

ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ

SYRIAN ORTHODOX PATRIARCHATE  
OF ANTIOCH & ALL THE EAST  
BAB TOUMA, P.O.BOX 22260  
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We extend our apostolic benediction, benevolent prayers and greetings to our brethren, His Beatitude Mor Baselius Thomas I, Catholicos of India, and their Eminences the Metropolitans; our spiritual children: Very Reverend Corepiscopoi, Reverend priests, monks, nuns and deacons and the entire blessed Syriac Orthodox people throughout the world. May the divine providence embrace them through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and St. Peter, Chief of the Apostles, and the rest of the Martyrs and Saints. Amen.

“Whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called  
great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5: 19)

**I- Introduction: the Church, God’s New People**

Dearly beloved in Christ,

The Church, shadowed by the mercy of the Almighty God, meditates on the Sermon on the Mountain, waiting for her Bridegroom Who comes with an everlasting covenant to betroth her for Himself. She remembers Moses who descends from Mount Sinai carrying in his hands the Law written on two stone tablets, and calling the Hebrew people to be God’s chosen people. The “stiff-necked people” (cf. Exodus 32: 9) did not wait for Moses to come back; instead, they started singing and dancing before a golden calf which they made for themselves as a god. The Church, on the other hand, becomes

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God's new people and worships the Crucified Lord that He may make her worthy by His Grace to be His bride "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5: 27). There, on the Mount of Beatitudes, the Church receives from her Bridegroom the divine teachings in their most complete form, for He did not come to destroy but to fulfill (cf. Matthew 5: 17). There also, the Lord commands her saying: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5: 19). Thus, He calls her to a heavenly mission with two dimensions, both to teach and to serve.

## II- The Church is entrusted with the Authentic Teaching

The Church – the body of Christ and temple of His Holy Spirit, is entrusted with the preservation of faith and its transmission throughout the generations; for, there on the mountain, the eleven apostles worshipped the Risen Lord and were instructed to "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28: 18–20).

Following the sending of the Comforter – the Spirit of truth – by the Son, (cf. John 15: 26), the disciples went forth carrying the Gospel, the Good News, to the ends of the earth, as the Psalm says: "Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Psalms 19: 4). The Holy Church affirms this through a liturgical hymn chanted before the reading of the Acts of the Apostles during the Holy Qurobo, which says: "مَكْتَمَلًا حَقًّا وَآمَنًا بِهِمْ وَمَا كُنَّا حَانِطًا فَكِهِمْ...", which is translated as: "The chosen apostles, whom God sent to the whole world, went forth preaching the good tidings of the Son among nations and to the ends of the earth, and preached the kingdom of heaven, saying: Blessed are the believers."

Indeed, the authentic teaching is received exclusively from the Holy Church. This is what St. Paul also clearly states: "even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1: 8). Furthermore, since Christ assured His disciples that, not only shall He be with them, but also with all who believe in His Name because of them, and after them, even to the end of the age (cf. Matthew 28: 20), and since it is necessary to ensure the continuation of the apostolic ministry of the Church by preserving the true faith, the Apostles had to elect bishops to succeed them and take care of the Church of God (cf. I Timothy 3: 5), and to choose as well elders: that is priests and deacons to assist them.

## III- The Bishop: a Teacher of the Church

"Wherever the bishop shall be, there shall the Church be; so as where Christ shall be, there shall the universal Church be". With this expression, in his letter to the people of Smyrna (chapter 8), St. Ignatius of Antioch – the second successor of St. Peter and third Patriarch of Antioch – defines the framework of the relation between the bishop



and the congregation. He instructs the flock to gather around the bishop, along with the priests and deacons. Saint Ignatius emphasizes the responsibility entrusted to the bishop assuring that “no man shall do anything connected with the Church without the bishop” (ibid).

St. Paul the Apostle says the following about the bishop: “a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, ... holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1: 7–9). In fact, St. Paul knows well that the teaching and preaching of the bishop cannot be effective if he himself is not holding firm to the word of truth and experiencing it in his own life. As a teacher of the Church, the bishop should know Christ and experience the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings; he should preach this, calling his parish to learn from the Good Master (cf. Philippians 3: 10). Indeed, the bishop – and the priest – cannot be a teacher nor a role model for the faithful except through his good deeds and being a good example, for “a good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good” (Luke 6: 45).

