

Church of the East
Committee on Iraqi Question

3939 Lawton Street, San Francisco, California 94122

PHONE: 564-9126

April 14, 1969

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

Dear Sir,

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

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

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

FACTS MISREPRESENTED

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

REGRETTABLE PUBLICITY

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

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

UNWARRANTED INTERFERENCE BY WCC

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

of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Hooft, to Mr. Darmo (then Metropolitan) to attend the Assembly Meeting of the WCC in Delhi, India, and this was deliberately done despite His Holiness' instructions (in answer to Hooft's letter) not to invite the man who already was active in his vicious prapaganda against the Patriarch and the whole Church. This was enough to encourage a man possessed with insatiable ambition for power and greed of money to greater excesses.

By this act the Secretary General of the WCC went against the very spirit and letter of that body, and this has proven to be a precuser to complaints from other Churches of similar interference in their affairs and which if not halted may very well prove the beginning of the end of WCC.

CONTRADICTION OF FACTS

The Western press has accused Iraq of "instability and barbarism" but the WCC apparently is in full accord with the same Government for the injustice perpetrated against the Assyrians. How can the said Secretariat reconcile this its attitude with that expressed towards the happening in Iraq; such as the hangings which have been taking place, the seizure of foriegn educational institutions, etc., the incarceration of individuals as foriegn spies, the invasion of Zchecoslovakia by the Russians, the inhuman war between Biafra and Nijeria, the Civil Rights Movement in U.S.A., all of which it has protested against with indignation and horror, and yet by some unknown measure of justice it justifies the cruelties and injustices being committed on the Church of the East and Assyrian people in Iraq ?

As you will observe our criticism is directed at the Secretariate and not at the World Council of Churches as a body which is formed of numerous churches and most of whom have little or no saying in the matter.

It is indeed generally felt that WCC has diverted from its original function which was to bring an understanding between the divided Christian churches on a historic and scriptural theological basis and has instead got itself embroiled in international politics with consequences which we have already witnessed.

SEEING THE SPLINTER, BLIND TO THE BEAM

In the words of Our Lord: " Why do you see the straw (chip) which is in your brother's eye, and do not observe the beam which is in your own eye ? (Matthew 7.3).

It is indeed ironic when Western Christianity is being torn from its very foundation by heresies and schisms, when our daily media of communication is full of stories about bishops and priests of one church or another, not only forming churches of their own, and establishing moral norms which are completely opposed to the Christian morality, nay, even denying the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, but the WCC shows no interest whatsoever in their doings, and yet, it is anxious to publicize and give a totally false picture regarding an insignificant occurrence in the Church of the East; a church which is least known to the public in general, while at the same time gives a blind eye to the significant events taking place in other Christian Churches which are far greater in numbers and well known to the public.

These facts, Sir, make it self evident that the purported split in the Church of the East is totally unfounded, and a mere wishful thinking of some interested parties, but if there remains anydoubt in the mind of your eminent organization, then we will ask the WCC to send its representatives to Iraq, other countries of the Middle East and India, to make inquiries on the spot and report its findings.

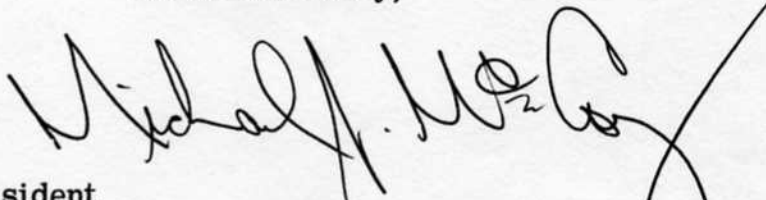
However, if these inquiries are to be of any value, these representatives must meet the bishops, priests and the faithful of the Church and not with those interested in the political split. In this context we wish also to mention that the Church of the East besides His Holiness has a Metropolitan and six bishops, all of whom are loyal to His Holiness and strongly opposed to Mr. Darmo and his repeated disloyal acts of dissension and disunity in the Church.

If, however, the Secretariat of WCC is not willing to make such inquiries, then in all fairness and justice it owes it to the Church

of the East, and the public in general which has been deceived by these reports, to issue another statement to the press correcting these misrepresentations.

We remain,

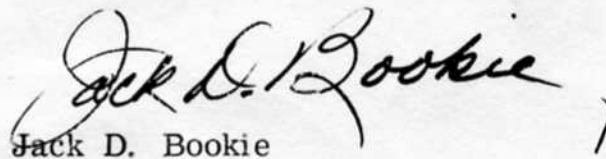
Yours sincerely,



President

Rev. Fr. Qashisha Michael J. McCoy

Secretary



Jack D. Bookie

Committee of the Church
Of the East on the Assyrian
Iraqi Question

Date April 14, 1969

Copy to: The Presidents of the World Council of Churches,
The Member Churches, and
Church papers.