



The Middle East in Transition and the Future and Role of its Christians

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Historical Background of what the Middle East Lives Today



The Ottoman Millet System



The Ottoman Millet System

- Millet, (Turkish: “religious community,” or “people”), applied to certain non-Muslim minorities, mainly Christians and Jews.
- In the heterogeneous Ottoman Empire (c. 1300–1923), a millet was an autonomous self-governing religious community, each organized under its own laws and
- Headed by a religious leader, who was responsible to the central government for the fulfillment of millet responsibilities and duties, particularly those of paying taxes and maintaining internal security.
- In addition, each millet assumed responsibility for social and administrative functions not provided by the state,
- Conducting affairs through a communal council (meclisimillî) without intervention from outside.
- From 1856 on, a series of imperial reform edicts introduced secular law codes for all citizens, and much of the millets’ administrative autonomy was lost.

How the Millet System was adopted

- The Ottoman rulers recognized the diversity of religious and ethnic communities that made up the empire
- They organized a series of ad-hoc negotiations with the heads of religious communities, resulting in what became known as the millet system.
- Under these arrangements Jewish, Greek Orthodox and Armenian communities organized their existence in the empire and survived through a generalized system of imperial toleration and intense negotiation.



The Millet System

What is the Millet System

- Historically, the millet (*mīlat*) system was used in the Ottoman empire to managed diversity
 - *religious groups granted semi- autonomous status led to reducing friction with the Islamic state*
- different religious communities in the empire had freedom to select their religious leaders, organize their own schools and courts.
- The religious leaders were the focal points of communication between the state and the community.
 - *Did not recognize non- Abrahamic religions or non- Orthodox Muslims*





Minority Concept in the Ottoman Empire - The "Millet System"

The Millet System

("Millet" = Religious Community)

"Millet-i Hakime"

(The Dominant Millet)

(All Muslims regardless of ethnic origin)

"Millet-i Mahkume"

(The Dominated Millet[s])

(Non-Muslims organized into autonomous communities but as second-class subjects)

Dominant
Millet VS
Dominated
Millet – the
Minority



THE TURKISH MILLET

- **Each millet**
 - **Was headed by its own religious dignitary**
 - Chief rabbi in the case of the Jews
 - Patriarchs for the Greek Orthodox, Armenian communities
 - **Heads of millet were responsible to Turkish sultan**
 - Advised sultan on affairs in the community
 - Was punished by sultan for problems of the community
 - **Later expanded to other ethnic communities**
 - **Muslims had not millet**
 - **Muslims ruled by Quran, sharia**
- **In the millet system**
 - **Each community was responsible for**
 - The allocation and collection of its taxes
 - Its educational arrangements
 - Internal legal matters pertaining to marriage, divorce, inheritance
- **In the pre-modern Middle East**
 - **Identity was largely based on religion**
 - **System functioned well until rise of European nationalism**
 - **Most cities were divided into quarters based on religion, language**



The Balfour Declaration

The Balfour Declaration



Foreign Office,
November 2nd, 1917.

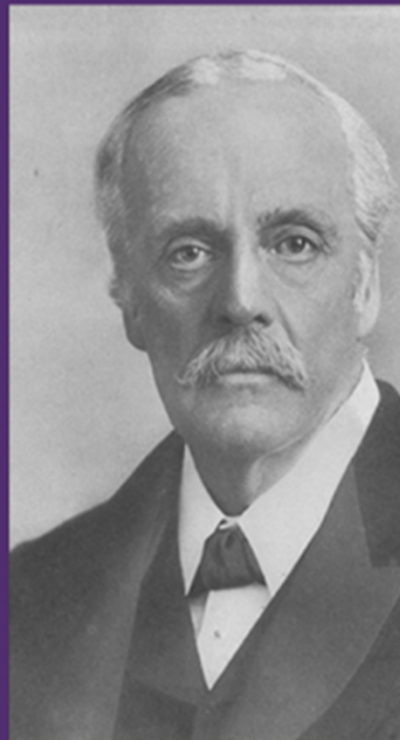
Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country"

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Y. in
Arthur Balfour



middleeasteye.net

What is the Balfour Declaration?

On 2 November 1917, British foreign minister Arthur Balfour wrote to Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community.

The letter contained the 67-word Balfour Declaration - the first time that a leading power had backed the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine.

Palestinians made up 90 per cent of the population in 1917. They blame the declaration for encouraging Zionists and ultimately handing their land to the Jewish homeland - the future Israel - by 1947.

The letter is now in the British Library. It was loaned to Israel, which reveres Balfour, from 1987 to 1988

M-E

Implementation of the Balfour Declaration



- The influence of the Balfour Declaration on the course of post-war events was immediate:
- According to the “mandate” system created by the Versailles Treaty of 1919, Britain was entrusted with the administration of Palestine, with the understanding that it would work on behalf of both its Jewish and Arab inhabitants.



