

# *The correspondence between the Vatican and the Eastern Church of Levant in the last decade of the seventeenth century*

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## **Abstract**

The article aims at elaborating facts in the last decades of the seventeenth century depending on three correspondences between the Pope of the Vatican with two heads of the Christian Community in the East. The first manuscript is written in Syriac by the Patriarch of the Chaldean Church, announcing his doctrine to the Pope. The other two are written in Arabic by the Metropolitan of the East or the Syriac Catholic Metropolitan, a branch from the Syrian Orthodox church emphasizing on his credibility and loyalty, asking the Pope for his blessings and educational materials. On the other side, the manuscripts illustrate the success of the missionary expedition in its mission in the Levant during this time.

**Keywords:** Levant, Ottoman Empire, correspondence, Vatican

## **Introduction**

The Chalcedon conclave in 451 A.D. brought about varied Christianity dogmas that flourished in the Near East, and since that time, the gap between Eastern churches and Vatican were widened until the Islamic occupation, which declared the end of any probable influence could be done by the Vatican upon the Eastern Christians populations<sup>1</sup>. The Vatican did not hide in the shadow of history or retreated to its territory and boundaries but, on quite the contrary, used all the aspects and conditions available to strengthen and prove its presence within the Christian populations and inhabitants of the East.

With the inauguration of the Crusades, the Holy See exploited the circumstances and had his presence in the East represented politically by the Crusade kingdoms and states and religiously by the missionary expeditions accompanied the drives and settled in the coastal cities of Syria and its ports. In this early period, the activities of the religious groups were confined to meeting the spiritual needs of the European civilian and militant communities, such as performing ritual sermons and preaching, along with the cooperation with the governors of the Crusaders' mini-states in all the seized cities and ports. Those religious associations also took on the responsibility to take care of the Christian pilgrims coming to visit

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<sup>1</sup> Abona, Hirmis. *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans*. New York: Camperia Press, 2008, 52–53.

the holy sites and supervise their issues. For that purpose the religious orders of ad-Dawiya and al-Istibariya were established.<sup>2</sup>

This religious activity accompanied the emergence of the Christian missionary movement that aimed at converting Muslim groups in Syria, catholicizing Eastern Christian groups, and reconnecting them to the Papal Church of Rome. On such a basis, a Crusader monk established the Order of Carmelites in 1156 A.D. on the Holy Land, whose members spread throughout Syria and Lebanon. This was followed by the emergence of the Franciscans and Dominicans in the early 13th century. The failure of the Crusades in achieving their goals led the European countries to explore another path to win as many supporters as possible among Muslims in a peaceful and friendly manner. In 1270, one of the Dominican bishops, William Tarabulsi wrote: "To retrieve the Holy Land, we need messengers, not soldiers". The European Community accepted the idea with enthusiasm, and they even started to introduce Arabic in their education programs. The Pope and the European countries also tried to intercede with the Mameluke authorities for the missionary communities in order for them to be able to enter and settle in the Holy Land by establishing friendly relations so that the European nationals have the right to work and trade in those areas as well as to facilitate Christian pilgrimage.<sup>3</sup>

Brother Roger of the Franciscan province of Aquitaine managed to conduct negotiations on behalf of the King of Sicily and succeeded in obtaining from al-Naser Muhammad (1310–1341) some privileges, such as the right of residence for Franciscans in the Holy Land, and their supervision of some Holy Sites.<sup>4</sup>

Their work during the days of the Mameluke state manifested itself in religious activity among the Christian communities in all their churches and in all over Syria, including taking care of pilgrims, offering hospitality and charity to them, in addition to the performance of some activities serving the European political interests in the East, as they had been given the task of communicating letters between the Pope and the King of France on one part and the kings of Ethiopia on the other.<sup>5</sup>

The golden era of Catholic missions arrived its zenith during the Ottoman Empire era, which started in the 16th century when Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent signed a treaty with the King of France in 1534, conducted in the first place against Habsburg, the common enemy of both sides. The treaty had other articles related to the economic fields. Still, the most important is the right of protection of the catholics in the East, which was endowed to the French King to support his position in the eyes of European populations.<sup>6</sup> Henceforth, the activities of missionary expedition would flourish in the Levant between the subjects of the eastern churches. Many of them would submit to the Pope, recognizing his supremacy and keen for his support.

