain within the Empire and eventually he was caught and executed in February AD 538. Reliance for ordination came to rest on only one bishop who resided in Persia, but in AD 544–545 the borders were sealed due to war. Monophysite prospects seemed very dim indeed in Syria.

However, the strategically important Ghassanid Arab tribes on the borders between Persia and the Roman Empire, under their leader Harith bar Gabala, favoured Monophysitism. In AD 542–543 he asked the Empress Theodora to find two Monophysite bishops for his people, and she was ready to assist. Two monks at Constantinople were found and consecrated. One was Theodorus who became Bishop of Arabia, an area peopled by nomadic Arabs which reached almost to Jerusalem and an area in which Monophysite refugees found haven. The other was Jacob Baradai who was ostensibly Bishop of Edessa and whose work we have outlined already. Suffice it to record here that by AD 566 the Monophysite hierarchy in Syria seemed secure with a patriarch and two metropolitans.

This is not to imply that persecution from Constantinople ceased. The later years of Justinian and those of Justin II (AD 565–578) saw it ease

and there were further attempts at reconciliation. These attempts had the support of the 'Green' faction in Constantinople, which faction maintained its sympathy for Monophysitism. However, with Maurice (AD 582–602) persecution was renewed, and at Edessa itself no less than 400 monks who refused to forswear Monophysite views were executed outside a city gate. The city's churches were handed over to the Chalcedonian Melkites, and the persecutions eased only when a number of natural calamities caused the persecutors to have second thoughts.

Phocas removed Maurice and ruled until AD 610, somewhat to the relief of the persecuted, not that he was any less anti-Monophysite. But in AD 610 he was replaced by Heraclius who was to reign until AD 641. Heraclius inherited considerable chaos throughout the Empire, with the Slavs and Avars in control of the Balkans and the Persians encamped in Asia Minor, somewhat to the relief of the Monophysites. It was not until AD 622 that Asia Minor was recovered, and after a series of setbacks and partial victories the lost Near East was recovered, and Persia humbled by AD 628. Throughout these vicissitudes the leaders of the Orthodox Church had been staunch allies of the Emperor who in AD 630 restored to Jerusalem the holy cross removed by the Persians seventeen years earlier.

Heraclius had visited Edessa in AD 628 and was impressed by its monastic piety and scholarship. The Bishop, Isaiah, refused him a role in the service in the cathedral unless the Emperor condemned both Chalcedon and the theological opinions expressed by Pope Leo the Great in AD 449, in what is called his *Tome*. This led to exile for the bishop, and a number of his aristocratic supporters, and to the Monophysite churches there being delivered into Melkite hands. However, Heraclius was convinced of the need to somehow reconcile Monophysites and Chalcedonians, not least in key areas such as Syria and Egypt. So he supported the monergism (single activity of Christ) attempts of Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople (d. AD 638) and gained support from Pope Honorius I of Rome (d. AD 638) and Cyrus, the Patriarch of Alexandria. But strong Chalcedonian condemnation of the approach came from the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Sophronius (d. AD 638). This led Sergius to amend his approach to monotheletism (one will in Christ) in AD 636, and Heraclius promulgated this in his *Ecthesis* of that year. However, it failed to gain support from the Monophysites and Honorius' successors in Rome were also opposed. So the final effort to find a formula under which Chalcedonians and Monophysites might find unity proved futile.

But in any case other factors intervened, for the Arab expansion overtook all these efforts, and by AD 639 Edessa was in Arab hands. The conquerors maintained the status quo concerning property, but at least the Monophysites were now removed from Byzantine attempts to enforce conformity with Chalcedon. So, as one Monophysite historian commented ruefully, but gratefully

> 'at this time the Great Church of Edessa . . . had passed from us. Nevertheless, the advantage to us was not small, in that we were delivered from the cruelty of the Byzantines and from their evil and their wrath and their bitter zeal against us, and we had rest.'[81]

In Edessa the Monophysites were represented by both Syrian Jacobites and Armenians, each of which maintained their own school in the city.

Throughout these upheavals there had been Monophysite expansion into northern Mesopotamia, at the expense of the Nestorians who had found a haven there. Such incursions had been sufficient to cause the Nestorian Patriarch, Ishu-Yab (d. AD 658), to upbraid the local Nestorians for their laxity. The momentous events in themselves encouraged belief that the last days were present and apocalyptic writing abounded, with persecutions and disasters seen as harbingers of the End of all things. So, e.g., Monophysites saw the Arab victories as divine punishment for Byzantine arrogance and persecution.