The Sykes Picot Agreement

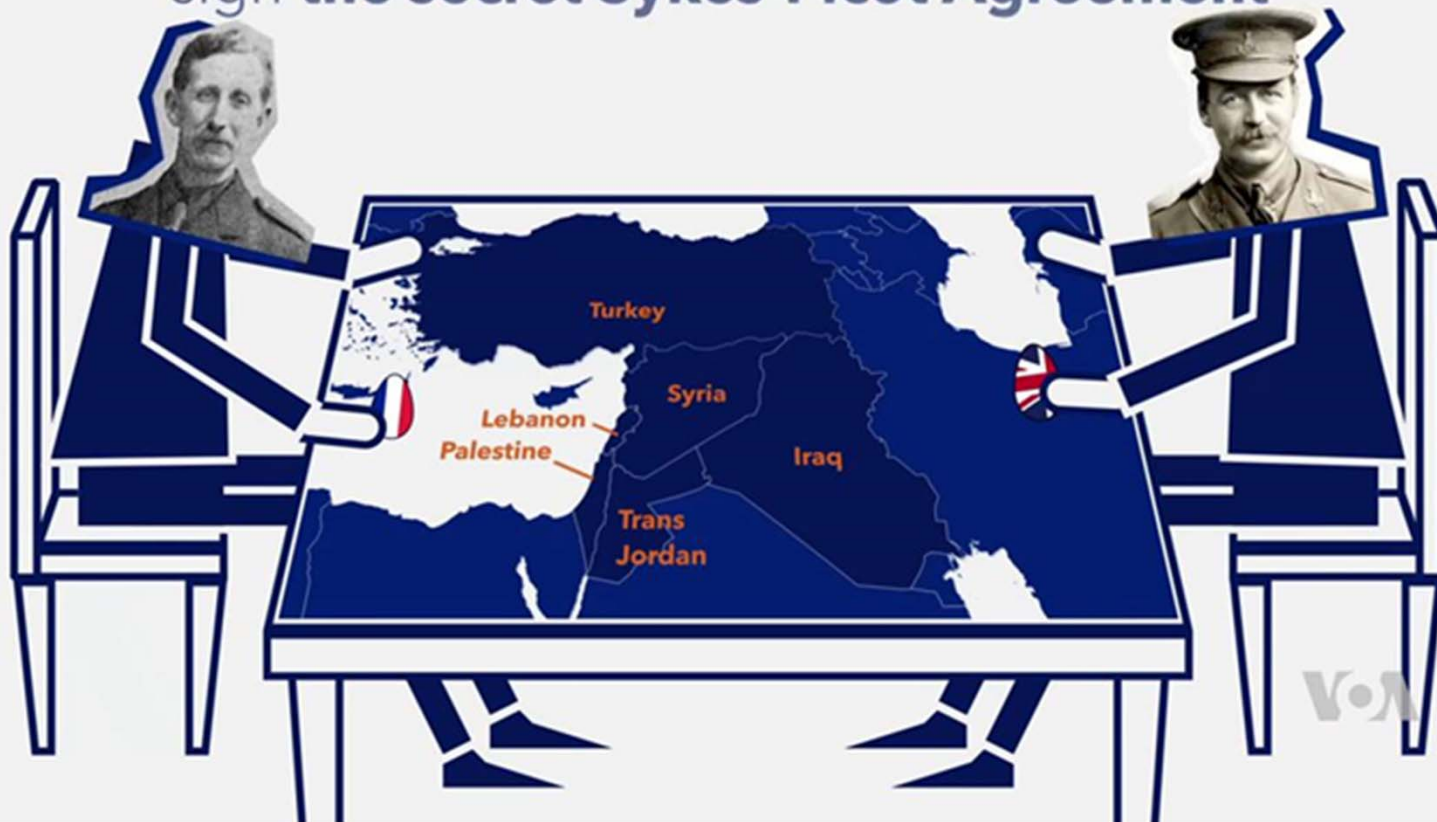
Inheritance of the Sick Man



- The Sykes-Picot Agreement created the modern Middle East.
- Providing a set of unrealistic and impossible promises to the Arabs, it led directly to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The Asia Minor Agreement, the official name of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, dates to 1916.
- It was the result of secret deliberations between the British civil servant Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot.
- It was made official by the Allied Powers of the first world war with the San Remo Conference in 1920.



In May **1916**, Britain's Mark Sykes and France's George Picot sign **the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement**





1916 The Sykes-Picot agreement

The agreement

France and Great Britain are prepared to recognise and protect an independent Arab states or a confederation of Arab states (a) and (b) marked on the map, under the control of an Arab chief.

In area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall have priority of right of business. In area (a) France, and in area (b) Great Britain, shall alone give advice to the Arabs leaders.

In the blue area France, and in the red area Great Britain, shall be allowed to establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states.

Great Britain has the right to build, administer, and be sole owner of a railway connecting Haifa with area (b), and shall have a perpetual right to transport troops along such a line at all times.

The people of the French and British areas shall be able to trade with each other without any taxes or other forms of control.

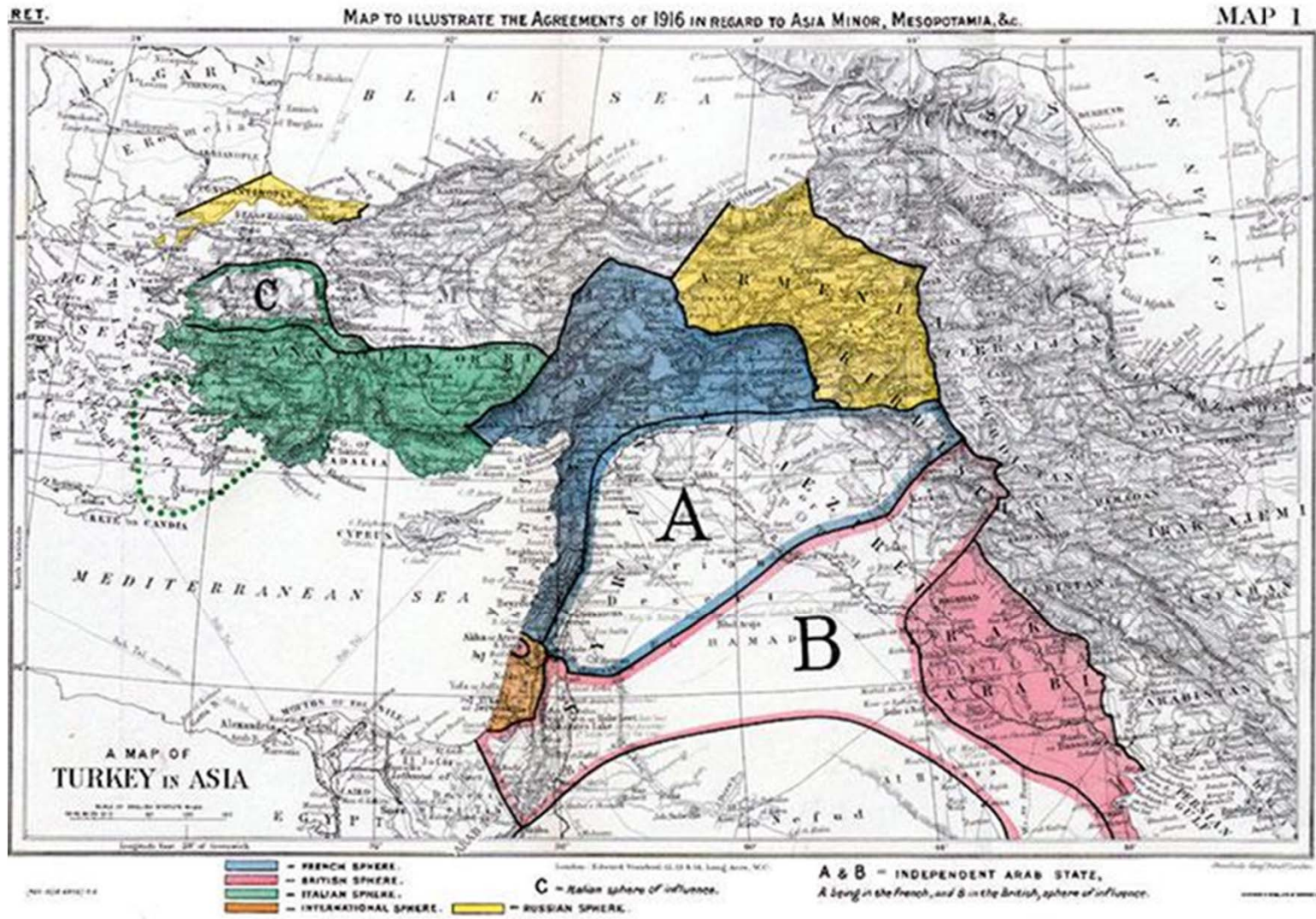
The negotiations with the Arabs as to the boundaries of the Arab states shall be continued through the same channel as heretofore on behalf of the two powers.

It is agreed that measures to control the importation of arms into the Arab territories will be considered by the two governments.



- (1) What did the British and French gain?
- (2) What did the Arabs gain?
- (3) Why did the Sykes-Picot agreement anger the Arabs?

Sykes-Picot Map



Tragicomic A Caricature of Sykes-Picot Agreement

ed in This Way.

ington, June 12.—Sales of savings stamps and certificates will be reported by the treasury to supply a part of the government's financial needs during the period of transition. The thrift campaign started before the war will be continued as a part of the government's policy.

"I got to borrow more money to meet our obligations," Secretary Baker told officials of the 12 reserve districts, gathered to discuss plans for the thrift campaign next six months. "To get that done, we must sell more savings stamps and certificates."

PROGRAM IS ARRANGED FOR DR. E. M. PESSOA

ington, June 12.—Elaborate arrangements are being planned in London for Dr. Epitacio M. Pessoa, president of Brazil, who was expected to arrive today from Portugal for a stop on his way to Brazil to assist. Dr. Pessoa will be the first Latin American to visit the United States while he is in the States and after he has visited Washington will be taken on a tour of the principal cities.

Presides At Meeting Of National Consumers' League

York, June 12.—Secretary D. Baker presided at a meeting of the executive committee of the National Consumers' League here today. Congressman William Kent, a member of the tariff bureau, delivered a report on the "Proposed federal regulations affecting the meat packing industry."

AN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY CALLED TO DISCUSS REPLY FROM THE ALLIES

Washington, Wednesday, June 11.—(By Associated Press)—The national assembly has been called to meet here today to discuss and study the Allied reply to the German counter proposals.

Paris advices indicate that the counter proposals will be ready until Saturday.

