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### **Historical and Geographical Origin of the Church of the East**

Being among the Eastern Christianity churches, The Church of the East followed the Syrian tradition. It quickly spread through Asia and by the 14th century, it had the largest Christian church due to its geographical extension. Its dioceses were spread through the Mediterranean Sea, India and finally China. The head of the church was a Patriarch, a tradition that was followed through the apostolic age. Theologically, the doctrine of Nestorianism has adopted in the church thus the doctrine, as well as human nature of Jesus, was emphasized. The church continued to grow even after Persia was conquered by Muslims. However, the final expansion period was experienced in the 14th century after the Mongol Empire stopped the civil war. After the 14th century, a decline period was experienced rapidly due to the interference by the foreign interference from outsiders (Coakley, 1992).

The tradition that was upheld by the church of the east mostly came from the Assyrian tradition. This is because the church was originally joined to the Assyrian Church of the East but they became separated years later. When the Church of the East tradition is referred by Christians, they tend to think of the Assyrian tradition due to the little difference that it had with the church. In geographical terms, it is regarded as the largest Christian community all over the world (Atiya 1968). It is also the most active evangelical church that existed. However, the church of the east was known to be a marginal communication. The church existed at a period where scholarly and ascetical tradition affected religion. However, their intellectual center was Nisibis thus christological vocabularies emerged out of the church. After Persia had conquered Nisibis, all the educated Christians were moved in various part of Edessa where they were

subject to a king. The leadership, as well as the organization of the church, changed since most of the leaders were displaced.

After its decline in the 14th century, the Church experienced a variety of issues due to the interference it faced from the outsiders such as the political influence. For instance, the Chinese Ming dynasty ejected Christians as well as all foreign influences from China. Other Christians were eradicated to Persia, Mesopotamia, and Malabar in India. It made history in 1552 when rival patriarchs led to the division of the church into two: the Assyrian Church as well as the Chaldean Catholic Church. However, some major differences can be pointed out between the Church of the East in Assyria as well as the church of the east. E.g. use of Gregorian calendar which was a reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by various churches.

### **Christianity Introduction in Church of the East**

The introduction of Christianity in the Church of the East is often attributed to the mission that was carried out by Alopen, a Persian cleric. It was during Tang Dynasty in China where most of the mission was taking place. Since the Church of the East had already influenced its religion in China, the missionaries came to bring a great revolution in the county, and their influence spread to the larger Asian continent. There are over seventy monks who are listed in history to have participated in introducing Christianity to the Church of the East (Baum & Winkler, 2003). The monks continued to cause a great revolution in the tradition, and most people that heard their gospel converted to Christians. After the collapse of Tang dynasty, more revolution was caused I Yuan Dynasty. Bringing revolution in China was a step that helped the monks to spread the gospel to the other neighboring parts where the Church of the East had rooted its tradition.

After the rapid growth of Christian religion along the tradition followed by Church of the East, Christianity was able to push its way through to the tradition. Western writers wrote books which described their experiences in the region and the affects they had seen in the tradition. The more that population of Christianity increased in the tradition, the more doctrine became embraced in many parts of Mesopotamia, Mediterranean, and India. Although it is not clear when the revolution stopped, it is clear that finally, the religion of Christianity was fully embraced in the Church of the East which caused them to change most of their traditional form of living to those of Christianity way of life.

### **Reasons for the Tradition's Separation from the Main Body**

In 1552, a Schism occurred which was caused by appointing rival patriarchs in the church. Following the division, each patriarch went their separate ways with their followers and failed to agree with the views of the rival patriarch. The schism led to the establishment of the Assyrian Eastern Church as well as the Eastern Catholic church. They were differentiated by their patriarchs. The Church of the East later emerged from the Assyrian Church. The church emerged as a result of various disagreements that were being experienced at the time. The separation occurred in the 20th century when reforms become a major part of the church. Such reforms include the use of Gregorian calendar in the church. Although the Asian Church of the East began with a small group of people, t later saw its increase when it started expanding to other parts of the world.

One of the major reason why the church was separated from the main body of Christ dome was due to its association with Nestorianism.it was a doctrine which emphasized one's disunion with their human nature to possess that of Jesus. Since the main Christ dome body did

not practice the Nestorianism, separation occurred and the church in the east established its leadership. The church has six provinces whereby the main province was located in north Mesopotamia where most of the activities were carried out. Iran was also part of the provinces thus the church had its sphere of influence from where it developed its tradition. It spread to most parts of Asia, including China before the rise of Muslim religion in those parts.

The Nestorian doctrine was highly valued in the church of the East due to the involvement of the school of Antioch in developing it. At one point, the Nestorian led to a public declaration of its challenge to the usage of Theotokos, for Mary, the mother of Jesus. The term Theotokos referred to God, and the church was against giving Virgin Mary the title of God. Most Christians at that time were using the title and did not support the Church of the East as it renounced the doctrine. Thus, the separation between the church of the east and the overall Christ dome was enhanced where they failed to recognize the term as referring to Virgin Mary. They believed that it was only their deity, God who had the authority to own the title as opposed to Virgin Mary.