<sup>2</sup> Hitti, Philip Khuri. *Lebanon in History*. Beirut, 1959, 368–378.

<sup>3</sup> Sabbagh, Laila al-. *European Communities in the Levant in the Ottoman Period*. Vol. 2, Beirut, 1989, 770–780.

<sup>4</sup> Duweihi, Marastan. *History of the Maronite Community*. Beirut, 1890, 378.

<sup>5</sup> Sabbagh, *European Communities*, 774–775.

<sup>6</sup> Bilateral Capitulations, Ottoman–French Contract (942 A.H. / 1536 A.D. and 1084 A.H. / 1673 A.D.). *Irbaya, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* Sayı:39 Yıl: 2015/2, 67–107.





البابا الطوباني.  
 إلى حضرة الأعظم والأب العام حبرنا ومولانا صانه الله تعالى. يقبل الأرض على  
 الوجوه غائيا ويمرغ الوجوه على التراب وهو باكيا ويهل العبرات على الوجنات  
 منتحبا امام وكيل ونائب ربنا يسوع المسيح ورأس المسكونة اب الإباء العام ورئيس  
 الرؤساء الأنام الجالس على كرسي مار بطرس الرسولي والماسك بأياديه المقدسات  
 مفاتيح القبول الممتلى من الخزائن الروحانية والمتردى بالزينة والحكمة الإلهية من  
 اختاره الله تعالى راعيا لخرافة الناطقة واملكه موهوبات أنعامه المسلم إليه الأوامر  
 والشريعة والمتولي على اسرار الكنيسة والبيعة اب الأباء والحبر المعظم حضرة البابا  
 المكرم شمس الدنيا وقمر المسيحيين وسراج العالم وعموم المؤمنين امد الله رئاسته  
 إلى دهر الدهرين بصلاة مريم العذراء والدة الله وجميع القديسين أمين اما بعد تقبيل  
 الأقدام المفروض ونص اللازم المعروف انه مار يوسف البطريرك بعدما رسمني  
 بطريرك أنا الغير مستحق صار له نيه أن نزور قدسكم حيث عليه التزامات لذا سأكتب  
 امانتي من جديد ثالثا وأرسلها معه إلى قدسكم الشريف وهو يقدم الطاعة إلى حضرتكم  
 عوضا عن حقارتنا فالمرجو من عزمكم ومن جزيل انعامكم إن مثلما باركتكم على  
 معلمي الموعود وشرقتموه وساعدتموه بمواهبكم الخيرية كذلك تكلفوا خاطركم  
 وتنعموا على أحقر عبيدكم وأصغر تلامذتكم وتباركوا علي بإرسال التثبيت وتشرفوني  
 ببركاتكم أنا الغير لائق لهذه الأنعام ولا مستحق لهذا الإكرام وها انا مقر ومعترف  
 بهذه الأمانة التي حررتها في الكراس بيدي وبجميع ما رسمت بلا غش و بلا شكوك  
 وانشالله أعرضها علانية واعلمها ظاهرا على قدر طاقتي لجماعتي وللغير واني  
 خاضع ومنصاع إلى قداستكم بكل ما تأمروني وترسموا علي من القوانين إلى منتهى  
 عمري وأخر نفس حياتي فالأن أخر ساجدا أمام الكرسي البطرسي وأقبل أقدامكم  
 الطاهرة وأتضرع إلى قدسكم ثانيا وثالثا وارجو أن لا تنسونا من دعاكم المقبول  
 وصلواتكم مشتت بين الدياب الخاطفة دتم سالمي برب العالمين. بنعمة الله ضابط  
 الكل الضعيف أو الصغير يوسف بطريرك الكلدان.

The blessed Pope

To the greatest, the general father, our pontiff, our Master, may God Almighty protect him, we lay the faces on the ground kissing it, rolling in the dust crying while the tears pouring down on the cheeks, weeping in front of the authorized representative and agent of Jesus Christ, the general father of fathers. The head of the inhabited world, the leader of the leaders of the humankind, who is sitting on the apostolic chair of Saint Peter and holding in his holy hands the keys of admittance who is filled with spiritual treasures and is clothed with divine embellishment and wisdom. Whom God the exalted chose to be the herder of his talking sheep, whom he is put in the possession of all the talents which the creatures have, who is in charge of the orders and Canons, who is the keeper of the secret of Church, and pledge of loyalty, the father of fathers, the authorized representatives of Christ, the venera-