"BETTER JOIN US, SAMMY, THERE'S A NICE BIT FOR YOU" - By MORRIS





The Treaty of Sèvres



The Treaty of Sèvres 1920 - signed between the Allies of World War I and the Ottoman Empire. The treaty ceded large parts of Ottoman territory to France, the United Kingdom, Greece, and Italy, as well as creating large occupation zones within the Ottoman Empire.





The San Remo Conference

Extract from The San Remo Conference Report



- The Mandatory will be responsible for putting into effect the declaration originally made on November 8, 1917, by the British Government, and adopted by the other Allied Powers, in favour of the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,
- It being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.
- This mandate was then ratified on July 24, 1922 by the Council of the League of Nations—the postwar world organization and the UN’s predecessor.

Delegates to the San Remo Conference, April 25, 1920,





The King–Crane Commission

The findings of the King-Crane Commission



- Commission appointed at the request of U.S. President Woodrow Wilson during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 to determine the attitudes of the inhabitants of Syria and Palestine toward the post-World War I settlement of their territories.
- Touring Syria and Palestine between June 10 and July 21, 1919, and soliciting petitions from local inhabitants, the commission found that a vast majority of Arabs favored an independent Syria, free of any French mandate,
- Out of 1,875 petitions received, 72 percent were hostile to the Zionist plan for a Jewish national home in Palestine. Such findings, coupled with Zionist talk of dispossession of the Arabs, led the commission to advise a serious modification of the Zionist immigration program in Palestine.

Petition presented by the people of Syria-Palestine





Syria divided in Millet States



Between Sèvres 1920 and Lausanne 1923 all the northern Christian area was lost



The mandate region was subdivided into six states.
1- Damascus (1920),
2- Aleppo (1920),
3- Alawites (1920),
4- Jabal Druze (1921),
5- the autonomous Sanjak of Alexandretta (1921, modern-day Hatay),
6- Greater Lebanon (1920), which became later the modern country of Lebanon.



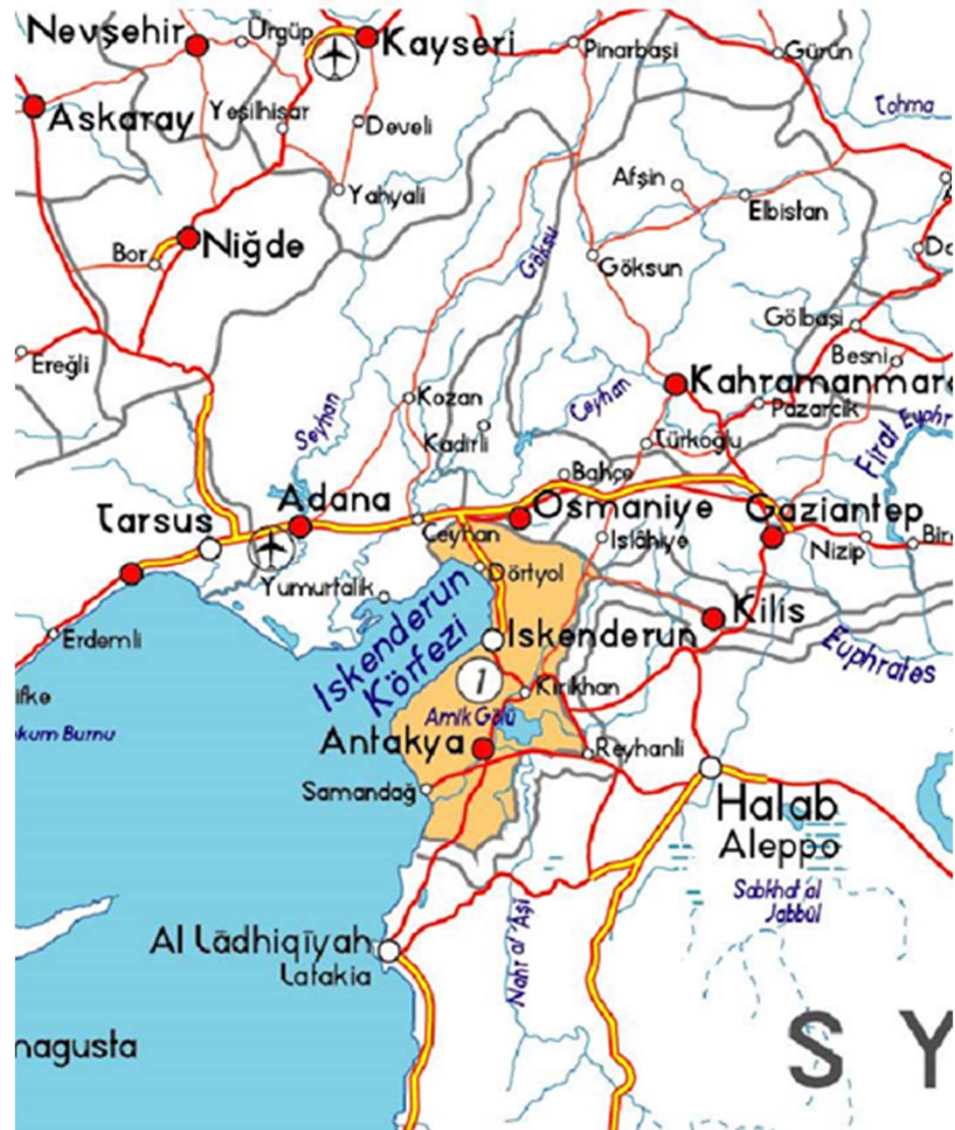


مجلس كنائس الشرق الأوسط

The Middle East Council of Churches

The Loss of Inskandaroun – Alexandretta and Antioch

Sandjak Iskandaroun includes Antioch and all the cities from which the Apostles embarked towards the rest of the world, such as Mersin, Adana, Tarsus.



Demonstrations
against the
annexation of
Sanjak Al
Inkandaroun to
Turkey.
Iskandaroun 1939





The five stolen
Christian
Districts:
1- Cilicia
2- Alexandretta
3- Aintab Plain
4- Upper
Euphrates Island
5- Hakkari



The transition, decomposition and precariousness of an area



The Arab Spring

- The last decade started with unprecedented massive anti-government protests and uprisings in the Arab world, known as the Arab Spring,
- It spread quickly from Tunisia in December 2010 to six other countries in MENA within two years.
- Citizens of 6 Arab Countries rose up for radical political change and **dignified** living of the masses.
- The dream of democracy, freedom, and improved living standards has been elusive, and sometimes impossible, for all these countries since 2011.
- Social Media played a major role in spreading information and serving as a mobilizing tool for spontaneous and organic gathering of protesters across the MENA region in the early 2010s.

Environmental problems and the fight over resources



- MENA is one of the most vulnerable regions of the world to climate change.
- Shortages of freshwater, drought, desertification, extreme heat, and dust storms have already shown the region's climate trajectory during this decade.
- Climate change was a contributing factor to the Arab Spring.
- Crop failures, food shortages, and higher food prices worsened the living conditions of the masses, forcing many of them to move within and beyond the borders of their countries in pursuit of a better life.
- According to a study published in the Global Environmental Change journal, there was a strong connection between climate change and conflicts in MENA between 2010 and 2012.
- Instability and conflict in MENA will be closely tied to climate change in coming years.



Agricultural Situation:

- The region is the largest food importer in the world.
- Lack of economic development, in the agricultural field and global increase in food prices (2008) were a contributing factor to the Arab-Spring uprising,
- Agricultural expansion has been ecologically and economically questionable because of its reliance on limited water resources.
- Existential threats to water, land, food, and a population of 500 million. The MENA region is the most water-scarce in the world, with an average renewable internal freshwater resource per capita of 444 cubic meters (well below the UN water scarcity limit of 1,000 cubic meters per person per year)
- Lack of water available for irrigation poses a serious threat to the region's food security.