While after AD 450 Nestorian thought does not appear to have had the same flowering as that of the Monophysites, its stress on the essential humanity of Jesus said much to the harsh desert life experience of many solitary monks. Inspired by the 'companionship' of Jesus, as described in Hebrews 4:15, and also by the conviction that his obedience had rectified the disobedience of Adam, the Nestorian monks saw themselves as continuing this process. As the approach has been described:

> 'Through Christ's real humanity he is united to man and has thus renewed human life, indeed all material creation, just as he has renewed the spiritual realm through the union of that realm with his spiritual reality.'

This process is

> 'to be continued voluntarily by his church and initiating the church into the life of heaven in which man is freed from indigence and becomes immortal and immutable.'[82]

So while Syria, occupied by the Muslim Arabs after AD 638, had both adamant Chalcedonian Melkites and equally adamant Monophysites, it was the latter along with Nestorians who predominated in northern Mesopotamia. If the extremes were represented by the Monophysites and the Nestorians, they had in common their rejection and abhorrence of Chalcedon. To this must be added the fact that there is no surviving Syriac reference to the succession of Petrine primacy at Rome. In fact such primacy as there was was related to the Catholicos among Nestorians and to the Patriarch among Jacobites, or to the whole episcopal college in each group.

'At the same time, apart from the animus of the Jacobites against Pope Leo and of the "Nestorians" against Pope Celestine, they have nothing to say for good or ill about the Roman primacy; their isolation prevented irritations and embitterment, and often in the future was to make friendly relations, and even partial reunions, possible.'[83]

UNDER MUSLIMS AND CRUSADERS TO AD 1510

Reference has been made several times to the fact that some Christians, particularly the harried Monophysites, were ready to welcome the triumphs of the Muslim Arabs over the arrogant, persecuting Roman Empire. Naturally those Christians who supported Chalcedon, i.e. the Melkites, were appalled. So, Sophronius of Jerusalem (d. AD 638) called for repentance that they might all be freed from the Muslim yoke, and Maximus the Confessor (d. AD 662), in correspondence between AD 634 and 640, wrote of a 'barbaric nation from the desert' as having temporarily overrun lands not their own, a sign that the Anti-Christ was at hand.

While all Christians saw the Arabs as a scourge on others' heresies, it was not until around AD 700 that Islam assumed the place once assigned to Rome as the fourth member of the bestiary of Daniel 7. The *Apocalypse* of about AD 690 attributed to Methodius, for all its acceptance by Monophysite circles, regarded the Roman Empire as certain to be restored to control after some 70 years. The Arab triumph was seen as a temporary one, to punish the Empire for such faults as sexual licence, and while Arabic and Jewish eyes saw the capture of Constantinople as the ultimate goal, Christian hopes were focussed on the recapture of Jerusalem.

Once it was accepted that Arab rule was likely to be of long duration there was considerable emphasis on Muslim monotheism as a belief held in common with Christians. However, very little in the way of detail was known about Islam. When taken up in some detail by John of Damascus (d. AD 749), who served within the Umayyad bureaucracy, as had his father before him, Islam was depicted as itself a Christian heresy. Within a Christian ghetto, John prayed for the victory of the Byzantine emperor over 'the people of the Ishmaelites, who . . . as blasphemous enemies . . . are fighting against us.'[84] At the same time John seems more concerned over the iconoclasm of the Syrian born Emperor Leo III (d. AD 741) than he was over Islam, his iconoclast critics regarding him as 'pro-Saracen'. He opposed Islam on theological rather than political grounds, and: 'His aim was to inform the Christian community of the faith and practice of the Muslims with whom they shared their communal life, rather than to inflame hatred.'[85]

All too readily Constantinople's attitudes were based on hearsay and there was ready recourse to ad hominem attacks on Muhammad as an 'Arian', a 'liar', 'hypocrite', 'pseudo prophet' and 'adulterer', and on reputed Arab lechery. Far better informed on Islam was the Arabic-speaking Bishop Theodore Abu-Qurra in the latter half of the 8th century in Syria. In some 17 out of 52 short treatises, Theodore used but little abuse, relying more on dialogue and discussion. He attempted to expound the doctrine of the trinity to deal with Muslim charges of tri-theism, and dealt also with other main points of the critique directed against Christianity. A somewhat similar approach was taken by Nicetas Byzantios, in the 9th century. He covered similar areas, and despite his lack of knowledge of Arabic, he used several translated versions to refute the claims of the Qur'an. Clearly by the middle of the 9th century, with Dionysus of Tellmahre (d. AD 845) we have clear recognition that Islam was less of a Christian heresy than a distinctive new religion.