ble Pope. The sun of the world, the moon of Christians, the light of the world and believers in general, may God prolongs his presidency forever by the prayer of the virgin Marry – the mother of God – and all priests. Amen. After the obliged kissing of the feet and the necessarily presented text (I say) that the Patriarch Mar Joseph, after having appointed me, the non-worthy to the post of the Patriarch, his intention to visit your holiness since he has obligation therefor, I will write my loyalty again and I will send it with him to your noble holiness. He will render obedience to your holiness demonstrating our obsequiousness so that I ask from your determination and your abundant benevolence, that, just as you blessed my promised educator, whom you have honored and helped him with your benevolent gifts, in the same way you also take the trouble and give your blessings on your pettiest servant and smallest pupil, and bless me with sending the decree of appointment, accepting me in your blessings even though I am inappropriate to this grace, and not deserve that honor. I admit and acknowledge in this trust, which I wrote by my hands in this letter and in all I decided without cheating or doubt. By the will of God, I will exhibit overtly, I will make it known clearly according to my ability to my community, as well as others, and I will be obedient and yielding to your holiness and to all the orders and Canons you pass, to the end of my life and to the last breath. Now I will fall prostrate before the chair of St. Peter kissing pure feet praying to your holiness to humiliating myself a second and a third time and I hope you will not forget us from your accepted invocation and prayers, which scatter the ravenous wolfs. May you remain safe in the Lord of the worlds by the grace of God who is the director of all. The Little and weak Josef, the Patriarch of Chaldean

## Review

The Chaldean Church descended from the Nestorian Church, that its adherents were scattered in big numbers in Syria and Mesopotamia. During the first four centuries, Syrians had many Christian religious schools, which were the beacon of Christianity in the East as Antioch, Edessa, and Nusaybin. There is no doubt, political situation of the region was as important as the religious differences since the city of Nusaybin and eastern territories fell to the hand of the Persian Kingdom in 363 A.D. Syrians were divided into two groups, and hostilities between them increased to the extent that they lived in separate territories, and were referred to as Westerners and Easterners.

Both of the groups adopted the decisions of the council of Nicaea 325 A.D. until the coming of Nestor, who himself was one of the disciples of Antioch, and a significant portion of Syrians accepted his creed regarding Christ, who is of two natures and two essences. While the Roman Empire excommunicated him, his proponents came under aggressive attacks and they were suffering from acute persecution; therefore, they left Antioch and Edessa and sought refuge in the eastern territories. We shall bear in mind that not all Eastern Syrians were Nestorians, but the entire Nestorians fled the western provinces of the East, and there they established their Church, which penetrated the world and arrived in China and India.<sup>8</sup> Since 497 A.D. they announced their independence from Antioch after the council held by the Patriarch of Church, whose name was Biabwi. In the end of the

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<sup>8</sup> Atiyah, Aziz. *The History of Eastern Christianity*. Translated by Issac Abeed. First edition, Cairo, 2005, 304–306.

sixth century, the hierarchy of the Church was established,<sup>9</sup> and placed in Almadain, the capital of the Persian Kingdom until 697 A.D., and later it was relocated in Bagdad. The attempts of spreading the catholic faith between the proponents of the eastern churches had started since 1247. In 1445, the head of Chaldean Bishopric of Cyprus Tethym declared his unity with the papal chair.<sup>10</sup> However, this integration was of less importance since the conversion of the small ethnic group would not affect the center of the Church and its adherents.

This Church established its hierarchy in a unique way utterly different from any other churches in the world that the Patriarch of the Church possessed both temporal and ecclesiastical authority over his proponents. In early modern history, the Church adopted a system called *Natir Kursi*, which means the office-guardian. The system guaranteed that the authority would stay in the Patriarch's family; the Patriarch pre-emptively commissions one of his relatives to hold the position after his death. Since the earliest centuries, the Pops of Vatican had had their dreams to seize power over all other Churches and doctrines. Early in modern history, the circumstances were utterly convenient. The chance came when the head of the eastern Patriarchate died and when his heir was just eight years old. Many bishops who had relations with the Franciscan and the other notables who had commercial ties with France headed their faces to the Pope seeking help. Their appeals described themselves as orphans without fathers, but just with a child who came from the same family, which had monopolized the Patriarchate see for the past hundred years, and they asked him to ordain a patriarch for their Church. As such, Yohanna Sulaqa was instructed and taught the Latin doctrine in Rome, ordained a Patriarch under the name Shimun VIII and sent back home.

