CHAPTER – IV

CHRISTIANITY IN WEST ASIA

Christianity arose out of Jewish apocalyptic revelations of the coming kingdom; it derived its impetus from the personality and vision of Christ; it gained its strength from the belief in his resurrection, and the promise of eternal life; it received doctrinal form in the theology of Paul; it grew by the absorption of pagan faith and ritual; it became a triumphant church by inheriting the organizing pattern and genius of Rome\(^1\).

One of the earliest non-Christian account of Jesus Christ can be found in the book *Antiquities of the Jews* written by Josephus in AD 93. He states:

“At that time lived Jesus, a holy man, if man he may be called, for he performed wonderful works, and taught men, and joyfully received the truth. And he was followed by many Jews and many Greeks. He was the Messiah”\(^2\).

There are references to Christ in the Jewish *Talmud* (Books). In the Pagan sources, the younger Pliny asks the advice of Trajan on the treatment of Christians. This was around 110 A.D. In 115 A.D., Tacitus writes about the persecution\(^3\) of Christiani (Christians) in Rome and states that there was already substantial number of Christians in the Roman empire. In AD 125, Suetonius talks about the persecutions of Christians.

---

\(^1\) Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, p. 575.
Christian evidence for Christ begins with the letters ascribed to saint Paul. Most of these letters were written before 64 AD. No one has questioned the existence of Paul or his repeated meetings with Peter, James and John. Paul states\(^4\) that these men had known Christ in flesh. The accepted epistles frequently refer to the last supper and the crucifixion.

The Gospels of the New Testament were written down between AD 60 to A.D. 120, but the oldest copies of the gospels go back to third century. The original copies which were written between AD 60 to AD 120 were therefore exposed to two centuries of errors of transcription. In 135 AD Papias had reported that Marks had composed his gospel (good news) proclaiming that the Messiah had come and that the everlasting life was promised to those who were repentant on their sins\(^5\).

We have impressive picture of Christ in the early days when he used to read scriptures to the congregations at Nazareth and choosing a passage from Isaiah:

"The spirit of the lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the down-trodden free"\(^6\).

The eyes of every one in the synagogue were fixed upon him. And he began by saying to them, 'This passage of scripture has been fulfilled here in

\(^4\) St. Paul to Galatians, I : 9, to Corinthians IX, 5 (New Testament)
\(^5\) The Greek Word, \textit{envangelion} meant good News or 'glad tidings'.
\(^6\) Isaiah LXI, 1-2 (Bible).
your hearing today’. And the listeners in the Synagogue spoke well of him, and were astonished at the winning words that fell from his lips.\(^7\)

Christ’s presence was itself a tonic. At his optimistic touch the weak grew strong and the sick were made well. His miracles were not myths. Similar phenomena had occurred during Jesus time at Epidaurus and other centres of psychic healing in the ancient world. The apostles themselves also performed some of these miracles through faith healing.

Christ himself attributed his cures to the faith of those whom he healed. In the case of Jairus’ daughter Christ said frankly that the girl was not dead but asleep perhaps in a cataleptic state. Hence he commanded her to awake, “little girl get up”. The girl stood up and became healed. Jesus believed that he could work miracles only through a divine spirit within him. Jesus himself seems to have experienced a psychical exhaustion after his miracles. He was reluctant to repeat them, forbade his followers from advertising them.

Christ’s most startling revelation was\(^8\) himself. This immediately sets him apart from the other great religious teachers of the world. When other religious leaders of the world, point out away from themselves and say, “that is the truth, follow that. But Christ said emphatically, “I am the truth; follow me”\(^9\). He further states; “I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall not thirst”.

\(^8\) H.P. Liddon, The Divinity of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Rivington.
\(^9\) John, VI 39 (New Testament)
“I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”\textsuperscript{10}.

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and who ever lives and believes in me shall never die”.

“I am the way and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the father, but by me”.\textsuperscript{11}

Jesus clearly believed Himself to be the Messiah of old Testament expectation and regarded His Ministry as a fulfillment of Old Testament prediction\textsuperscript{12}. He had come to establish the kingdom of God foretold by generations of Prophets. It is significant that the first recorded word of his ministry was the word ‘fulfilled’. He further stated ‘Blessed are the eyes which see, what you see’. ‘For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, (but) did not hear it\textsuperscript{13}.