Environmental Situation



- According to the world bank, air pollution is estimated to be responsible for 176,000 premature deaths in 2013 in the region, and for the loss of more than 2 % of the regional GDP.
- About 90 % of the total solid waste in MENA countries is disposed into dumpsites and unlined landfills, resulting in air, land and groundwater pollution from hazardous chemicals,
- There is a lack of legal frameworks and national strategies for integrative waste management,.

Mass Migration and Refugees



- The most prominent feature of the past decade was the start of an enormous global refugee crisis.
- By the end of the decade, there were more refugees than after the end of World War II.
- The Syrian war created some of the worst refugees crises in the world. Almost 6 million Syrians fled their country since 2011, and more than 6 million remain internally displaced.
- Despite the spike in the number of asylum seekers in Europe, the biggest burden of helping refugees has fallen on developing countries with weak economies and fragile social stability.
- Between 2005 and 2015, the number of non-displaced, international migrants in the ME increased from roughly 19 million to about 31 million.



The difficult transition in the Arab countries

- There is a difficulty in successful democratic transition in Arab countries
- Non-democratic issues dominate in the polemic about Arab countries and their democratic transition.
- These countries witness a clash between democratization and rising fundamentalism
- However, with the conflicts between religious and secular powers, problems prevent the democratization of the Middle East: military intervention, the issue of sectarian and ethnic conflicts, and the proliferation of religious extremism
- The world is disappointed since the “Arab Spring” had turned into “Arab winter”, “Spring of Islam”, or “Islamic awakening”.
- There is an ascertainment that the enormous political influence of Islam in the Middle East has exceeded any historical period after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire

The nature of political systems of the Arab countries



- They basically can be divided into two types: republic and monarchy
- The predecessors of Republic Arab countries had the experiences of semi-democratization in the late colonial period, but none of them succeeded.
- In the subsequent process of decolonization, they established authoritarian republics after the revolution led by the military
- the four countries that end up with regime change, as well as Syria, which is trapped in civil war, are republics. Tunisia and Egypt had peaceful protests, while Yemen went through tribal conflicts, and Libya and Syria went into wars, showing a gradual increase of intensity;



The nature and causes of upheavals in the Middle East

- They are very complex: the aim at democratic transition and democratic political life undoubtedly constitute a major cause of the drastic changes in the Middle East
- Since those changes came out in the Middle East, the Arab countries that have experienced regime changes, and those who have not experienced regime change, are now both apparently in a comprehensive reforming and adjusting stage
- Democratization in the Arab countries will undoubtedly constitute the main part of the transition and reform



The dynamics of the transition

- Established an elected government or transitional government
- Politically, most of them have amended the constitution, adopted multiparty democracy and parliamentary elections
- But they generally face intensified conflict between religious and secular forces and the serious deterioration of the economy and livelihood,
- They witness the expanding power of local and tribal forces, social unrest, challenges of religious extremism and terrorism, and other issues.

Western Influence and democratic transition



- The development of the Arab world and the Middle East has always been influenced by the Western-dominated international system
- Due to the military intervention and export of democracy by the Western powers, democratic transition in Arab countries has certain external-driven features, aggravating the turmoil of the Arab countries during the process
- Western intervention in Arab countries promoted the spread of democracy and the external pressure played some positive roles in democratic reform in the Arab countries
- But regime changes through military intervention, harsh practices performed by the western countries during the intervention, and their double standards, had a negative impact on transition to democracy in Arab countries

Liberalization of the economies and adoption of western models



- Business elites are calling for more accountability in the way the government operates and spends money
- In particular, they want a more structured system of rules and regulations to be applied in some Arab Countries
- Claims for Future economic development:
 - 1- Involve the private sector more deeply
 - 2- Give more freedom of action
 - 3- Strive for a more liberal system
 - 4- Give the opportunity for economic initiatives of young entrepreneurs

Transition and Religious Institutions



- The Gulf region moves toward the succession of leadership from the older, traditional leaders to the next generation
- In parallel, the role of clergy will likely be reassessed
- Clerical institutions are currently under severe pressures in almost all the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to meet popular interest in fundamentalist movements

western culture influence in the transition



- The vast majority of population growth in the Arab World was caused by high birth rates and prolonged life spans due to the importation of medical technology and adoption of better means of prevention
- This implies that people are living longer, healthier lives
- Due to the development of media, youth are seeking a better quality of life, more consumer options, claiming accountability from their governments, and respect for human rights
- Youth, have been raised on television and internet images from both the West and media that portray the lives of singles and parenthood couples in a different way
- The level of awareness have been substantially increased by the identification to the western model

The lame transition and the general situation



- The people of the region have been impacted in significantly and even in tragic ways by these transition movements
- The effects on the people of the area were heavy and sometimes deadly
- The failed transition to adopt modern forms of government, lead to the accumulation of persisting problems and an increase in fundamentalist activity
- All sort of problems emerge: sociopolitical divisions, resurgence of old social structures, poverty, unemployment, violence, crime, etc.

Poverty



- According to ESCWA, 116 million people across 10 Arab countries or 41 percent of the total population were classified as poor, while another 25 percent were vulnerable to poverty
- In terms of extreme poverty, MENA is the only region that has seen significant increases
- Between 2011 and 2015, extreme poverty in MENA has nearly doubled, rising from 2.7% of the population to 5%. As of 2018, an estimated 18.6 million people in the region are living on less than \$1.90 per day
- According to Carnegie, a poor family in the Middle East today will remain poor for several generations

Business and Employment



- In the MENA region, youth unemployment rates have exceeded 25% since 1991 and keep increasing
- the IMF estimated that the region needs to create between 60 and 100 million jobs by 2030, 27 million in the next five years, in order to significantly reduce unemployment and poverty
- Business closures within the region have substantially increased, due to declining economy, unstable security situation, and the pandemic.
- In Lebanon, 25% of private sector businesses already closed in 2020
- In Syria, 15 per cent of small and medium sized business reported permanent closure

Security Situation



- The Middle East registered a reduced number of hostilities after the defeat of ISIS. However, the situation remains volatile as armed conflicts continue to occur
- Proxies affiliated with regional and international competing powers, continue to destabilize situation in the region and to spread divide and sectarianism
- According to the United States Institute of Peace, the spread of the Pandemic in Syria and Iraq, poses great risk for an ISIS resurgence and threatens to exacerbate the country's existing health, economic, political, and security crises
- Moreover, the spread of poverty, as previously mentioned, is a driving force behind the recruitment process of fundamental entities

The situation and role of the Christians

The Christians and their churches are not spared by the transition process that is taking place in the region

The effects of the rise of extremism on Christians



- In some parts of the Middle East life became more difficult for Christians
- They are seen as a community which has close ties with the West, therefore Christians became increasingly persecuted
- In the devastated areas they became an easy target to fundamentalist militias
- Churches, Convents and other institutions were looted and destroyed
- Aid coming from Western agencies is being opposed by Muslim Takfirists based on old suspicions that aid is a thinly veiled cover for neo-colonial economic penetration or for efforts to encourage Christian proselytization in Muslim lands

Armenian in Nagorno-Karabakh



- There was confiscation of land and destruction of Churches and Convents in Turkey
- Whether intended or not, the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh took a religious turn
- The violence that ensued was then “religionized”
- The politicization of religion led to the religionization of the conflict
- The inclusion of religious rhetoric in the public discourse created a sociopolitical environment within which the conflict between Armenians and Azeris often made sense when portrayed in religious terms, even though it was not become about religion per se
- Turkey’s involvement in the conflict made that Armenians assimilate Azeris with the Ottoman Turks who marched thousands of Armenians into the Syrian desert and concentration camps without supplies to die of hunger, shipped boatloads of Armenians into the sea to drown and burned entire villages alive