This schismatic line in the Nestorians church did not survive since Sulaqa could not be able to win over the main body of the Church, and he was isolated for one year in the Mountains of Diyarbakir until he got caught by the Ottoman government and killed. This loss and disappointment did not affect the function of the missionary expeditions nor the determination of Vatican, and in 1515 they found the circumstances paved the way for their attempts when a sudden disputing happened within the Church, since Shimun Dinkha, the bishop of a critical bishopric rose against the head of the Church Mar Elia who could manage to evict Dinkha into Persian land. Despite the support of the Persian government, in trying to find a new branch within the Church of the East which could adopt more independent policy from the Ottoman authority, and the efforts of Vatican to win over the Church, this line did not succeed in achieving the Vatican's goals and fantasy, since the population stuck at their faith and his successors had neglected all connections with Rome and returned to their ancestral doctrine.

A new schism in the Church started during the seventeenth century when the Metropolitan of Diyarbakir Yusuf, the first converted to catholicism, initiating a new line, would continue to exist until 1828. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, catholicism

<sup>9</sup> Abona, Albert. دليل إلى قراءة تاريخ الكنائس الشرقية [A guide to comprehend the church history]. Beirut: The Chaldean Syrian Eastern Catholic Church Press, Orient House, 1997, 212.

<sup>10</sup> Samir, Abdeh. الطوائف المسيحية في سورية أصلها تطورها تعدادها [The Christian Communities in Syria, their Origins – Development – Census], First edition, Damascus: Hasan Malls Press, 2003, 58–120.

flourished in Diyarbakir; even all the followers of the Eastern Church there will become loyal catholic subjects to the Pope of Rome.<sup>11</sup>

The document mentioned the first two patriarchs of this line who confessed and obliged loyalty to the Pope; therefore, presenting their life would be necessary since they were fifth patriarch under the name of Yusuf.

Yusuf the first or Yusuf Abd al-Ahed was originated in Kirkuk in Iraq. The Patriarch of Eastern Church Elia IX (1660–1670) ordained him as archbishop of Diyarbakir. In 1667, the archbishop turned upon his master converting to catholicism; therefore, he was imprisoned for a while. After his release, he set out to Rome in 1673, and in 1683, Pope Euclid X vested him with the rank of the Patriarchate and recognized him as the head of the Chaldean Catholic church. His sovereignty expanded over Amed, Diyarbakir, Mardin, Mosul, and Bagdad. In 1694 he traveled to Rome for treatment and died there in 1707.

Yusuf, the second who sent the epistle, was born in 1667 in Tall Kayf in Iraq. Son of Cumaa of al-Maroufs' house. In 1689, he was consecrated to priest and two years later, the first Yusuf vested him with the metropolitan rank, and in 1694 he ascended the Patriarchate on the ground of the departure of Yusuf the first.<sup>12</sup> The manuscript is clear evidence for the success of the missionary expedition activities in the Levant since the new Patriarch obliged loyalty to the Pope and requested the assertion for his position.

### The second manuscript<sup>13</sup>

هو الى جناب السادة الكرام الكاردينالية الفخام الموكلين على انتشار الايمان ومدبري سائر الامصار والاقطار سلمهم الله تعالى وابقاهم في خير وعافية. الى حضرة المقر الكريم العالي الموسوي السيد مجد الامة المسيحية فخر البيعة الكاثوليكية حرس الله نعمهم ووفر من السعادة حظهم وقسمهم امين. انني انا الفقير بين رؤساء الكهنة باسيليوس إسحاق مطران سائر المشرق الذي كنت سابقا الذي كنت سابقا مطرانا على مدينة آمد منذ اثنتي عشر سنة مرسوم من يدي البطريرك بطرس الانطاكي اقر واعترف امام الله تعالى وحضرة قداستكم انني كاثوليكي المذهب على الايمان المستقيم مطيع البيعة الرومانية مؤمن بالاب والابن والروح القدس وان القنوم الثاني الذي هو الابن نزل من السماء وتجسد من مريم البتول وصار انسانا حقيقيا مساويا لنا في كل شيء ما خلا الخطيئة وانه انسان سام واله سام بطبيعتين ومشيئتين وقنوم واحد اعني طبيعه الهية وطبيعه إنسانية واني مقر ومعترف بالسبعة عشر مجمع المقدس وبجميع ما رسمت وثبتت وقبلت هذه المجاميع المقدسة وعلى الخصوص ما رسم في المجمع الخلقيدوني الرابع الذي حرم به ديوسقورس وشيعته المقرين المقرين بطبيعه واحدة واؤمن بكل ما تؤمن به البيعة المقدسة و اردل واحرم كلمات ردله وتحرمه البيعة

<sup>11</sup> Abona, *Assyrians, Kurds, and Ottomans*, 77–78.

