

Cristiani del Kurdistan - Assiri, Caldei, Siro-cattolici e Siro-ortodossi (Christians of Kurdistan - Assyrians, Chaldeans, Syrian Catholics and Syrian Orthodox) by Mirella Galletti, with contributions by Alessandro Mengozzi - Roma - Jouvence Editoriale - 331 pages. In Italian. 25 Euros.

A Modern History of the Kurds by David McDowall - I.B.Tauris Publishers - London • New York - 515 pages.

Reviewed by Gladys Warda

Preliminary Remarks

David McDowall is a specialist on Middle Eastern affairs. *A Modern History of Kurds*, besides being a detailed, practically day-by-day account of events, is superbly written, not only stating facts but analyzing them.

Mirella Galletti, an adjunct professor at the Universities of Bologna and Trieste, has specialized in the study of Kurdistan. In 1978, she began to focus her research on the Christians in Kurdistan. Her investigation was supported by her own travels and by countless conversations and interviews conducted in the region. The fruit of this study is *Cristiani del Kurdistan*. In the introduction to Galletti's book, Franco Cardini¹ mentions that Kurdistan is a mosaic where different ethnic groups and religious faiths co-exist. Galletti's book goes on to describe this mosaic, particularly Christians.

Both McDowall and Galletti write about Kurdistan, but their approach is totally different. As the titles of their books imply, McDowall's point is the history of Kurds, while Galletti, besides concentrating on the region rather than on the Kurds themselves, devotes her study primarily to Christians. These two works complement each other and they enable us to deepen our understanding of the situation in that region.

Galletti's work is not available in English, but its Italian title may be interpreted in two different senses: "Christians of Kurdistan" and "Christians from Kurdistan". In fact, Galletti analyzes both concepts. She explains in passing that she uses the term "Kurdistan", because if she referred to "Chaldea", "Assyria", or "Media" her readers might be led to think that she is referring to something from the ancient past.

A moving detail is Galletti's dedication of her book to her grandmother, who taught her the basics of Christianity, and to her uncle who took care of her when she became an orphan.

As both of these titles suggest, Galletti and McDowall each cover a great deal more in their books than we tackle in this review. Our comments generally relate to the segments concerning Assyrians and Christians, and their relation to the Kurds.

Assyrians and Kurds

¹ Editor of the magazine *La Porta d'Oriente*

In his detailed history of Kurds, McDowall discusses their origin and refers to several myths, some of which link them to 'the mountains'. In his view, *"the Kurds only really began to think and act as an ethnic community from 1918 onwards"*. He adds *"it is extremely doubtful that the Kurds form an ethnically coherent whole in the sense that they have a common ancestry"*. This reviewer queries whether a similar doubt exists for him regarding the heritage of modern Assyrians. Like the Kurds, Assyrians lived in 'the mountains' and the reference to them as 'Assyrians' appears to have gained common parlance mostly after the arrival of English missionaries in the 19th century.

Interestingly, in his Introduction to *Cristiani del Kurdistan*, professor Franco Cardini supports the principle that Kurds have a solid linguistic and national identity. That is, McDowall and Cardini maintain clearly opposite views about the origin of the Kurds.

Another interesting point that McDowall raises is that *"those who have investigated the physiognomy of Kurds [...] have concluded that the most significant feature is their similarity with neighboring non-Kurdish communities"*. Could these be Assyrian communities? McDowall explains that the Kurds' language with its different dialects, also confirms their manifold origins.

McDowall points out that there is a sizable Christian community in Kurdistan, a fact which Galletti emphasizes in her book. In addition to Assyrians, McDowall mentions the Armenians of eastern Anatolia, who were virtually extinguished during the First World War. He adds, *"it is difficult to say whether they are racially distinct from the Kurds"*. Another point to ponder is McDowall's statement that *"Whatever their later status may have been, Christians were clearly included in the term 'Kurd' in the early Islamic period. [...] A substantial proportion of Assyrian and Syrian Orthodox may well be of the same racial stock as their Muslim neighbors"*. It has been generally assumed that Assyrians are Semites, in the same category as Hebrews and Arabs, while Kurds are Aryan or Indo-European. McDowall's assertions show that these traditional categories do not necessarily coincide with the situation in the region.

First World War

Both Galletti and McDowall write about the First World War and the massacre of Armenians and Assyrians. Galletti notes that in this climate of violence the Assyrian tribes felt the threat of extermination. For his part, McDowall goes further when he asks, *"Why did the Kurds co-operate in government orders so willingly?"* He mulls his answer by writing, *"It is tempting to accept the argument that the struggle was purely an ethnic one"*. But after considering the milieu and circumstances, he concludes that *"the massacres would have happened in any case, for they were also a climax to the tribal lawlessness that had developed since the latter part of the nineteenth century, and to the rising tensions between a Muslim empire and its enemies"*.