The Syriacs in Anatolia



- Syriacs or Souryanis still face many difficulties and various forms of oppression and discrimination from illegal land acquisition by the State
- There is locals violence against the Christian Syriacs
- In more recent times, state officials had even attempted to permanently close down ancient Christian monasteries such as Saffron in Mardin (1978) and Mor Gabriel in Midyat (1997) for educating children the Syriac language
- On December 14 2011, the U.S. House of Representatives adopted a religious freedom measure, calling upon Turkey to return the Christian church properties it stole through genocide, and to end its repression of the surviving members of the vast Christian civilizations that once represented a majority in the territory of the present-day Republic of Turkey

The Syriacs in Anatolia - 2



- Experts have often warned that the Syriac cultural heritage will disappear in a few decades. This is due to a number of factors: 1- lack of official status 2- and the continuing suffering from persecutions 3- discrimination and intense Turkification efforts. All Syriacs have been uprooted from their homeland in Southeast Turkey
- Another reason the Syriacs are not returning to their home land is a result of the recent intimidation campaign of extremism by the Islamic Kurdish inhabitants of Tur-Abdin
- Over the last three years, human rights violations against Christians in Turkey have increased significantly. The reports and statistics issued by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) confirm the continued increase in violations of the European Convention of Human Rights (the “ECHR”)
- In fact, Turkey was found to be the worst offender with the highest number violation of the ECHR since its inception.

Christians in Egypt



- Since 2011, conditions facing Christians have only deteriorated. The latter half of 2012 and the first half of 2013 witnessed continued violence and persecution directed at the Christian community
- According to Persecution.org, several incidents demonstrate the growing trend of kidnapping, assault, rape, and forced conversions of Egyptian Christian women and girls
- The Church in Egypt is extremely active and powerful and in good terms with the Government
- The persecution of Christians in Egypt is mainly active in rural underdeveloped areas
- The usual educated Egyptian citizen has positive attitude towards Christians
- Media and intellectuals in Egypt are engaged in struggle against the culture of discrimination and the hate speech

Christians in Palestine



- The occupation legal system has, devised and utilized various modalities and mechanisms to systematically confiscate Palestinian land in general and more specifically the waqf, with concentration on Church properties
- Many public buildings of the occupying authorities are erected on lands belonging to the Christian communities
- The remaining Christians in Palestine make only 1% of the population as a national average
- Palestinian Authority Table below shows exact figures

Palestinian Population In Palestine By Governorate And Religion 2017 – Percentages Of Christians Of The Total And Christian Population



| GOVERNORATE | TOTAL POPULATION | CHRISTIAN POPULATION | % OF TOTAL POPULATION | % OF CHRISTIAN POPULATION IN WEST BANK |
|------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Jenin | 49,908 | 2,699 | 5.4 % | 5.9 % |
| Nablus | 156,906 | 601 | 0.4 % | 1.3 % |
| Ramallah & Bireh | 84,973 | 10,255 | 12.0 % | 22.4 % |
| Jerusalem | 391,942 | 8,558 | 2.1 % | 18.7 % |
| Bethlehem | 212,016 | 23,165 | 10.9 % | 50.7 % |
| Jericho | 47,247 | 285 | 0.6 % | 0.6 % |
| Gaza | 1,872,631 | 1,138 | 0.06 % | 100.0 % (Gaza) |



The Situation of Christians in the Middle East

- Lebanon: The Lebanese Christian population has shrunk—from over 65 percent before 1975 to somewhere around 36 percent today. The reason for the decrease:
 - The Lebanese civil war,
 - Lower birth rate in the Lebanese Christian population due to their generally higher economic status,
 - Decreasing role and influence at a national level.

Syria:

- Christians are a minority in Syria and represent approximately 10 percent of Syria's population

Iraq:

- Around 1.4 million Christians in the country were counted in a 1987 Iraqi government census. Today, there are thought to be between 200,000 and 300,000 Christians left in Iraq.

Palestine:

- Between 2001 and 2005, more than 3000 out of 25 000 Christians left the Bethlehem District alone. Since then, an estimated 700 – 900 Christians have left Palestine each year.
- Combined with low birth rates and an ageing community, this has served to diminish the Christian presence to little more than a remaining 1% percent of the Palestinian population,



Statistics on Christian Presence in the Middle East

Present Day Christians in the Levant –
Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and
Palestine:

- 1882: 25%
- 1914: 26%
- 1945: 19%
- Today: Less than 9%

TODAY, BY COUNTRY

- Lebanon: 1.5 M
- Syria: 1.0 M, or less?
- Jordan: 175,000-258,000
- Israel: 121,000
- Gaza/WB: 75,000
- Egypt: 8 M
- [Palestinian Christians have gone from a high of 18% to 1-2% today.]



Do Christians have future in the region?

- Unfortunately, the answer is not that optimistic to say the least
- It is important to mention that even before the rise of ISIS, Middle Eastern Christianity was in decline
- In 1910, greater Syria, the Levant, was about 30 per cent Christian
- Syria, before the revolution, was about eight per cent Christian.
- If there's a Syria in the future there is no telling what the Christian percentage would be.
- This is true across the region.
- Iraqi Christians, before the American invasion, numbered 1.5 million; today they are less than 300,000. So that decline has been going on for a while and is not only the result of the growth of ISIS today.

Threats to Christian presence



- The threat to the Christian presence in the Levant stems from the following factors: the burden of history, the self-serving maneuvers of despotism, and the unachieved modernity of Islamic thought and of Near Eastern societies, Muslim and otherwise.
- It is amplified by the segregation of communitarianism, ironically just when a retreat to communitarianism appears to be the sole source of safety. And, as in the case of Lebanon, it is aggravated by the parochialism and populism of self-selected leaders
- As a result, the erosion of Christian communities in the region does not have a foreseeable end.
- Reversing the trend may require a new, secular democratic liberal politics.
- Across the Levant, despite the apparent dominance of religious and sectarian discourse, a latent popular political will toward this more inclusive approach still persists.
- Sadly, the political leadership that would summon the courage to embrace it has yet to emerge.

Christians and the Levant



- The continued decline of Christians, who have historically played a key role in the multicultural richness of the region, is emblematic of the need to take action to protect and enable all minorities to co-exist in dignity
- Without a rigorous intervention, the Levant will lose its identity as a mosaic of cultures, religions, traditions, and ethnic groups
- The increase in political tensions within countries will put pressure on Christians and others to choose sides, which has an impact on emigration, especially for young people anxious to get an education and enter the job market
- So what can be done to maintain safety and dignity for Christians and other minorities in the Levant, and provide opportunities for futures that are less bleak while maintaining the multicultural richness that has made the region home for so many?

Emigration as the only foreseeable outlet
Changing the face of the Middle East



- For many Middle Eastern Christians, the only answer is emigration, to pack their bags, to pack 2000 years of history and leave the lands of their ancestors and go to the West, hoping for an open door there
- The Middle East will lose a lot by their emigration
- The rich historic mosaic that is the Middle East will no longer be there
- Instead, it will be a Middle East that will no longer have the Maronites, the Melkites, the Yazidis and the Mandaeans, the mosaic that for so long survived
- It will no longer have those communities that were the bridge between the East and the West