<sup>12</sup> <http://saint-adday.com/Chaldean patriarchate of Babylon>

<sup>13</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Turki V.K.23 (1526–1584). N39.

الرومانية واعتقد ان سيدنا البابا الروماني هو الحبر الأعظم ونائب السيد المسيح ووكيله وانا مطيعه وتحت رياسته وعلى هذه الأمانة الصادقة أعيش وعليها اموت بحسب الايمان الذي قبلته منذ صغري من ابهاتنا الكيوجيين المرسلين الى مدينة الموصل.

ويكون معلوم سيادتكم اننا في هذه البلاد مشغولون في التعليم والكرز وانتشار الايمان الكاثوليكي لكننا محتاجون الى بعض كتب ضرورية لنا وهي كتب التوراة المقدسة لعنيفة والحديثة وأربعة كتب التواريخ وابن سينا واکاودوس في علم الهندسة ولا بأس إذا كان عندكم غير كتب لازمة لنا ان ترسلوا منها لنا لاجل تعليم المؤمنين ولكم الاجر والثواب عند الله وأيضا نأمل من الجناب الرشيد ان تتعموا علينا بشقفة من صليب الحي كما ارسلتم لمار يوسف لأنه ما يوجد في طائفتنا شيء من صليب الحي فلذلك تهجمنا على قدسكم وطلبنا هذه الذخيرة العظيمة لتكون بركة يسوع وصلبيه وبركة الكرسي الرسولي وبركتكم علينا وعلى طائفتنا وكنائسنا فقط لا لشيء آخر ونأمل من قدسكم ان ترسلوا لنا الغفرات (صكوك الغفران) العظيمة لنعطيه في كنائسنا في الأيام المعلومة وكلما احتاج الامر اليه وسابقا كنا ارسلنا لكم مكتوب بمثل هذا بختمي وختم ابهاتنا المرسلين وقد كتب تحريراً في الشهر الثامن من شهر تموز سنة الف وستمائة وأربعة وتسعون مسيحية.

It is to the noble gentlemen, magnificent Cardinals, delegates of spreading faith, directors of the various territories and provinces, the Almighty keep them safe and sound, to the eminence, high office, the glory of the Christian nation, the pride of Catholic Church, God surveillance their grace over and save their happy life.

I am Basil Issac, the bishop of the East, the poorest among the bishops that I was previously the bishop of Amed for twenty years commissioned by Peter, the Patriarch of Antakya. I admit and confess before the Almighty and your holiness that I believe in the catholic faith, as well as I, pay homage to the Catholic Church, believe in the father, son and Holy Spirit. I confess that the other essence is the son who fell out of the sky and embodied in human through the Virgin Mary, and we are equal to him except he has no sin, and he is transcendent human and God at the same time. He has two natures, two volitions and one essence that I do mean a human nature and divine nature. I confess and avow to the holy seventeen councils and in all the laws and principles, which had been given rise to them, especially what the Chalcedon council brought about that had forbidden the dealing with Discords and his proponents who are confessing to one nature.

I believe in the Catholic Church, and I forbid what the Catholic Church has prohibited and I think that our Master the Pope of Vatican is the supreme pontiff and the vice Christ, I obey him and under his presidency. For this trust and to that confidence I live and die according to the belief that I have accepted since I was a child at the hand of our capuchin fathers who had been sent to Almousel.

To be in your knowledge we are in busy of teaching and spreading the catholic faith so that we are in need of some books, which are necessary for us, which are the New and Old

Testament, four books in history, Aben Sina, and, Gladius in engineering science. It is okay if you have other books that could be useful to us in teaching the believers. To get a reward and retribution.