The dialogue approach is most obvious and detailed in the supposed correspondence between Caliph 'Umar II (d. AD 720) and the Emperor Leo III (d. AD 741). On what is argued to be a Greek original, followed by a Latin abridgement, and then an expanded Armenian form by Ghevond in the 9th–10th century,[86] a detailed dialogue is developed which revealed wide knowledge of respective Christian and Muslim emphases. In what may only be described as a good spirit one chided the other over such issues as the falsification of Scripture, the role and status of Jesus and of Muhammad, the divisions among both Christians and Muslims, the replacement of Saturday by Sunday or Friday and the veneration of relics and pictures on one hand and of the Ka'bah at Mecca on the other. Overall the consensus of opinion on the correspondence is that there was an authentic original, and if this is so, it reveals a considerable advance in understanding, even when we discount a good deal of the detailed contents as having been expanded over the years since the original.

With the further passage of the years, knowledge of the other faith increased, and with it understanding, not that Christians gave up hopes for the conversion of Muslims or vice-versa. So by the 12th century Byzantine views of Islam reflected some attitudes that were negative to the extreme, but also some that looked for agreement on a monotheistic basis. And in the later writings of the retired Emperor, John Cantacuzenos (d. AD 1383), there is informed discussion of Islam coupled with hopes for its conversion, hopes echoed by the theologian Gregory Palamas (d. AD 1358). It should be noted, in this connection, that Muslims who converted to Christianity were required still to anathematise Muhammad and all his relatives.

As we have seen with John of Damascus, Christians of whatever persuasion, including Melkites like John, were not averse to co-operating with and serving their new rulers. The Arabs were quick to recognize their

need of help in the professional, educational and bureaucratic tasks associated with their new empire. Experienced Christian bureaucrats were widely employed, not least in the area of financial management. As Smith put it:

> 'Under the Umayad caliphs, Syrian Christians frequently held high office at Court, and in the reign of Mu'awiya, the governor of Medina employed Christians from Ayla to police the sacred city.'[87]

That this was not restricted to Syria or Arabia is clear from a report of Mukaddasi that in the 10th century

> 'the clerks in Syria and Egypt were Christians, as were most of the doctors in Syria. In 369 [AH, i.e. AD 991] the vizier in Baghdad was a Christian, Nasr ben Harun.'[88]

At a somewhat lesser, but still observable level were the contributions of Byzantine architects and craftsmen to the buildings and mosaic decorations of Damascus and Jerusalem, not least being the latter's famous Dome of the Rock.

Such contributions eased the path of conversion to Islam for not a few, as also did contributions from Christians towards the development of Islamic thought and institutions. Not least did these come from the fact that between AD 750 and 950 Jacobites and Nestorians, transmitted to the Muslims virtually all the knowledge enshrined in the Syriac language, and what was known of pagan Greek thought. In addition the Christian mysticism of the region played a role in the development of Sufism among Muslims.

From the Muslim side there was not only the acceptance of Christian contributions as a matter of expediency. While they looked for and encouraged the conversion of Christians to Islam, they saw them, along with the Jews, as 'people of the Book' because they shared with Muslims the heritage of the Hebrew scriptures. The Qur'an itself supported dialogue with non-believers, and Muslims, for all their enmity with the Roman Empire, were not universally hostile to Christians or their faith. Nor was any distinction made between the various Christian groups, except to have some special care with respect to the Melkites, whose attitude towards Constantinople was clearly more positive than that of the Jacobites. It was usual to leave Christian churches untouched, or at most to take over some in a town, or to share with Christians portions of the buildings concerned. The most renowned of such cases was the fact that

> 'the cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Damascus was shared by Muslims and Christians until the reign of al-Walid (AD 705–715), when on some pretext the whole was transformed into a mosque.'[89]

There are cases recorded also in which Muslims and Christians shared in ceremonies associated with the nativity of Christ.[90]

On a more individual level, a Muslim leader like 'Umar

> 'when he visited Syria in AD 639, stayed with the Bishop of Ayla, and he showed friendliness towards the Christians of the town. Elsewhere, many of those forming the agricultural population of Syria, while remaining Christian, settled down peacefully under Muslim rule.'[91]

Likewise many Christian Arabs, particularly the famous tribe of Banu Taghlib in Central Mesopotamia, while ready to ally themselves with Islam in war, retained their Christian faith, under both the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates.