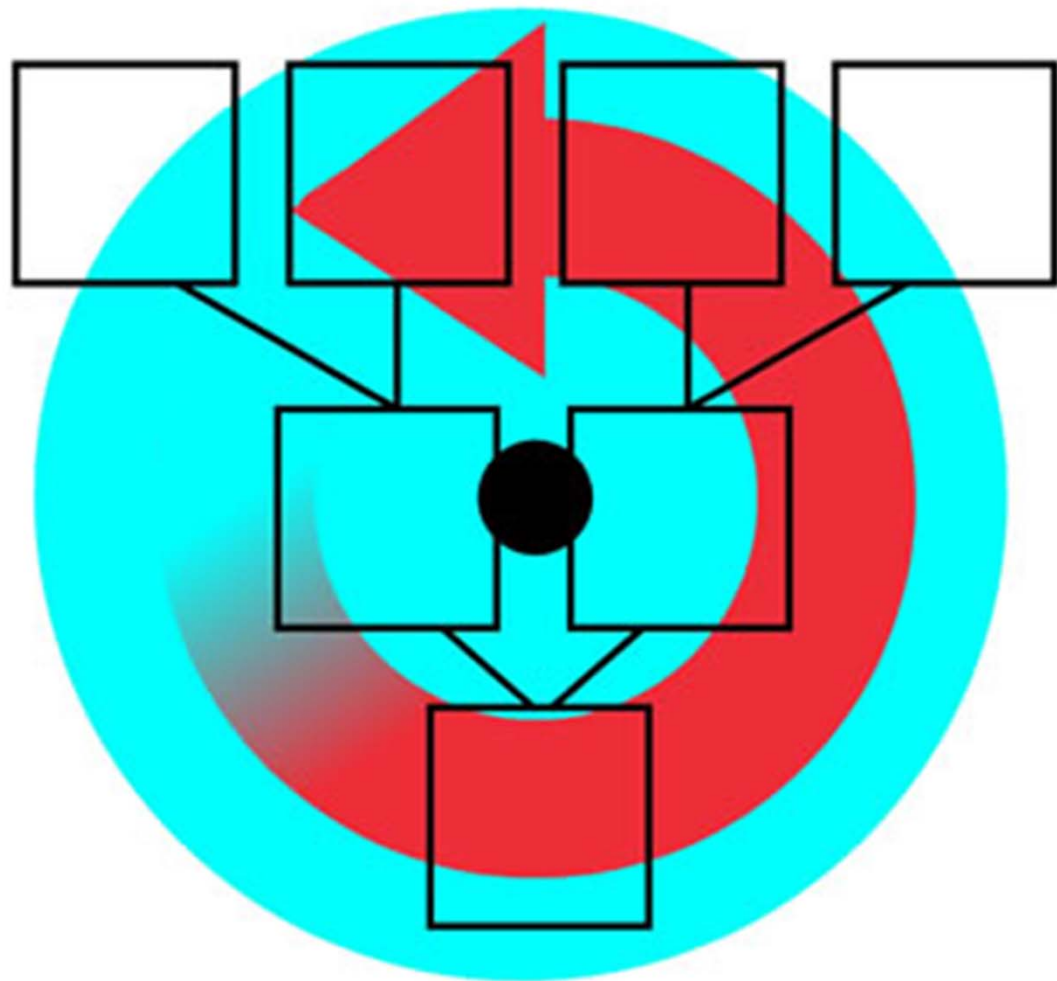


The Way Forward

How to reverse the process



A process needs
definitely to be
reversed and the
attempt is not
impossible without
effects





*The first and key
Challenge*

The Will to
Stay.
A Resilience
in the sense
of Belonging





Fingerprints of Christianity are everywhere from North Africa to the Far East.

Awareness of this reality should be reinforced.

This is not nostalgia of the past.
This is collective self-consciousness.



shutterstock

Christians should not be any more in this situation



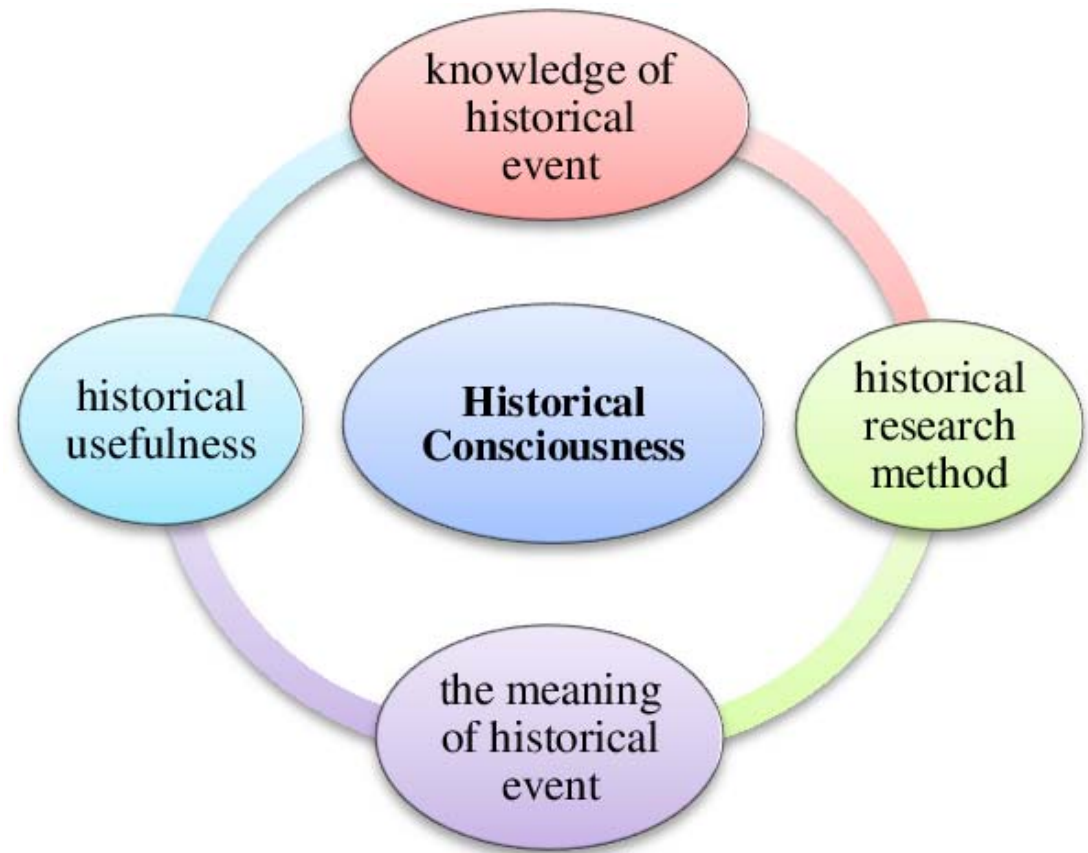
*The threat
to Christian
Identity in
Iraq*



Develop a historical consciousness and a pride of the national and Christian identity



- Christians of the area should be made aware of their identity, their legacy and their contribution to the civilization and culture of their nation. Centuries of persecution made them forget that!
- Very simple illustration:
- How come all the cities , villages and places in all our area carry Syriac names?
- How come all the languages spoken in the larger Middle East have Syriac roots?