We hope from the guide to the right path to reward us with a piece of the Christ cross like the one, which was sent to Josef Elmar, for we do not have anything of it. So that we dared to your holiness by asking you to give us these high supplies to lay upon us, our Community and our Church the blessing of the Christ and his cross, the blessing of the holy seat and you.

We hope from your holiness to send for us the great indulgences to offer it in our churches at the holidays and the time of need, previously we sent like this letter with my seal and stamp of sender fathers. It had been written on the day of eighth of the July in one thousand six hundred ninety four A.D.

### The third manuscript<sup>14</sup>

الى جناب عمدة الاجلاء فخر الامايد الاخلاء حضرة الاب المكرم الانا الطاهر المفخم سلمه البار تعالى وابقاه البقاء المجيد. الى حضرة من حرر اسمه الكريم أعلاه دام عليه نعماه وبلغ في الدارين يومناه بجاه مريم والدة الاله امين يا معين انني انا الفقير بين رؤساء الكهنة باسيلوس إسحاق مطران سائر المشرق الذي كنت سابقا الذي كنت سابقا مطرانا على مدينة آمد منذ اثنتي عشر سنة مرسوم من يدي البطريرك بطرس الانطاكي اقر واعترف امام الله تعالى وحضرة قداسنكم انني كاثوليكي المذهب على الايمان المستقيم مطيع البيعة الرومانية مؤمن بالاب والابن والروح القدس وان القنوم الثاني الذي هو الابن نزل من السماء وتجسد من مريم البتول وصار انسانا حقيقيا مساويا لنا في كل شيء ما خلا الخطيئة وانه انسان سام واله سام بطبيعتين ومشينتين وقنوم واحد اعني طبيعه الهية وطبيعه إنسانية واني مقر ومعترف بالسبعة عشر مجمع المقدس وجميع ما رسمت وثبتت وقبلت هذه المجاميع المقدسة وعلى الخصوص ما رسم في المجمع الخلقيدوني الرابع الذي حرم به ديوسقورس وشيعته المقرين المقرين بطبيعه واحدة وأؤمن بكل ما تؤمن به البيعه المقدسة و اردل واحرم كلمات ردله وتحرمه البيعة الرومانية واعتقد ان سيدنا البابا الروماني هو الحبر الأعظم ونايب السيد المسيح ووكيله وانا مطيعه وتحت رياسته وعلى هذه الأمانة الصادقة أعيش وعليها اموت بحسب الايمان الذي قبلته منذ صغري من ابهاتنا الكيوجيين المرسلين الى مدينة الموصل ويكون معلوم سيادتكم اننا في هذه البلاد مشغولون في التعليم والكرز وانتشار الايمان الكاثوليكي لكننا محتاجون الى بعض كتب ضرورية لنا وهي كتب التوراة المقدسة لعتيقة والحديثة وأربعة كتب التواريخ وابن سينا واكلودوس في علم الهندسة ولا بأس إذا كان عندكم غير كتب لازمة لنا ان

<sup>14</sup> Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Turki V.K.23 (1526–1584). N98.

ترسلوا منها لنا لأجل تعليم المؤمنين ولكم الاجر والثواب عند الله وأيضا نأمل من الجنب الرشيد ان تنعموا علينا بشقفة من صليب الحي لان ما عند طائفتنا منه شيء وهو لازم لنا لاجل البركة وكنا سابقا قد ارسلنا مكتوبين على هذ النص للجمع المقدس شهادة ابينا الباطريك بطرس واخينا المطران رزق الله مطران حلب والاباء المرسلين ان نرسل لكم هذه مع سيدنا البطريرك يوسف لأنه عارف بنا من بلادنا خير من الكل وشهادته تجري عن شهادات كثيرة والحوايح التي ذكرنا بعد أن تتصدقوا وتحسنوا بهم سلموهم الى يد امبرسيوس اللنباردي وهو يرسلهم لنا ونسأل الله تعالى ان يكثر يخيركم ويزيد من فضلكم ولا يعدمنا احسانكم دتمت سالمين برب العالمين وقد كتب تحريراً في الأول من شهر كانون 1695.

To the grand Master among them all, the pride of the ancient greats, the honorable father, the pure luxurious Ego, May God protect him in peace forever. To whom his great name is mentioned above, God's favor has lasted upon him by the name of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God. Amen.