> 'The same was the case with the Beni Tanukh who remained Christian up to the reign of the Caliph al-Mahdi.'[92]

On the other hand the Banu Ghassan, like many other Christians, yielded to persuasion of argument and opportunity and became Muslim.

This leads us from the area of overall attitudes to that of official arrangements. What sort of modus vivendi was developed for Christians within Islamic society? In general the Christians were regarded as a *milla*, or religious sect, and were required to pay special tribute taxes, not least in lieu of military service. They were given the right to keep (most of) their churches, but, ostensibly, were not permitted to build new ones. Tax reforms instituted by 'Umar II (AD 717–720) encouraged conversions to Islam, but churches and monasteries remained exempt from such taxation. However, he insisted that Christians and Jews wear distinctive garb, and he excluded them from public office. Nevertheless, his reign was a brief one, and again we know but little as to how widely and strictly his measures were enforced. Even when the Caliph Mansur (AD 754–775) ordered the branding of all Christians, the execution of the decree varied from place to place, as had Roman persecutions of Christians before AD 311.

The best known detailed statement of the official situation is that in the so-called *Covenant of 'Umar*. Drawn up in the schools of law it came to be ascribed, like much else, to the famous caliph, 'Umar I (d. AD 644). Somewhat curiously couched in language which is that of the vanquished towards the victors, the text, in a letter of the chief commander in Syria, Abu 'Ubaida, runs as follows:

> 'When thou camest into our land we asked of thee safety for our lives and the people of our religion, and we imposed these terms on ourselves; not to build in Damascus and its environs church, convent, chapel, monk's hermitage, not to repair what is dilapidated of our

churches nor any of them that are in Muslim quarters; not to withhold our churches from Muslims stopping there by night or day; to open their doors to the traveller and wayfarer; not to shelter there nor in our houses a spy, not to hide one who is a traitor to the Muslims; to beat the nakus [i.e. bell] only gently in our churches, not to display a cross on them, not to raise our voices in prayer or chanting in our churches, not to carry in procession a cross or our book, not to take out Easter or Palm Sunday processions; not to raise our voices over our dead, nor to show fires with them in the markets of the Muslims, nor bring our funerals near them; not to sell wine nor parade idolatry in companies of Muslims; not to entice a Muslim to our religion nor invite him to it; not to keep slaves who have been the property of Muslims; not to prevent any relative from entering Islam if he wish it; to keep our religion wherever we are; not to resemble the Muslims in wearing the kalansuwa, the turban, shoes, nor in the parting of the hair, nor in their way of riding; not to use their language nor be called by their names; to cut the hair in front and divide our forelocks; to tie the sunnar round our waists; not to engrave Arabic on our seals; not to ride on saddles; not to keep arms nor put them in our houses nor wear swords; to honour Muslims in their gatherings, to guide them on the road, to stand up in public meetings when they wish it; not to make our houses higher than theirs; not to teach our children the Koran; not to be partners with a Muslim except in business; to entertain every Muslim traveller in our customary style and feed him in it three days. We will not abuse a Muslim, and he who strikes a Muslim has forfeited his rights.'[93]

A briefer version, with some features distinctive to it, runs thus:

'These are the terms imposed on the Christians. The rich are to pay forty-eight dirhams, the middle class twenty-four, and the poor twelve. They are not to build churches, not to lift up a cross in the presence of Muslims, and to beat the nakus inside the churches only. They are to share their houses that the Muslims may dwell in them, otherwise I ['Umar] shall not be easy about you. They are to give that part of the churches towards Mecca as mosques for the Muslims, for they are in the middle of the towns. They are not to drive pigs into the presence of Muslims. They are to entertain them as guests three days and nights. They are to provide mounts, for those on foot, from village to village. They are to help them and not to betray them. They are not to make agreements with their enemies. He who breaks these conditions may be slain and his women and children made slaves.'[94]

It would appear that some of these provisions were first effected under 'Umar II, which doubtless helped the ascription of the document(s) to his

illustrious predecessor and namesake. However, references to the *Covenant* are not common until later.