We, the clergy of all ranks, shall then be keepers of the orthodox faith, teaching the flock and overseeing its salvation, serving each of its faithful with devotion and love. It is also proper that we preach the word at all times, and convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching (cf. II Timothy 4: 2). However, we should not forget that all our teaching – even though coming from our faith – can profit us nothing nor save us, if it is not associated with good deeds that glorify the holy name of God. (cf. James 2: 14 &17).

#### IV- Teaching and Service

The Lord Jesus Christ calls the Church – clergy and laity alike – to teach and to serve, expressing her love to the Lord, and revealing her faith in Him which works through love (cf. Galatians 5: 6). In fact, the Church learns from her Master and follows Him, for He is the Good Divine Teacher Who “went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matthew 9: 35). Despite all tribulations, persecutions and rejection, He had one clear answer: “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5: 17). The Church is thus called to live the Kingdom of Heaven on earth; each and every faithful is called to be a disciple of the Lord, and a teacher and keeper of His commandments, because “whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5: 19). All our church service should lead to the growth of the Church and the realization of the Kingdom of God among people.

Dearly beloved, this year we commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the departure of the two Archbishops who were among those disciples of the Divine Master who taught and worked in His vineyard: Mor Philoxenus Youhanna Dolabani, Archbishop of Mardin, and Mor Gregorius Boulos Behnam, Archbishop of Baghdad (1969 – 2019), of blessed memory.



### V- Mor Philoxenus Youhanna Dolabani: A Model of an Apostolic Minister

Mor Philoxenus Youhanna Dolabani was born in Mardin in 1885; he led a monastic life, worshipping the Lord, practicing asceticism and living in poverty. He was entrusted with several teaching and administrative ministries in the Church. He was known to care for the orphans, poor and needy. In 1933, Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem I Barsoum of blessed memory appointed him as Patriarchal Vicar for the diocese of Mardin, Deir al-Za'farān, and Environs. Later in 1947, he consecrated him Archbishop of Mardin. The new Archbishop carried out his episcopal and pastoral duties with faithfulness and diligence, thus becoming a model of holiness and righteousness, at a time when the faithful lived the atrocities of the two World Wars. He authored many books, without neglecting his ascetic life which he started at an early age. He passed away in 1969 leaving behind more than fifty books in Syriac, Arabic, and Turkish.

### VI- Mor Gregorius Boulos Behnam: A Model of an Apostolic Teacher

Mor Gregorius Boulos Behnam was born in Qaraqosh (Iraq) in 1916. He studied theology and philosophy; he was appointed Principal of St. Aphrem Theological School in Mosul in 1945 where several future prelates and priests of the church graduated. He was interested in education and published two journals: Al-Mashriq and Lisan Al-Mashriq, in which he published various important articles on literature, philosophy, theology, and history. In 1951, Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem I of blessed memory conferred on him the title "Malphono (Teacher)", upon defending his thesis titled: "Psychology in the Works of the Syriac Philosopher Mor Severius Moses bar Kefa (+ 903 AD)". In the following year, Patriarch Aphrem I consecrated him Archbishop of Mosul. In 1959, he received a scholarship from Union Theological Seminary in New York, where he stayed for one academic year. On his way back to Iraq, he visited several libraries, as well as religious and academic institutions in different western countries. In 1960, he was appointed as Archbishop of Baghdad, becoming the first Archbishop of Baghdad since the collapse of the diocese in the thirteenth century. He passed away in 1969, leaving behind a large number of publications in the fields of history, Syriac literature, theology, and philosophy.

As we remember these two prominent Syriac figures of the twentieth century, we encourage you to offer prayers and divine liturgies in their remembrance. We also recall their lives and the circumstances they lived in – which are very similar to the conditions in which we live today. As we recall their lives and the good fight they fought, we encourage you to walk in their footsteps. We ask the Lord God to grant us the virtues and spiritual gifts he bestowed upon them, in order that all of us are adorned with wisdom and zeal so that our churches and countries may live in peace, especially in the suffering Middle East. Moreover, as we commemorate the two great archbishops Youhanna (Dolabani) and Boulos (Behnam), we pray for the safe return of the two beloved abducted archbishops of Aleppo Youhanna (Ibrahim) and Boulos (Yaziji).