We pass now from a consideration of Christ’s general claim to close personal relation to God to two examples of his more particular and direct claims. The first claim occurred at the conclusion of the 8\textsuperscript{th} chapter of St. John’s gospel\textsuperscript{14}. In controversy with the Jews, Jesus asserts, “Truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} John VII, 1 : 12.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} John XI, 25 : 26
  \item \textsuperscript{12} John XIV, 6
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Luke X.23
  \item \textsuperscript{14} John VIII 51-56
\end{itemize}
my word, he will never see death”. This was too much for his critics. ‘Abraham
died, they postulate, as did the Prophets."

‘Are you greater than our father Abraham? Who do you claim to be? Jesus replied, your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day’. The Jews are yet more perplexed. ‘You are not yet fifty years old and have you seen Abraham? And Jesus responds with one of his claims most categorically, ‘Truly truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.’

When Jesus stated that before Abraham was, I am (and not I was), it was a claim that he was existing eternally before Abraham. ‘I am is the divine Name by which Jehovah (god) had revealed himself to Moses, at the burning of the bush. ‘I am who I am … say this to the people of Israel. “I am has sent me to you. This divine title Jesus quietly takes to Himself. It is because of this that the Jews reached out for stones to avenge the blasphemy.

The second example of a direct claim to divinity took place after the resurrection when his disciple Thomas was doubtful, whether it was the lord himself whom he was seeing. Then Jesus invites Thomas to feel his wounds and Thomas overwhelmed with wonder, cries out, ‘My Lord and my god’. He rebukes Thomas for his unbelief but does not object to the expression, ‘my Lord, my god’.

Christ’s third indirect claim was to teach truth. His contemporaries were certainly impressed by his wisdom. They were astonished at his doctrine, for his

15 Joh VIII 51-58 (New Testament)
16 Exodus III, 14. (Bible, Old Testament)
17 John XX, 26-29
word was with authority. He spoke the unequivocal words of God. He issued absolute moral commands, like “Love your enemies, pray for your enemies”, “Do not be anxious about tomorrow”\(^\text{18}\),

It is enough to indicate that the value of Christ’s miracles lies less in their supernatural character than in their spiritual significance. They are not merely demonstrations of physical power, but illustrations of moral authority. Thus, the first sign was the changing of water in to wine at a wedding reception at Cana of Galilee. Its significance lies beneath the surface. According to St. John, the water pot of stone stood ready for the Jewish purification rites. This is the clue we are seeking. The water stood for the old religion. The water which\(^\text{19}\) he converted in to wine symbolically stood for the new religion of Christ. As Christ changed the water in to wine, so his gospel would supercede the ‘Jewish rites’ (law).

Christ’s achievements lay not in ushering in of a new state, but in outlining an ideal new morality, different from that of the Pagans (Romans) and the conservative Judaism. His ethical code was predicated on the early coming of the kingdom of god. And hence he wanted to make men worthy of entering it\(^\text{20}\). Hence, Christ advocated a life of simplicity, piety, moral integrity, gentleness, justice and peace. In a world of revenge, killing and retaliation, Christ advised his followers to turn the other cheek to the enemy, which was the further most degree of non-violence. He wanted his followers to be pure in heart like little

\(^{18}\) Mt V. 44, Luke VI (i).
\(^{19}\) John ii, 6.
\(^{20}\) Will Durant, Cesear and Christ, XXVI, p. 566.
children. He advocated strict celibacy in a world of immoral practices. Entertaining immoral thoughts in the mind itself was a sin, according to Christ. He advocated his followers to renounce everything family, property and positions to prepare themselves to be worthy of the new spiritual and material order which he was contemplating. He visioned a time when men would worship god not in temples and synagogues, but in ‘spirit and truth’ and in ‘their deeds’.

