

The Assyrian Institutions: Self-Destructive Enterprises

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It is stated that the Assyrians' greatest enemies are Assyrians themselves. Oh how true that is! Why is it that a dozen of individuals or half dozen of organizations refuse to support, and/or work with, each other? What is it about these people and groups, who chose to be part of such destructive enterprise, especially in moments of great urgency?

We could excuse and forgive a naïve and uneducated person who does not know enough and makes a mistake, or exercises bad judgment, through which he/she might hurt his/her own people. How could we justify the destructive actions of individuals who are considered educated leaders of this nation? How could we claim to be Christians when we break every single commandment of God and go against every single value of human decency and morality? How dare we face the altar and pray to God and claim to be his humble servants, then come out and stab our brothers in blood and Christ in the back? What is it with this devious hypocrisy, and when would this madness stop?

We thought that tribalism was finally left behind us as we acclimated to certain healthy customs in western societies; however, the more we look around us, the more we see the tribal killer syndrome embedded in our society. Both the Assyrian Church of the East and Assyrian politics are run through tribal mentality. Many Assyrians question if we could do Assyrian matters justice when significant business in Church and politics considers tribal affiliation a requisite.

It is 2:30 a.m. and I just cannot go to bed seeing what is happening around us, listening to speeches of division and of deceit, and reading about so many declarations from clergymen and laity each asking for his/her separate demands from the Iraqi authorities. I want to scream, curse, go out on the street and run, may be I will get to a place where I could find reason. Nevertheless, I know that I could not face this despair by running away. I have so much to get out of my chest, but I always remember my father's words: Son think hundred times before writing about someone or something, consider the family, the relatives, the church, and the community before you do. At the same time, he had taught me to stand by and for the truth, always. We must not hurt one another, the Bible orders us; however, does the Bible order us not to point to the wrong and awful things around us?

We always hope that things will improve, but we continue to be disappointed with every opportunity that presented itself to us. My agony continues to get deeper and deeper. Those who yesterday were pinching our brothers in the back with a needle are stabbing them today with a sword and those who were digging a hole in front of our brothers yesterday are pushing them over a cliff today. Whereas the involvements of the few were a nuisance and inconvenience yesterday, it is becoming a matter of almost life and death for a nation today. If so, what is it with this silence of a nation and what is it with this complete apathy and indolence? Every human being must take certain responsibilities in his/her society and when we get involved, we are expected to serve the best interest of society. When one deviates from such norm, the people must in timely manner react and force aside those who are not serving the interest of the people the best, otherwise, the damage that such people could inflict on the well being and future of the community could be irreversible.

We have stood and watched AssyriaSat for almost two years attack, curse, humiliate, and belittle our only elected leader in Iraq and the only meaningful political group, and I am referring to Mr. Younam Kanna and the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), without a single protest. We stood and watched this destructive and biased satellite TV station present us no serious alternatives to our dilemma in Iraq besides shiny slogans and worthless commentaries as if to state foolishly that when it publicizes the mistakes and imperfections of others, it becomes by default the savior of the people. We have stood on the sidelines and witnessed self-destructing of a nation and we are yet to lift a finger to rectify the situation. What are we anticipating? This pathetic situation will not correct itself if we do not get involved. We have sat and listened to childish and silly poems by Rev. Barkho on AssyriaSat satellite TV, which exposed to the world a sample of the mentality of this nation's state of decay. Few others made references to Mr. Kanna that

embarrass any decent human being when they unleashed their filth across media waves. Is this all what we understand of the meaning of democracy and freedom of speech?

We have sat and listened to speeches of clergymen inciting people to hate, when they should have been the promoters of love, sympathy, and forgiveness as they preach from their altars on Sundays. We have heard consistently from His Holiness Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV that clergymen would not get involved in politics; however, in many statements, speeches, letters to governments, and other actions, we see clergymen consistently being involved. I have no problem with clergymen giving guidance to their parishioners, since they are part of the nation, but the Church should stop this obvious contradiction between what it says and what it does. Finally, I listened to the speech of Patriarch Mar Dinkha last week. Was that not a political speech?