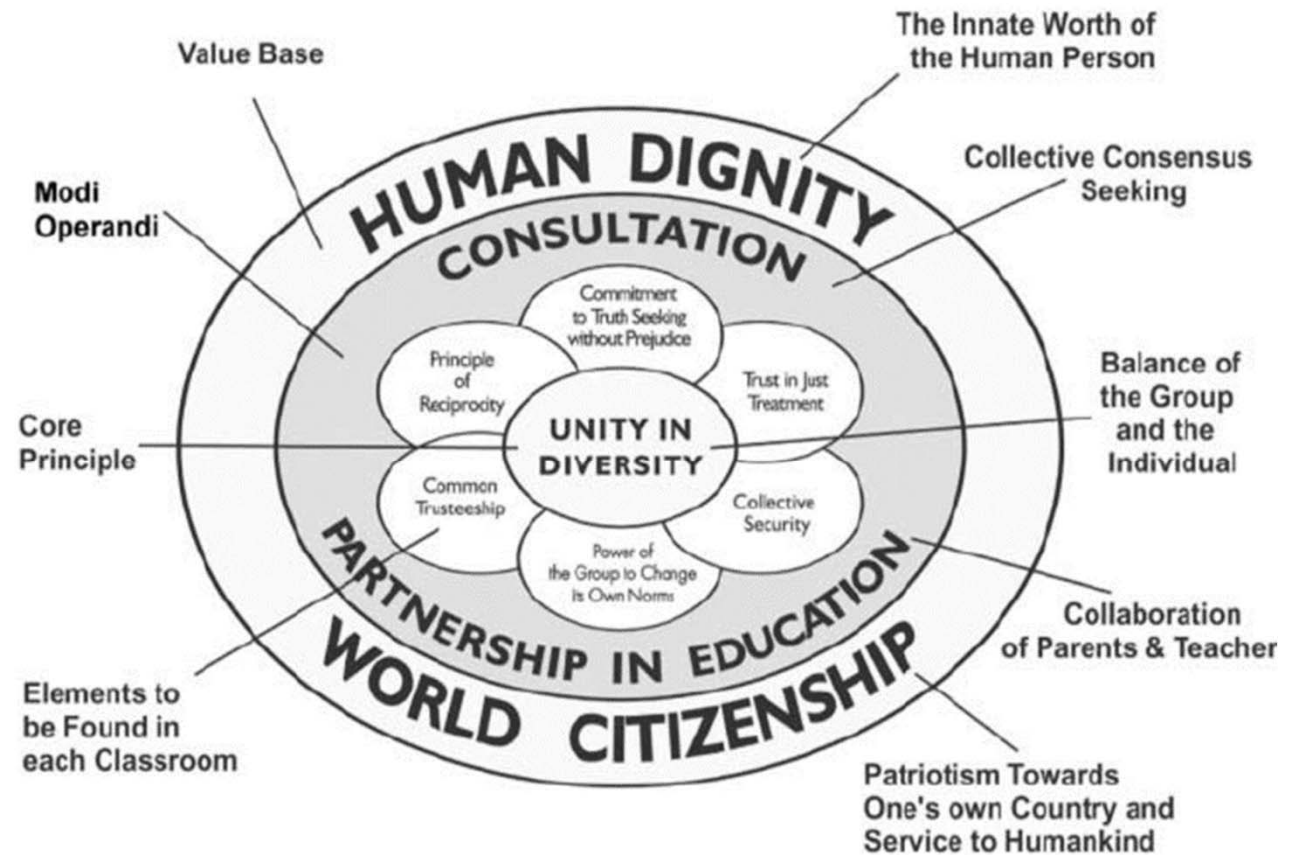
Reinforce the Social
Capital between
Christians and
enhance the sense of
Human Dignity



The Paradigm of Human Dignity



This should be the scope of the Christians in the Middle East, North Africa and the rest of the East!



Develop Christian Education and Youth Motivation



- Youth activities and education are the basic of this reinforcement movement
- They are initiated to their nation's history, the role of Christianity in building this civilization and to pride and solidarity
- This will prepare tomorrow's leaderships for collective ecumenical Christianity





Institutional development

- 1- Reconstruction of damaged ones
- 2- Modernization of Equipment
- 3- Development of programs





Working on the demographic factor by preventing emigration and helping the creation of new families through family support

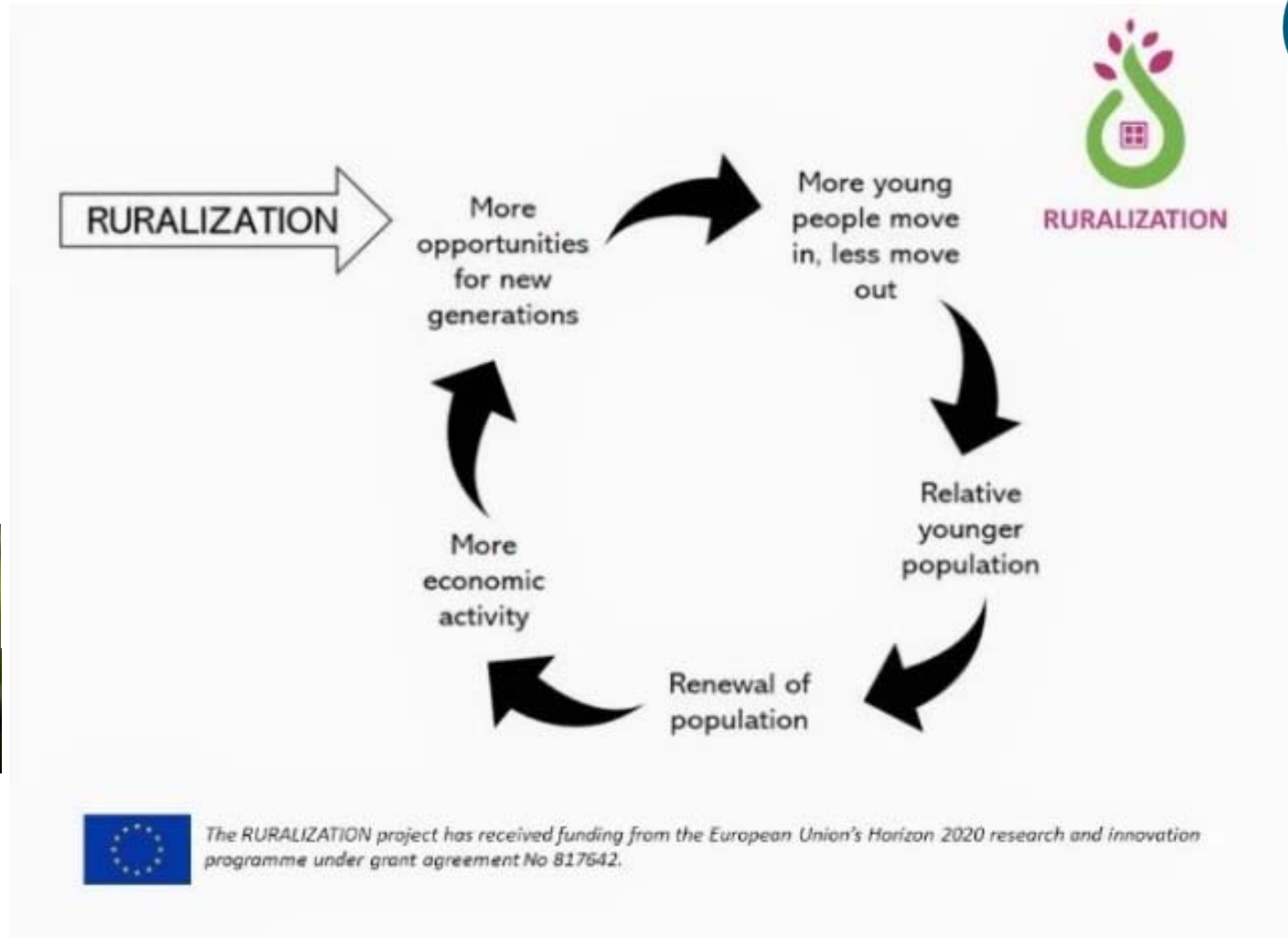


Churches own land, schools and hospitals



- They are supposed to provide and sponsor:
- 1-Occupational Training and Development – income generating
- 2- Agricultural and rural development
- 3- Educational Support
- 4- Medical care support

Ruralization of the Churches is an urgent necessity





Church related
institution and
activities are to
coordinate their
efforts in
solidarity



Christians in the Middle East, and everywhere, have no choice but to be cohesive and united, and form an unbreakable System, which includes several sub-systems