I am the poorest among the heads of priests, Basil Isaac, the bishop of the East that I had been previously the bishop of Amed for twenty years commissioned by Boutros, the Patriarch of Antakya. I admit and confess before the Almighty and your holiness that I believe in the catholic faith, as well as I pay homage to the Catholic Church, believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I confess that the other essence is the son who fell out of the sky and embodied in human through the Virgin Mary and we are equal to him except he has no sin and he is a transcendent human and God at the same time. He has two natures, two volitions and one essence that I do mean a human nature and divine nature.

I confess and avow to the holy seventeen councils and all the laws, especially the Chalcedon council that excommunicated Discords and his proponents who are confessing to one nature.

I believe in the Catholic Church and I forbid what the Catholic Church has prohibited and I think that our Master the Pope of Vatican is the supreme pontiff and the authorized representative of Christ, I obey him and under his presidency. For this trust and to that confidence I live and die according to the belief that I have accepted since I was a child on the hand of our Capuchin fathers who had been sent to Almousel.

To be in your knowledge, we are in busy of teaching and spreading the catholic faith so that we are in need of some books, which are necessary for us, which are the New and Old Testament, four books in history, Aben Sina, and, Gladius in engineering science. It is okay if you have other books that could be useful to us in teaching the believers. To have pay and reward by God.

We hope from the guide of the right path to reward us with a piece of Christ cross which we do not have anything of it. I previously had sent two letters regarding these issues to the sacred Community with the testimony of our father Peter, the Patriarch of Antakya, our brother Rezq-Allah, the Bishop of Aleppo, and the Capuchin fathers. I will send this letter with Patriarch Josef because he knows us well, and his testimony deputizes other testimonies.

After rewarding the supplies, which we mentioned above, please hand it to the hand of Ambrosias al-Lombardi and he will send it to us, and we ask the God Almighty to enhance your goodness, boost your charity and not deprive us from your help – protected with the care of God. It was written on the first of January in 1695.

## Review

Both of the documents contain recognition of the catholic faith by Basil Isaac, the bishop of the East, and his appeal to the Holy See or Rome to provide him with some provisions and supplies necessary for spreading the catholic faith in the East.

Basil Isaac, the Metropolitan of the East was born in Mosel to an Orthodox priest named Abd al-Gabbar, who converted to catholicism by the Capuchin Fathers. Basil Isaac demonstrated sharp intelligence, and he was the center of attention since he learned Italian and Latin in his early years. In 1643 he went to Edessa, and afterward, he continued his way into Aleppo accompanied by the Catholic Metropolitan of Diyarbakir Abd al-Jalil Tethymus. After his residency in Aleppo, the Patriarch of Antioch sent him into Rome, and there he had studied languages and religious sciences for four years. In 1672 he returned to Lebanon, and his residency, the Catholic Patriarch of Maronite vested him with the priesthood degree. In 1682, the Patriarch of Antioch Peter promoted him to the Metropolitan rank. Then, he was held responsible for the Catholic Church of Amed.

During his period, the Church of Amed confronted with many problems that the Orthodox Party and their head Isaac Ezer procured a decree from the Grand Vezir Ali Basha in the reign of Mehmet IV contained instructions of preventing the Ottoman Christians from converting to catholicism. The Archbishop of the Orthodox Church took advantage of the decree and evicted the Metropolitan to Aleppo. In Aleppo, the situation was more intense, and the struggle between catholics and orthodox continued for a long time. Therefore, the Metropolitan found himself, obliged to ask for the back of the French King that in his letter which dates back to 1686, explained the hard situation and toil, which laid upon catholics.

In 1690, he traveled to Istanbul and procured a decree from the Ottoman authority on 28 January. The order contained information and instruction for deposing the Orthodox Patriarch and recognizing the Catholic Patriarch Peter VI as the chief of the Syrian Community. The confrontation was alleviated for a while until the Orthodox Patriarch Isaac Ezer acquired a new decree from the Ottoman government and got further permission for exiling the Catholic Patriarch and his community. On basis, Gaffer Basha, the governor of Aleppo put them in custody for a while; and their release could not be achieved without paying a substantial fine. The communion was scattered in different areas, and the Metropolitan headed his face into Cyprus and settled down in a capuchin monastery. In 1702, he accepted an invitation from the ambassador of France in Constantinople, and there, he had sent many letters to the King of France Louis XIV written in Arabic and for his strong relationship with the King Louis gave him the advantage to send many eastern students to France for education<sup>15</sup>. Those letters still archived in the vaults of the French Ministry of Foreign affairs for being considered essential materials and one of the best evidence regarding the