About the Jewish priestly classes, he stated thus:

“The scribes and the Pharisees... put their heavy loads of the law upon men’s shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. They do everything they do to have men see it. They wear wide scripture texts as charms, and large tassels, and they like the places at dinners and front seat in synagogues... but alas... for you hypocritical scribes and Pharisees... you blind guides.... You let weightier matters of the law go .... Justice, mercy and integrity.... You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence....”

While giving arms (Dana), Christ advocated, ‘your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing’. Your father in heaven will come to know what you do, and reward you. When you fast, you shall not put ashes on your face and wear sack clothes in order to make the people know about your fasting. Instead, Jesus advised, wash your faces and apply scents, so that others will not come to know about your fasting except God in heaven.

---

21 Mathew, XXIII 1-34, XXI.31 (New Testament)
Christ’s crucifixion, death and resurrection were fortold by the earlier prophets of the old Testament. But the majority of the Jewish population remained unbelievers because they expected a material kingdom and liberation from the Roman over lordship. Whereas, the Kingdom of god, which Christ spoke of was a spiritual kingdom of justice, peace and of a high moral behaviour.

Early Christianity

After the death and resurrection of Jesus the Apostles believed that they had received from Christ or the Holy spirit miraculous powers of inspiration, healing and speech. Many sick and infirm persons came to them, some were cured, says Mark, by anointing with oil.\textsuperscript{23}

The early Christian community lived with collective ownership of what they had and they subsisted on that.

“There was but one heart and soul in the multitude who had become believers and not one of them claimed anything that belonged to them as his own, but they shared everything they had with one another. … No one among them was in any want, for any who owned lands or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds and put them at the disposal of the Apostles; then they were shared with every one in proportion to his needs.\textsuperscript{24}

When the number of proselytes increased the Apostles appointed seven deacons to administer the affairs of the community. For sometime the Jewish authorities tolerated the new set as harmless. But when the ‘Nazarens’ (as they

\textsuperscript{23} Mark, VI, 13.
\textsuperscript{24} Apostolic Acts, IV, 32-6; ii 44-5.
were called for sometime) multiplied from 120 to 8000, the Jewish priests became totally alarmed. Simeon Peter and others were arrested and questioned by the Sauhedrin (the Jewish Council). Many Sadducees among them wanted to condemn them to death. But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, got them flogged and released. But later, Stephen one of the ordained Deacons was arrested for blasphemy against the Jewish religion. But Stephen questioned the Jewish authorities with great vehemence.

“You stubborn people... you are always opposing the Holy spirit, just as your fore-fathers did! Which of the Prophets did not your fore-fathers persecute? They killed the men who foretold the coming of the righteous one, whom you have now betrayed and killed. You had the law given you by the angels and did not obey it”25.

The Sanhedrin, the Jewish Council, in anger had him dragged outside the city and stoned to death. A young Pharisee named Saul (Later Paul) aided the attack; thereafter he went from house to house in Jerusalem, seized the adherents of the new faith and put them in Jail26.

A large number of Jewish Christians of Greek name and culture, who were the followers of Stephen fled to Samaria and Antioch and established strong Christian communities. Most of the apostles escaped the persecution because they still observed the Jewish law and remained in Jerusalem with Judaic Christians. While Peter carried the gospel to the Jewish towns, James became

26 Acts VIII, 2-3
the head of the impoverished Church in Jerusalem. James practiced the Jewish law in all its severity and rivaled the Essenes in asceticism. In 41 A.D. another James, the son of Zebedec was beheaded. Even Peter was arrested, but he escaped. In 62 A.D. James the just himself was put to death. The Jerusalem Christians then left the city and established themselves in Pella on the farther bank of river Jordan. From that time onwards Judaism and Christianity parted its ways.

It was during this period that the Jews revolted against Rome. The Romans under Titus destroyed the Temple at Jerusalem, which resulted in the exodus of the Jews to other nations.

Thereafter Judaic Christianity lost its significance. The new religion was later moulded by the Greek mind. However, Judaic Christianity survived for five centuries in a little group of Syriac Christians called Ebionim ("the poor") who practiced Christian poverty simplicity and the Jewish law. At the end of the second century the Church condemned them as heretics27.