The church established the first Council of Ephesus which enhanced the Christian religion in the tradition and condemned most of the evil and traditional practices that some individuals still upheld. The council of Ephesus started opposing the doctrine and label of Nestorian and that marked the period when the title of the East Church was established. With their separation from the main Christ dome, the church has more freedom to change most of its doctrines willingly. However, some of the doctrines used the title of Nestorian, but they did not follow the belief. Having the Nestorian title did not necessarily mean that the church was following the doctrine. However, the Church of the East differentiated itself completely when it changed the title of the church.

### **Theological Difference between the Church Of The East With Christdome**

The Church of the East allowed the mandating of a version of the creed, a practice which Christdome regarded as downgrading the Holy Spirit. Despite the opposition that the Church received from other churches, the establishment of a Creed went on, a practice that differentiated the church from other churches to a greater extent. Following this theological difference, Latin armies imposed a Latin regime in the region which followed the doctrine in 1204. The church of the east, as well as the wider Orthodox who had adopted the doctrine, viewed the regime as betrayal from their fellow Christians. Their city, however, was weakened and later invaded by many Muslims in 1453. A huge separation occurred between the tradition and the other Christians which led to wider theological differences between the two.

The tradition of the Church of East developed an idea that it was not possible to access God in the human reason but it was possible to access him through the human heart. This idea was contrary to that of Christ dome which had developed the idea of penal substitution that Christ fulfilled. Therefore, theological differences were established among the traditions, and each of the traditions developed their ideas based on what they understood and heard from their leaders. Some of the theologies were completely different, and it was hard for the tradition to unite and form one religion due to such differences that were already evident in their traditions.

Another theological difference was that the Church of the East tended to develop categorical and legalistic theologies concerning the church. On the contrary, other traditional churches developed mystical flights which seemed vague and ambivalent to the church of the east. Mystical theology involves establishments of themes such as the love of God, inexplicability of mystery as well as the relation of man to the Godhead. The differences were

tangible and up to date; the difference between the two revolutionized traditions is evident.

Although the differences emerged many centuries ago, it has been a hard task trying to reduce the difference and unite the churches together. The only practice that happens is that churches continue to split more and more due to some issues that they still fail to agree on. If anything, more theological differences continue to expand regardless of the efforts put to eliminate them. Theological differences between the Church of the East and the main body of Christ Dom is proving that there were various traditions which existed in the early church that cannot be eliminated without determining the cause and working on them

### **Political, Traditional and Christdome Influence of the Church of the East**

After the church of the East declared its independence as an independent church in 424, there was tremendous changes made by the church politically, traditionally and its influence on the main body of Christdome. The church had the support of the heretical Roman Empire before 431 but was involved in the persecution of Persia. Although the church was affected to a great extent, it narrowly escaped its survival as a church during the period of persecution by Persia. However, Abbasis Caliphate supported the church during the persecution period, and this saw the church gain political support in Persia (Coakley, 1992). It was able to unite and spread to the various parts of the county where they were misplaced. It branched out to all parts of Asia and established their tradition there. Each political support that the tradition gained saw it develop to a higher level where it influenced a larger population to join their religion.

Another political period where the church was able to thrive was during the Mongol empire. During the Empire, the Church of the East obtained tremendous increase due to the support it obtained from the government. According to the history of the Empire, the church was

directly involved in the rule of the empire. Mongol gave the church an opportunity to present their ideas, and he created for them a conducive environment for them to increase. Therefore, the church continued to spread up to the 14th century due to the political influence it was able to obtain and cause during the Mongol empire. After the 14th century, the church of the east started experiencing a decline due to confinements by its founding Assyrian adherents. However, the Church of the East had already spread in diverse parts of the world, and despite the confinement in the Assyrian homeland, it continues to have political influence in areas such as Malabar Coast of India.

The political climate for the church was not continuously conducive for the church to thrive. For instance, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there were dynastic struggles which led to the schism of the church. The schism was not only due to the differences that arose at the time, but it was also contributed by political influence in the region. The stable Church of the East that was found in India after the other branches declined also experienced challenges due to the political state of the county. For instance the Portuguese invaded India, and after their political influence in the county, the Church of the East in Indian faced its rifts.

The Church of the East was also involved in influencing traditions and beliefs of various individuals into their religion. It had traditional implications in many parts of India and Asia. For instance, during its expansion to some parts of India, the church was involved in changing the cultural ways of the Indian people so that they could fit in their tradition and religion. They also developed beliefs and Christian practices that were adopted by other churches. Having the widest reaching branch in the Easterly Christianity, the Church of the East was able to influence major decisions and norms that concerned the church. For instance, its idea of Nestorianism was widely adopted by most churches in the Easterly region.

**Lessons from Church of the East tradition**

From the tradition of the church of the east, there are many lessons to learn. The importance of leadership, for instance, was valued in the tradition. Each part of their church was headed by a patriarch who oversaw the well-being of the church (Baumer, 2006). Through their leadership, also, unity was upheld since the leaders acted as a symbol of unity for the church. The apostolic age that was established has continued in the same line where leadership in that Church has continued to thrive.

The unity and persistence that the Church of the East had is something that is present for everyone to learn. The church was continually spreading its tradition to many parts of India, Mediterranean, and the wider Asia in an attempt to bring more people to their belief. Before its decline in the 14th century, it had influenced most parts of these areas. Perhaps the persistence and unity that was demonstrated during the rise is an experience to learn from.

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