<sup>15</sup> Terazi, Philip de. أصدق ما كان في تاريخ لبنان [asdaq maa kaanan tarikh lubnan] 1948, 317.

status of the Catholic Church of Syria at the time<sup>16</sup>. In 1704, the Pope Euclid XI sent an epistle to the metropolitan raising him to the patriarchate rank and naming him the Patriarch of Antioch. The epistle had orders to the Ambassador of France for adopting the Metropolitan, by extracting an Ottoman decree supports his position. Seemingly, the personality of the Metropolitan, which was full of human knowledge, refused this offer because he does not want to open a new door for prolonged struggle in the same communion and, at the same time, would be pointless. Despite this, he accepted to run the affairs of the Community. In 1706, he traveled in Rome, spending all his time in interpretations and composition until his death in 1721.

### Conclusion

The documents are mere evidence about the continuing cultural intercourse between East and West, illustrating the grand role played by the Vatican and missionary expedition in communicating with the communities of the East. The political factor was no less critical since those missionary expeditions and correspondence could not be done without the acceptance of the Ottoman Empire and the protection of European countries at imperial level. Both factors are mutually complementary since the movements of missionary expedition are related to the Ottoman concession during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. From these points of view, we need more explanation for each side. The Ottomans started these kinds of privileges with the inauguration of 16<sup>th</sup> century thinking that if they endowed some economic and religious concession to some European countries (France) would weaken the Austrian position and if they did not capture its land at least could enforce their conditions upon them. France required such allies to help them in their wars in Europe and exploited the manifestation of protection of the Catholics in the East therefore; the religious movement during these centuries was established on political ground.

Converting to catholicism was a unique element during 17<sup>th</sup> century. There is no material assurance that the Vatican was still persisted in finding a new front inside the East to capture the Holy Land and build the Kingdom of God, nor the Christians of the East were under persecution during that time. Still, we could not ignore the idea of trying to find an elite inside the Ottoman Empire could work to serve the interest of the Vatican or at least to restrain the Ottoman jeopardy, which proved itself in 1683 once again. Reckoning the economic situation of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the Ottoman Empire could be the best reason of converting most of Christians to catholicism. The Ottoman Empire suffered from series of prolonged wars in many fronts and the new obtaining lands in the past covered the financial problems, but the Ottoman expansions arrived its peak and wars did not stop while the cost of defending the lands increased and on such grounds, the population of the East found in Vatican a safe house could offer them charity to pay the taxes which increased and forced upon them. On the other hand, they could have political protection and exemption from the taxes according to their point of view at least.

From an educational point of view, the correspondences were written in Syriac and Arabic, which attest that despite the word of nations in its self-did not existed. Still, the Com-

<sup>16</sup> Terazi, Philip de. السلاسل التاريخية في ذكر أساقفة الابرشيات السريانية [The historical series in mentioning the Bishops of Syriac dioceses], Beirut, 1910, 123–124.

munity of Syrians stuck culturally to their traditions, emphasizing on their origins and identity. At the same time, the Vatican and its hierarchy obtained the idea of nostalgia of those people to attract them, talking to them by their language. The Catholic Community of Levant existed outside the millet system, which was established by Mehmet the Conquer and divided Christians into three categories, which catholicism was not one of them and here the question is that: did the Ottoman Empire has kind of tolerance or it was just under a political pressure pushed the government to accept catholicism inside Levant and could give her a chance to strengthen its relation with France or at least could possess a peace with European countries?

The idea of religious forgiveness appears as a preposterous idea since the sharia law was the only factor inside the court and the law did not give even the Christians included in the millet system a superiority upon Muslims. Still, in quite contrary, the common issues between both of them must solve by Sharia law; therefore, the only aspect that affected the relation of the Ottoman Empire to the Catholics of Levant at first was the concession made by them with the European countries, which was useful economically to the west and very useless politically and harmful economically to the Ottomans.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the European countries started to impose their conditions upon the Ottoman Empire and took advantage of it to protect holy lands and catholics in the East as pretext to intervene in the Ottoman Empire issues. The documents are just a series of many illustrate the civilization cross-fertilization from one side. The other has very political importance since the history of catholicism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would have the grand direction in European policy towards the Ottomans.