In the beginning Paul was at the head of the Jewish groups, who persecuted the Christians. But on his way to Damascus he was suddenly stopped by a heavy voice, ‘Saul, why are you persecuting me’? It was Christ’s voice.

**St. Paul and his mission**

The founder of Christian theology, Paul was born at Tarsus in Cilicia around 10 A.D. His father was a Parsee. His father also had the Roman

27 Will Durant, p. 577.
citizenship. So Paul had inherited the citizenship from his father. The name Paul was the Greek equivalent of the Saul. Saul did not receive a classical Greek education. Because no Parsee would have allowed such outright Hellenism for his children. Nevertheless, his knowledge of Greek was sufficient enough for the proselytization. In fact, some elements of stoic theology and ethics passed from the university environment of Tarsus in to the Christianity of St. Paul. So he uses the stoic term *pneuma* (breath) for what has been later translated into English as spirit.

In several Greek cities we come across several mystery religions including the Orphic religion. These religions believed that the God they worshipped had died for them, had risen from the grave and would, if appealed to by lively faith and proper ritual, save them from Hades, and share with them his gift of eternal and blessed life. The mystery religions prepared the Greeks for Paul and paul for the Greeks.

Paul's teachings had a profound influence in Greece and the Hellenistic world. The Roman rulers arrested Paul and charged him with treason. One of the writers, Testulliam writing about 200 AD, reports that Paul was beheaded at Rome. It was from Paul that the theological structure of Christianity came. Paul had found a dream of Jewish eschatology, confined in Judaic law. He had freed and broadened into a faith that could move the world. With the patience of a statesman, he had interwoven the ethics of the Jews with the metaphysics of the Greeks, and had transformed the Jesus of the Gospels into the Christ of

---

28 Martial, Epigrams, Leob Library, 2 Vols.
theology. He had created a new mystery, a new form of the resurrection drama which would absorb and survive all the rest.

St. John continued the work of Paul. He tried to give a Greek philosophical tinge\textsuperscript{29} to the mystic Jewish doctrine that Jesus was the messiah. John also made efforts to detach Christianity from Judaism. Christ was no longer presented as a Jew, living more or less under the Jewish law. Christ was presented as the co-eternal son of God; not merely the future judge of\textsuperscript{30} mankind, but the primeval creator of universe. In this perspective, the Jewish life of the man Jesus could be put in to background and the god of Christ was assimilated to the religious and philosophical traditions of the Greek mind. Now the pagan world even the anti-Semitic world could accept him as its own.

Christianity did not destroy Paganism, it adopted it. The Greek mind, dying, came to a transmigrated life in the theology and liturgy of the Church. The Greek language having reigned for centuries over philosophy became the vehicle of Christian literature and ritual. While Peter and Paul spread the message in Rome and Greece, another disciple of Christ, St. Thomas traveled all the way to Muziris the ancient harbour town of Kerala to preach the gospel among the Jewish community there and among the locals. It was in AD 52.

**Christian Morality**

They led a collective life in the beginning each contributing according to his means to the common fund, so that the needy could be taken care of. Apostle James spoke with revolutionary bitterness, while addressing the rich.

\textsuperscript{29} John, I, 5.

\textsuperscript{30} Justin, Apology I, 66.
“Come now, you rich people, weep aloud and howl over the miseries that shall overtake you! Your wealth has rotted, your clothes are moth-eaten, your gold and silver are rusted... and their rust will eat in to your very flesh, for you have stored up fire for the last days. The wages you have withheld from the labourers who have reaped your harvest cry aloud, and their cries have reached the ears of the Lord... Has not God chosen the world’s poor to possess the Kingdom?

The morals of the early Christians were a reproving examples to the Pagan world. A new supernatural ethics was created in the midst of dying Pagan practices. Christianity gave highest priority to the moral life of the individual. It believed that god saw every act of human beings. He knew man’s every thought. The Christians were asked to keep themselves away from the sinful way of life.

Abortion and infanticide, which were decimating the Pagan society were forbidden to Christians. Celibacy and virginity were recommended as ideals. Divorce was allowed only in rarest of the cases. The younger Pliny was compelled to write to Trajan that Christians led peaceful and exemplary lives. Galen described them as “so far advanced in self-discipline and intense desire to attain moral excellence that they are in no way inferior to true philosophers.