Galletti's Book

In his introduction, Cardini states his opinion regarding the 2003 Iraq war, and the problems facing the Christians in Kurdistan. He sees them as dispersed, divided among different confessions, uncertain as to their ethnic identity and concerned about Muslim intolerance. Muslims view them with suspicion, and they consider them an inferior people, while the Western world ignores them. Although Cardini does not give specifics, he is of the opinion that Galletti's book will help to avoid or at least postpone the specter of an ethnocide.

In her preface, Galletti notes that she finished the book before the 2003 Iraqi war. She hopes that her historical analysis will be of value in understanding not only the past but the future of the Christian communities in Kurdistan. After reading the book, one cannot but agree with this statement.

Of course an important aspect of Galletti's book is the description of the various Christian churches in Kurdistan. The chapter where they are described is written by Doctor Alessandro Mengozzi, who mentions the "forest of denominations" that exist in the region. We find that these include the Armenian Church, the Syrian Orthodox (or Jacobites), the Syrian Catholics, the Maronites, the Eastern Syrian (Church of the East or Nestorians), the Chaldeans, the Coptic Church, the Ethiopic Church, Monophysites, Duophysites, and Chalcedonians.

History

In the early chapters, Galletti examines the history of Assyrians beginning in Biblical times and up to the 21st century. However, a reader should be familiar with the history of Persia to grasp the involved details. For anyone who has read Bugnini's book *La Chiesa in Iran* (reviewed in JAAS Vol. XII No2., 1998) this history will be easier to understand. And although it focuses on Kurds, McDowall's book can also be a guide.

Having read both Bugnini and Galletti, this reviewer offers a brief comment comparing these two authors. Anyone wishing to learn the history of Christianity in Kurdistan can benefit from either of them, but at the same time the reader should keep in mind the differing perspective of each writer. Bugnini, as a militant Catholic, is all for the Church, and in particular for the Roman Church. Invariably he shows his deep affection, and even his bias, for every one of the Catholic missionaries. Moreover, Bugnini writes mostly about Persia (Iran). On the other hand, Galletti gives the impression of being more open. She shows her fondness for the whole region and tends to give a more impartial, albeit extensive and well-researched, view of Christians and their history.

In this long history Galletti relates some interesting facts. Danish traveler Carsten Niebuhr in 1766 writes at length about the Dominican mission in Mosul where two religious men lived. He recalls that he wasn't admitted in the mission because he was Protestant.

On the other hand, Dominican Father Domenico Lanza, who was the first Apostolic Prefect in Mosul from 1754 to 1779, strove to reconcile the differences between the Catholic Church and the Nestorian dissenters. For this activity Lanza is today regarded as the forerunner of ecumenism in Mosul.

Another Dominican Father, Maurizio Garzoni, reports that among themselves Christians use books in their own language. All of them, however, need to know the Kurdish language not only for their daily contacts with Muslims, but also in their economic transactions with the Kurdish owners and tribal chiefs of the region. This reviewer recalls that her own father, in the first decades of the 20th century, not only knew his own mother tongue but he was also fluent in Kurdish.

Yet another Dominican, Giuseppe Campanile, who lived in the Mosul mission from 1802 to 1815, voices his opinion about Nestorians, saying that they are so senseless and stubborn that they themselves don't know what to believe or what to rebut, and that their priests have the impudence of writing and relating fables and dreams to their people.

For his part, Prussian General Helmuth von Moltke mentions the disputes between Nestorians and Jacobites, remarking that they have the most beautiful churches, but that they are separated by very deep rancors and dissensions.

Galletti explains that Christians were isolated geographically and culturally. Christian communities in Kurdistan were organized in tribes, under the religious and political authority of their patriarchs. In the long phase spanning the 16th to the 18th centuries, we see, on the one hand, the tendency of Christians to be integrated into the Kurdish social and economic structure and, on the other hand, to be the object of missionary penetration by the Roman church. The Ottoman power prevailed towards the middle of the 19th century. Political control of the territory was in the hands of the Kurdish "Emirs". However, the heads of the Assyrian mountain tribes maintained a certain independence from the central power.

In this context, Galletti quotes Pierre Rondot: "*It is difficult to determine the exact circumstances that made some groups of non-Catholic Eastern Syrians, of a particularly energetic nature, take roots in the impenetrable Hakkari mountains in contact with Kurdish tribes and in symbiosis with them. [...] Thus emerges, on a tribal basis, an original society whose firmness and isolation have guaranteed its independence*".²

In the second half of the nineteenth century the Eastern Syrian hierarchy that had not accepted the union with Rome wished to break the isolation to which it had been confined and there was an opening towards Catholicism. It is said that Patriarch Abraham Shim'un XVII (1820-1861), on his death bed, advised: "*When, to save our nation, change of religion will be needed, join the Catholics and not the Protestants*".