'In the first century (AH) it is ignored; in the second some of its provisions are sometimes observed. By 200 AH (i.e. AD 815/816) it existed in the traditional form, but with many minor variations.'[95]

So a continued Christian existence, within certain limitations, was quite possible, under Muslim rulers. Pressures to convert came via financial decrees on one hand and from perceived opportunities for advancement on the other. Sectarian divisions among Christians was another factor which promoted conversion to Islam. But even some who accepted Islam did so nominally rather than with conviction beyond such perceived opportunity. So many

'who formed an important part of the Umayyad armies, cared little for Islam, and were described as "Arabs" like strangers and Muslims with the characteristics of Christians.'[96]

The Jacobites, as the majority group of Christians in Syria and as far east as Nisibis, held their ground overall for some centuries. The monastery of Mar Barsauma, between Samosata and Melitene, was the seat of Jacobite patriarchs in the 8th and 9th centuries, and another important centre was Haran. Some Jacobite monasteries had as many as 1000 monks, mainly living in coenobitic fashion with associated hermits. Under the united Arab rule of Syria and Persia Jacobites had missionary opportunities further east, but were not in a position to seriously challenge Nestorian efforts in these areas. Nevertheless by AD 1280 Barhebraeus (d. AD 1286) reported that the Jacobite patriarch oversaw 20 metropolitans and about 100 bishops from Anatolia and Syria to lower Mesopotamia and Persia. Relations with Muslims continued along constructive lines up until the era of the crusades, but Jacobite numbers declined greatly late in the Middle Ages.

The 10th century saw a resurgence of Byzantine power under Emperor Nicephorus Phocas (d. AD 969). In AD 965 he had recaptured Tarsus, Mopsuestia and Cyprus. Antioch held out against the Byzantines until AD 969, and Aleppo fell to them in AD 970. Consolidation of gains, against the Fatimid reaction from Egypt ensued under the Emperor John Tzimisces (d. AD 976), and gains were made as far south as Caesarea, but caution dictated against over-extension of the lines of supply and communication. Fatimid reaction continued until the end of the century and reached its most extreme form under the caliphate of al-Hakim (AD 1009–1020), when

'the Christians of Egypt and Syria were persecuted, and the churches of Jerusalem were destroyed, and the furniture of the churches was

spoiled, and the Christians were made to wear a wooden cross of five pounds weight round their necks, and a large number became Muslims; and hearts were torn with pity. . . . And the bishop in Egypt related that in the western districts the number of churches destroyed reached about 40,000 churches and monasteries, and that only a few persons [Christians] remained.

The general accuracy of this brief statement is borne out by other authorities. It appears that the motive of Hakim was zeal for Islam, and he was particularly angered against the Christians and Jews because of the important positions they held in the state and their insolent bearing towards the Muslims.'[97]

Under the Emperor Basil II (d. AD 1025), Antioch was secured, and in the year of this Emperor's death Edessa was regained by the Byzantines.

A new power arose on the scene some 40 years later in the Seljuk Turks, who by AD 1067 had invaded Cilicia and had captured its capital Caesarea. Three years later the Byzantines took, but then lost Jerusalem to the Seljuks, to be followed that same year by the loss of Antioch. A major defeat for the Byzantines at Manzikert in Armenia in AD 1071 meant the loss of Asia Minor and a threat to Constantinople itself, while Syria and Palestine seemed secure in Seljuk hands. In Edessa there was a period of instability as between AD 1077 and 1086 the Armenian Philaretos ruled. Then the Seljuk Turks took control until AD 1095, when for the next three years the ruler was Thoros, a lieutenant of Philaretos. The crusades were to lead to further changes up until AD 1144.

The crusade period from AD 1095 to 1291 had long reaching effects on Christians in Syria and Palestine, as elsewhere. Byzantine requests for aid from the West led to a series of crusades which paid little if any attention to the claims of Constantinople to suzerainty. Indeed the crusade preached by Pope Urban II, and taken up by European princes, nobles and their followers, envisaged something far different from helping a fellow Christian ruler to regain his lost territories. The crusaders captured Antioch in AD 1098 and Jerusalem in AD 1099, crowning Baldwin as King of Jerusalem in 1100. In AD 1098 the Armenian ruler Thoros of Edessa was persuaded to name Baldwin as his successor in return for aid against the Seljuks. Thoros was murdered by the populace, but the city still came under crusader rule, with Joscelyn I as Count of Edessa from AD 1119–1131, and under Joscelyn II until AD 1144 when the Seljuks captured the city and rebuffed the count's attempt to retake it in AD 1146. He was forced to flee and the Turks set about ridding the city of its Christian population, by such measures as banishing many of the Armenians and replacing them with collaborating Jews. In addition marriage with the Turks by more than 100 Christian women within one year, further weakened the Christian position in the city.