All in all, the most attractive religion was presented to mankind. It offered itself without restriction to all individual classes and nations, it was not limited to one people, like Judaism, nor to the freemen of one state, like the official cults of

31 James, V, I, II, 5.
33 Pliny the Younger, X, p. 97 Loeb Library
34 Galen in Hammerton IV, p. 2179.
Greece and Rome. By making all men heirs of Christ’s victory over death, Christianity announced the basic equality of men, and made transiently trivial all differences of earthly degree. To the miserable, maimed, bereaved, disheartened and humiliated, it brought the new virtue of compassion, and an ennobling dignity. It gave them the inspiring figure, story and ethic of Christ, it brightened their lives with the hope of the coming kingdom and of endless happiness of eternal life after death.

Thus, Christianity began to spread in Greece, Rome, north Africa and certain areas of West Asia. The fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 ended all hopes of winning Jesus homeland for Christianity. In fact, the fall of Jerusalem delayed its mission eastward toward the great centres of the Jews at Babylon and elsewhere in Parthia and among the Syriac and Aramaic speaking people of Mesopotamia for over a century.

After a century of sporadic persecutions by the Roman authorities, an attempt was made by the Emperor Decius in 250 AD to force the Christians to join with their fellow provincials in a general act of sacrifice for the well being of the Empire. This attempt failed. In the coming decades there were repeated natural disasters and increasing taxation by the Roman authorities convinced the people in many areas that the old territorial gods had failed them, and that both earthly and heavenly salvation was to be sought from the Christians. Christianity was no longer confined to Greek or Latin speaking town-dwellers and

---

among the rural converts it began to take new forms. The Egyptian Coptic Christians under St. Antony (A.D. 270) started a strong monastic movement.

Despite the Great persecutions of Nero, Diocletian and others (303-12) the Church still continued to be stronger. Finally with the rise of Constantine, Christianity became the recognized religion of the empire. He also took the initiative in summing the councils of Arles in 314 and Nicaea in 325. He and his successors strove to bring the state and the Church closer. They also wanted disciplinary and doctrinal unity within the Church.

Christianity was perhaps the most attractive religion ever presented to mankind. It offered itself without restriction to all individuals, classes and nations; it was not limited to one people, like Judaism. It was unlike the official religions of Rome and Greece. By making all men heirs of Christ's victory over death, Christianity announced the basic equality of men and made trivial all differences of earthly degree. To the miserable maimed, bereaved, disheartened and humiliated, it brought the new virtue of compassion, and ennobling dignity. It gave them the inspiring figure, story and ethic of Christ, it brightened their hopes, it gave them hope of the coming kingdom.

Even to the greatest sinners it promised forgiveness and their full acceptance to the community of the saved. To those minds harassed with the insoluble problems of human existence, its origin and destiny, evil and suffering, it brought a system of divinity revealed doctrine in which the simplest soul could find mental rest.
To men and women imprisoned in the prose of poverty and toil it brought the poetry of the sacraments and the Mass, a ritual that made a very\textsuperscript{36} major event of life a vital scene in the moving drama of god and man. In to the moral vacuum of a dying Paganism, in to the coldness of stoicism and the corruption of Epicureanism, in to the world sick of brutality, cruelty, oppression and sexual chaos, it brought a new morality of brotherhood, kindliness decency and peace.

Thus Christianity began to spread fast from Jerusalem to Damascus, Edessa, Selucia and Ctesiphon. To the south it began to spread to Bostra, Petra and Arabia. To westward from Syria, via Egypt to North Africa. Carthage and Hippo on North Africa became the leading centres of Christianity. Some of the great Christian theologists like Tertullian, Cyprian and St. Angustine emerged from North Africa. Over the Mediterranean sea, it spread to Spain and Gaul (France) and then to Britain. By 300 A.D. the majority of the population in Ephesus and Smyrua were Christian. In Rome, the Christian community numbered some 100,000 by\textsuperscript{37} the end of the third century. During the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd} centuries, Asia Minor (West Asia) was the stronghold of Christianity.