Allow me to put the issue of the nature of the speech aside and discuss the speech itself. There were some very encouraging remarks in that speech; however, we have heard too many of such speeches in the past. A speech that talks about the oneness of our Assyrian, Chaldean, and Suryani people without any meaningful steps and actions to institute that oneness is worthless. Talk is cheap. I personally expect more from the Patriarch in order to prove that he means what he says. I would expect from the Patriarch to pick up the phone immediately, reach out first to His Holiness Patriarch Mar Addai, and undo the mistake of 40 years ago that divided our church into two churches: Old and New Calendars. There should be no reason whatsoever that such step should not be addressed seriously in the Church synod that starts on Monday, October 31, especially now that the Ba'athist interference in church affairs is gone. Where there is will there is a solution; do we have the genuine will to move ahead? Next, Mar Dinkha should reach out to His Beatitude Mar Emmanuel Delly III and do whatever it takes to reach a common understanding now, because now is the moment to do something as we approach the elections in Iraq on December 15 and we do not want to miss this opportunity as well. Visionary leaders of the Church should have resolved all these issues since 1992 when many national and international observers anticipated a change in Iraq, but we missed that. Then came the elections of January 31, 2005, and we were crushed in defeat because of our division. Do we want to miss another opportunity?

My other concerns in the Patriarch's speech center around the followings:

1. Mar Dinkha on two occasions mentioned that northern Iraq was known as Kurdistan. There was no reason for the Patriarch to make such a statement. By saying so, the Patriarch is recognizing Kurdistan on our Occupied Assyria in northern Iraq. There seem to be a pattern in such reference lately and that is alarming. What is the reasoning behind such statement or policy? Some analysts point to the fact that the Church relation with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) dictates such policy? What alarms me personally is the manner that the Church leadership and the main Assyrian political organization (ADM) are dealing with the Kurdish threat; they are standing in opposite directions. Thus, the Kurds are the most to benefit from such conflict.
2. Mar Dinkha stated that Assyrians were returning to their villages in northern Iraq, as their villages (homes) are being built. This statement supports the claims Kurds and the KDP have made recently regarding the so-called reconstruction of Assyrian villages. The Americans paid 33 million dollars to the Kurds to spend on Assyrian reconstruction villages. Part of this money is under the authority of Sargis Aghajan, Deputy Prime Minister of the Northern Iraq Kurdish Regional Government and a collaborator with the KDP, to build some homes and few churches in selected villages. This limited money spent on Assyrian villages and churches does not cover one-tenth of the total 33 millions assigned to Assyrians. By having the money come from the Kurds, they, i.e., the Kurds, are getting unwarranted credit. This money is not Kurdish money as spread in the media; it is part of Iraq reconstruction money. Stating that Assyrians are returning to their villages, the Patriarch, indirectly, and whether intentionally or not, is defending the Kurdish claims that they are working with the Assyrians, which is not the case. There are Assyrians who work for the Kurds; however, we know that they are Kurdish agents.
3. The Patriarch emphasized on the fact that all three communities: Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Suryanis are one nation. That was wonderful; however, in his final prayer, he stated that all these

communities are of Assyrian origin. This has been a problem as we know and the Patriarch knows that as well. Majority of the Chaldeans and Suryanis do not profess with the known historical fact that they are Assyrians. Therefore, when the Patriarch insists that they are Assyrians, this will keep the name issue boiling and the division present, when we should cool it off at this time.

4. The remarks of malik Shamisdin malik Gewargis of Lower Tiwari to the Patriarch, as Mar Dinkha presented them, were distressing. Malik Shamisdin was a close ally of the ADM earlier; however, people change as they say. Malik Shamisdin moved from Baghdad to Dohuk in northern Iraq (Occupied Assyria) and strengthened ties with Sargis Aghajan. Sources to this writer have indicated that malik Shamisdin has received expensive gifts from Aghajan and the KDP. If such statement was indeed made by malik Shamisdin, it is because of his obligation now to Aghajan and the KDP. Nothing is free in this world, and there is always a price and a favor that helpless and weak people have to pay when they accept expensive gifts or money from oppressive groups looking for supremacy. Today, clergymen in northern Iraq are being bribed with expensive gifts and then becoming Kurdish advocates when and as needed.

In my humble opinion, the speech of Patriarch Mar Dinkha will accomplish nothing, unless it is followed by actions that go hand in hand and in that same line of the speech. In the past, we have listened to many of such speeches by different clergymen and politicians; speeches that excited us for that specific moment in which the speech was made. What have those speeches accomplished? The answer is nothing! The Kurds continue to take advantage of our division, and of the incompetence, indecisiveness, and weakness of most of our leaders. Kurds in northern Iraq (Occupied Assyria) continue to move ahead and progress at our people's expense. If we are serious about protecting and preserving our homeland and our people in Iraq by uniting the various fragments of this nation, the present leadership must revitalize itself. Genuine unity and cooperation is the key, nothing else will work. Assyrians are tired of the boring, empty, and useless speeches that are motivated by one reason or another. Our people demand actions just as the old and popular TV commercial questioned: where is the beef?