The loss of Edessa precipitated the second crusade in AD 1147, but it proved to be fruitless and Jerusalem was lost to Saladin in AD 1187. The third crusade AD 1189–1192 regained some coastal areas but failed to take Jerusalem and the fourth crusade was diverted to and captured Constantinople, setting up a Latin kingdom (and patriarchate) which lasted from AD 1204 to 1261. Jerusalem was regained for some 15 years, AD 1229–1244, but by negotiation, not by force of arms. The failure of the crusaders was exacerbated when they failed to make common cause with the anti-Muslim Mongols, sometimes led by Nestorian generals and with pro-Christian khans, like Argun (d. AD 1291). This failure contributed to the Mamluk defeat of the Mongols at Ain Jalut in AD 1260, after Damascus and Aleppo had both fallen to the Mongols earlier that year. The remaining history of crusading efforts in Syria, Palestine and Egypt was one of failure, not least in the face of Mamluk power from Egypt. The Mamluks took Jaffa and Antioch in AD 1268, and took Acre, the last crusader possession on the mainland, in AD 1291.

The consequences of the crusades were many. The Latins introduced a new focus of loyalty for Christians. In both Edessa and Jerusalem in AD 1099 a Latin archbishop and a Latin patriarch respectively, were consecrated, to be followed in AD 1100 by a Latin patriarch at Antioch and in AD 1310 one was named for Alexandria.[98] Melkite Christians were challenged to give their obedience to Rome rather than to Constantinople, while the presence of Latin patriarchs virtually unchurched the Melkites. Loyalty to their patriarch was even strained among the Jacobites, with little courtesy extended to him, or to their own bishop at Edessa in AD 1100. It even came to schism between the patriarch and the Edessans.

Mamluk pressure made life difficult for both Melkites and Maronites, the latter group being made up of a nucleus of a small monastic group of Monothelites whose numbers were swelled by refugees in the mountains. The Maronites gave their ecclesiastical loyalty to Rome under Uniate arrangements from AD 1182,[99] while the Melkites still looked to Constantinople. Together the two groups made up about 30% of the population of Syria. Jacobites were to be found in the main in rural areas and Melkites in the cities, but overall Christians had lost majority status after AD 1200. The legacy of bitterness from the crusades soured relations between Christians and Muslims, which previously had been those of tolerance coupled with subtle pressures for conversion by the latter. The results could be seen in a report of a Western visitor, Varthema, who, in AD 1510, could report on the beauties of Damascus; populated by 'Moors', Mamluks and Greek Christians, most of the last being wealthy merchants, 'but they are ill-treated.'[100] No less must it be remembered that Greek Christians in these lands had suffered deeply under the crusaders who ostensibly had come to help, and, in fact, came to dominate and to exploit.

It remains to review briefly the fate of Syrian Christian culture and creativity over this whole period. In the time of the Umayyad caliphate, i.e. to AD 750, it made very significant contributions to Muslim culture and learning. So successful were they in this that the passage of the Umayyads saw consolidation of Islamic theocracy, and a concurrent decline in Syrian creativity. Indeed as the former grew the Syrian Christians, like Christians elsewhere under Muslim rule, were forced increasingly on to the defensive in order to preserve their heritage against an increasingly confident challenger.

The intellectual edge of this challenge had been honed by the Islamic philosopher al-Ghazzali (d. AD 1111), not least in his great work *The Revival of Religious Sciences*; by a somewhat intuitive blend of traditionalism and intellectualism he so systematised and explained Muslim thought and teaching that it marked a watershed for Muslims, which may be compared to that provided for Christans by Thomas Aquinas (d. AD 1274) in his *Summa Theologica.* Early in the 14th century, the Syriac literary tradition was replaced by that of Arabic, with only the Church liturgies retained in Syriac. The use of the Arabic vernacular over many generations had prepared the way for this shift. In many ways the work of the polymath Jacobite Bishop Barhebraeus (d. AD 1286) represents the height of Syriac achievement, after which decline set in. As for Greek, its use was preserved among the Melkites, with their relationship to Constantinople, but it too ceased to be used generally in the population at large by AD 900. That Syrian Christianity persisted is a tribute to the fidelity of many over the centuries. That it made a distinctive contribution to Christianity is as undeniable as it is little recognized among Western Christians. That it was a vehicle by which Islam was influenced constructively in its early years, and somewhat destructively via modern secularism in later centuries is also clear. And, finally, we need to recognize and pursue the influence of Syrian Christianity in areas to the south, north and east.