**Major Divisions in Christianity**

Christianity spread to three continents, like the Roman empire within a short span of time. But its growth was beset with problems. The message of Christ was taken to different regions by different preachers who functioned almost autonomously in the beginning. Customs and traditions differed in each area. The liturgical languages also differed such as Syriac, Greek and Latin. In

\textsuperscript{37} Epictetus, Discourses, I, 6.
Greece, the metaphysical, argumentative minds of the Greeks created several heresies.

**Orthodox Church**

Orthodox Syrian Church in the Middle East has been living ever since the fall of Constantinople in 1453 in a predominantly Muslim world. Except for the extensive Greek colour in the Ottoman empire and until recently in Egypt, the Orthodox of the Middle East belonged almost wholly to the native populations of these lands. The faithful are generally Arab-speaking except in Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria. The orthodox are conscious of their existential status as a Christian minority group in a vast Muslim sea. Lebanon is one country where Christians are substantially strong.

Under the Ottoman Turks, the orthodox Christians became part of the Muslim Dhimma system (system of protected communities) with a condition to pay (Jiziya) tax for protection. According to this system, there is a difference between the Muslim and the non-Muslim population. The former (Muslims) constituted the *Umma* (i.e., the nation) and hence they enjoyed all the privileges which the *Dhimma* could not enjoy. In the beginning the Christians were the administrative class. But later they were prevented from holding any important positions. They could not serve in the armed forces and they could not hold any important administrative positions. Their men could not marry Muslim women. They were also asked to pay the special tribute and subject themselves to the

---

39 Ibid., p. 300.
Muslim rulers. These restrictions amounting to a second class citizenship led to the gradual decline of Christianity in a predominantly Muslim world⁴⁰.

When Constantinople fell, Mehmed the conqueror saw it to that a new ecumenical patriarch belonged to the anti-Rome party. The Sultan addressed him as follows:

“Be patriarch; may god keep thee; I grant my favour and support”. An imperial edict was later issued, guaranteeing the person and freedom of the patriarch, exempting him from all taxes, assuring the transmission of his prerogatives to his successors, and granting him some temporal authority.

The orthodox Christians had considerable influence in Constantinople under the Ottoman Turks. Often the Sultan would issue edicts or ferman in their favour against Catholic missions from the west. Thus in 1725 two such edicts were promulgated whereby western missionaries were forbidden to enter the homes of the Christian subjects of the Sultan. In 1774, a most important treaty was concluded between Russia and the Ottomans from which Russia emerged as a sort of protector of the Christians of the Ottoman Empire.

The Constitution of 1908 established⁴¹ equality among the subjects of the Ottoman ruler regardless of their religions affiliated. After 1908 many orthodox Christian soldiers began to enter the military service. In 1910, many orthodox Christian soldiers joined the campaign from Constantinople and Izmir against the Druzes in Syria.

---

The four ancient seats of orthodox churches, at Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem still exist, each having its own venerable patriarch. However, the orthodox church in the Middle East is substantially reduced in its strength. After the world war I several changes had taken place. Tens of thousands of orthodox Christians were displaced from Palestine\(^{42}\) and Israel into Lebanon. The Arabic-Israeli war of 1947-48 further displaced the Christians from Syria, Jordan and other places. The orthodox community was virtually liquidated from Egypt.

**The Catholic Church**

The major catholic communities of the Middle East are the following:

1. Melkites (Greek Catholics)
2. Coptic Catholics (from Egypt)
3. Armenian Catholics
4. Maronite Catholics
5. Chaldean Catholics (same as Malab Catholics)
6. Syrian Catholics (same as the Malankara Catholics of India)
7. The Latin Catholics (Who are spread widely)

At the beginning of the 19\(^{th}\) century\(^{43}\) the Ottoman empire was only a shadow of its former glory. The intervention of the European nations began to take place in the 20\(^{th}\) century, particularly after the massacre of the Armenian Catholics.

---


France took the position as a protector of the Catholics at Levant. France had close relationship with the Maronite Catholics. The Russians on the other hand, were interested in protecting the interest of the Orthodox Christians in the Holy places.