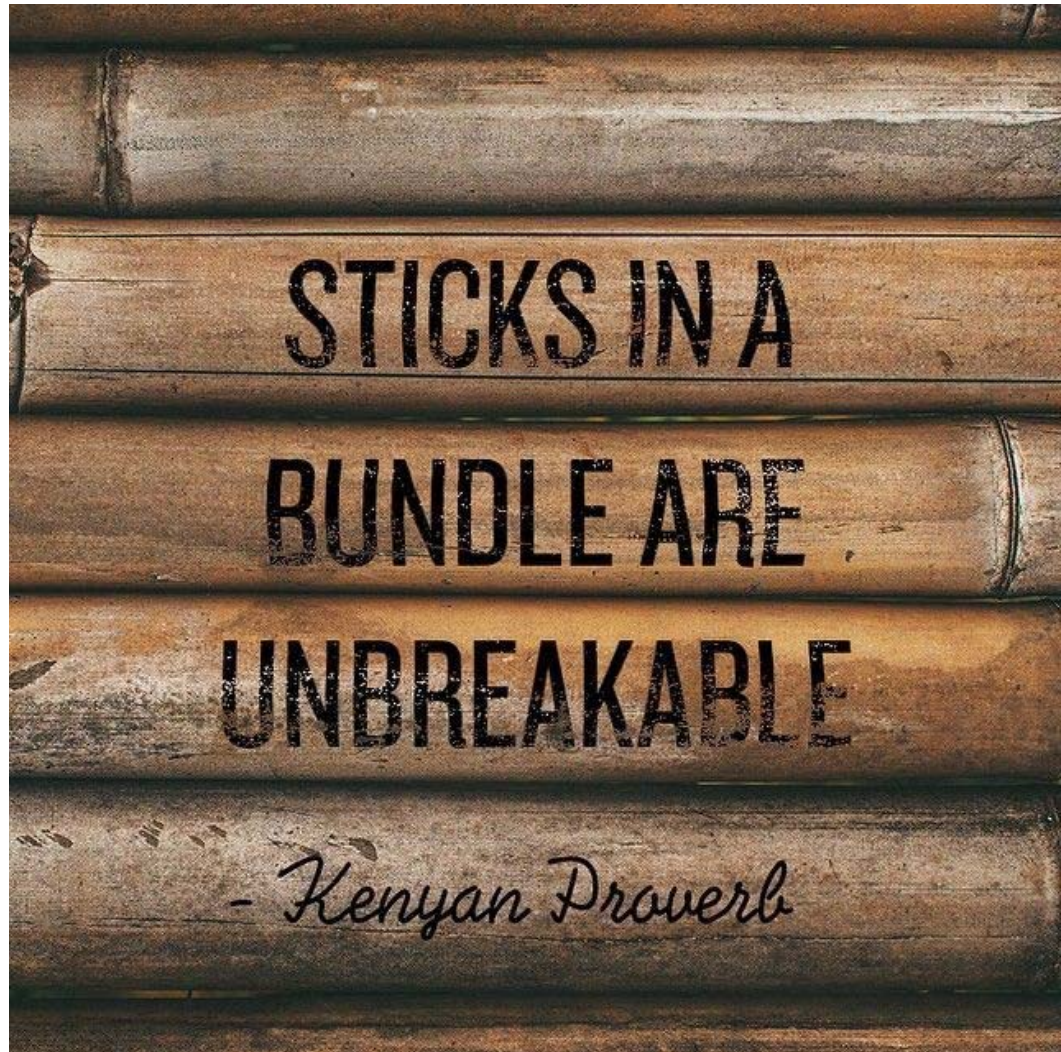




They have to
systematize
their
presence,
work and
coordination

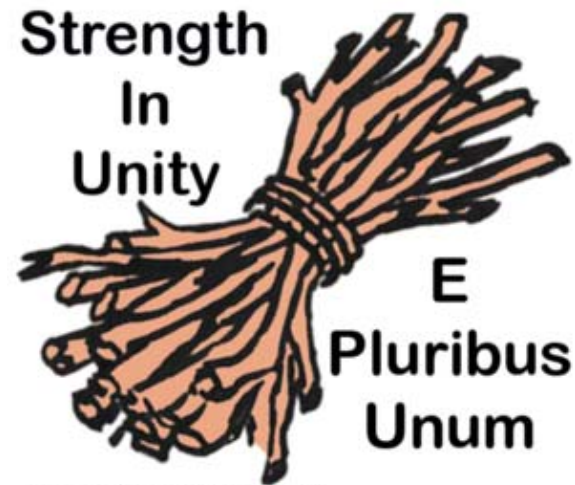


Either we are a bundle entity, like the bunch of sticks, so that no one can break us, or we are fragments that will be broken stick by stick. Choice is ours!





Christians could be a bunch of bunches. Diversity becomes a strength if it is properly managed. The main bunch is the system and the smaller bunches are the sub-systems



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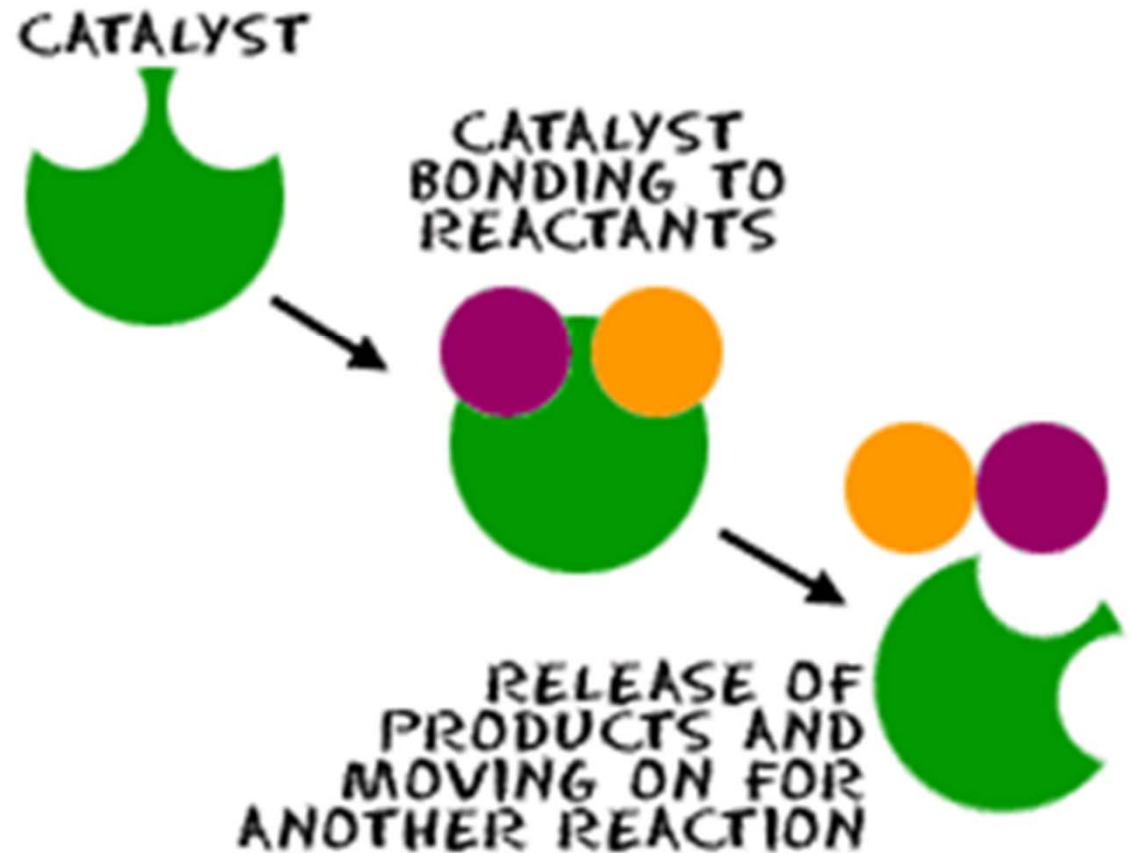


A culture of
togetherness
should be
developed
and sustained





MECC is one main tool of Christian Togetherness, Solidarity and Synergy. It is trying to fulfill it to the best of its capacity



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“and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it”