In the 19th century, Turkey was virtually disintegrating. One major internal reason was the running of the state with the archaic and theocratic conception of the state based on Quran when the society was actually exposed to the ideas of progress on modern lines. The ideas of French Revolution of liberty, equality and brotherhood had spread through the Empire. During the Greco-Turk conflict for independence, Christians were attacked. In 1821 on the Eastern Sux the 84 year old Patriarch in his Pontifical vestments was hanged by the Turks at the door of the Cathedral and the Christians were massacred.

At Tripolita, 23,000 Christians were slaughtered and 50,000 people were sold as slaves. This invited the intervention of the European powers. The Egyptian Ottoman fleet was destroyed by the Anglo-French fleet at Navarino in Oct. 1827. The Russians also declared war on Turkey. They captured Silistria and Adrianople in August 1929. The ‘Treaty of Adrianople’ sanctioned the independence of the kingdom of Greece, which was guaranteed by England, France and Russia.

In 1860, certain events occurred which had a decisive effect on the fate of Lebanon. The Druze peasants in joint action with their overlords, launched an attack on the Maronite Catholics and the other Christians. More than ten
thousand Christians were savagely massacred in the Lebanon by the Druzes. These incidents led to wide-spread outrage in Europe and especially in France. By international agreement a decision was taken in favour of military intervention. Lebanon was separated from the other regions and placed under a privileged regime on an autonomous basis. The unity of the country was strengthened by an increased in the powers of the Governor who was required to be a Christian. For the administrative and the magisterial affairs, this government was assisted by a Council, elected by means of proportional representation.

These developments gave a severe blow to the feudal system in the country. The country became increasingly modern. Among the Catholics, the Melkites formed an important group who derived their name from the Syriac term Malka (malik-Arabic) meaning Lord, owner or emperor. They were originally loyal to the Byzantine Emperor and hence the name was given to them. They were originally under the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

Between 1583 and 1587, the titular bishop of Siolon, Leonard Abila was sent to the orient by Pope Gregory XII in an attempt to win over to the Catholic faith the old Patriarch Michael VII who had retired to Aleppo. A small nucleus of Catholics was formed in Aleppo and increased in size when the Capuchins and Jesuits came to the city in 1625. In 1716 the Patriarch Cyril a great friend of Pouillard, French consul at Siolon joined the

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
Catholic Church due to persuasion Cyril VI (1724-59) was followed by an uninterrupted succession of Catholic Melkite patriarchs of Antioch. After 1819, they were recognized by the Ottoman authorities.

Among the Coptic Christians, one group joined the Catholic Church in 1741 with the announcement by Bishop Athanasins. Pope Benediot XIV committed to his care some scattered Catholic copts in Egypt who had embraced Catholicism in the 17th century under the influence of the Franciscans from the Holy land.

Groups of Armenian Catholics existed in various parts of Turkey as well as in Constantinople. There were almost 10,000 of them when in 1707, the priest Terkomitas was martyred. In 1850, six new Episcopal sees were founded in Turkey. Antoine Hassun45, Archbishop primate of Constantinople (1860-7) was elected patriarch with his seat in Constantinople.

The Syrian Catholic Church was formed by Catholics who, after the Jacobite schism of the sixth century, returned to union with Rome. Towards the end of the 16th century, however, the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch, Nimat Allah admitted the possibility of a mass return to Catholicism. This consideration and the desire to see the Eastern Church accepting the Gregorian calendar indeed Gregory XIII to send the Maltese Leonard Abila, who had been consecrated titular bishop of Sidon, as a legate from Rome in 1583.

The designation "Chaldean Church" is western in origin and came into use only in the fifteenth century\textsuperscript{46}. In modern times, the first of the Eastern communities in separation to become united with Roman Catholic Church was Chaldean. The Nestorian Catholicos of Rabban Hormizd Elias joined the Catholic Church along with thousands of his followers.

The Syro-Malabar Catholics, although do not come under the purview of the Middle East, had some linkage with the Chaldean church of Antioch who follow the Syriac liturgy, instead of Latin.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.