As the twentieth century ends, Galletti observes that the Christians of Kurdistan are dispersed in four territories of the Near East:

1) Iraq, which is laic, has officially accepted the existence and the rights of the Christian community;

2) The Islamic Republic of Iran (a theocracy), accepts and provides limited freedom under the "statute of protection" or "dhimma";

² Pierre Rondot, *Les Chrétiens d'Orient*, Paris, J. Peyronnet & Cie., 1955, p. 155

3) Turkey, ostensibly laic, does not recognize ethnic minorities in its territory;

4) Syria, which has received the Christians who fled from Turkey and Iraq during the twentieth century, continues a policy of tolerance.

The presence of missionaries, according to Galletti, generally had nefarious consequences. In fact, she argues as some others have before her, that the arrival of Western churches and of the Russian church among the Christians of Kurdistan was disastrous because it ruptured the century-long relationships that existed with their Muslim neighbors. This intrusion contributed to induce, even though unintentionally, the expulsion of Christians, the Armenian genocide and the massacre of Assyro-Chaldeans.

As to the adoption of the term “Assyrian”, Galletti writes (page 127): “*The Eastern Syrian church lost, in the course of the nineteenth century, a great number of its members. It then took on the name ‘Assyrian’ Church, as Protestant missionaries called it. It was a designation avidly appropriated by these Christians as it allowed them to declare that their presence preceded the arrival of Arabs and of Islam*”. In other words, Galletti not only does not adhere to the ‘direct descendancy’ theory, but she points to socio-political reasons for its invention.

Assyrians

An interesting aspect of Galletti’s work is her description of Assyrians and their characteristics, as shown by different authors.

Galletti quotes an article about the “*situation of Chaldeans*” written in 1833 and published in Milan (which shows that the presence of Christian minorities was acknowledged in the Italian media): “[...] *children are numerous and robust. [...] There are no registers of births, or of weddings, or of deaths. [...] Few men have family names; most of them are identified by a name followed by the formula ‘son of ...’, as in olden times. These people are rarely afflicted by illness [...]*” . On a personal scale, this reviewer recalls that her father, a native of Jilu, had only a vague idea of the date he was born, and enjoyed excellent health to a ripe age.

Hakkari Assyrians and Persian Assyrians were different. When in 1915 the Assyrians had to abandon their homes, Galletti observes that the refugees from Hakkari and the Persian Assyrians coexisted with difficulty since they had very different life styles: the Ottoman Assyrians were proud and bellicose, while the Persian farmers were more adaptable and conciliatory.

Jean-Pierre Valognes, when discussing the emigration of Assyrians and the forced exodus from their homes, states that “*their world came apart*”, and gives us his view of their idiosyncrasy: “*This rupture [...] can be attributed to the excessive compliance to medieval structures and authority, to personal and religious conflicts, to being incapable of adapting to the modern world, to excessive confidence in the Christian West [...]. The Church of the East has endorsed the idea of an independent Assyrian state, which was not realistic. [...] Claiming an independent state, Assyrians have expressed their inability to*

abandon their traditional tribal organization [...]". On the other hand, the Chaldean community "*chose to be a part of Iraq [...]*"³

After the 1933 massacre, Galletti notes that the Italian government rejected the placing of Assyrians in Ethiopia arguing that "*They are a warrior people, of a proud and independent character, turbulent and difficult to govern [...], little inclined to continuous and methodical work [...]*".

Kirkuk

No one can question the significance of the town of Kirkuk in the history of Kurdistan.

Galletti has written a paper elsewhere which is titled *Reports on Kirkuk by Modern European Visitors*. It is an anecdotal collection, based on narrations of visitors to this Kurdish city.

Galletti begins by mentioning the tradition which establishes that Kirkuk was founded by Nebuchadnezzar, between 605 and 562 B.C., after the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C.

Although other Kurdish cities were more visited, Galletti is able to find ample reports of visitors to this city. These travelers were mostly sent to Kurdistan by European governments "*for the purpose of exploring and obtaining information [...]. The interest for the town of Kirkuk is related to the presence of petroleum*".

In fact, the presence of petroleum is mentioned by practically every traveler. They all describe the "*burning fiery furnace*".

Besides this undoubtedly important issue, there are other appealing observations. J.S. Buckingham mentions "*a large party assembled, who seemed to derive great entertainment from the antics of a dancing bear*". Lieutenant-Colonel Shiel describes the date trees, and observes that "*the women wear immense turbans*".

Gaetano Moroni notices that "*Turks, Armenians, Nestorians and Kurds live here*", while Carsten Niebuhr adds that "*All the Oriental Christians help one another but [...] cannot stand the Roman Catholics*".

In the twentieth century (1926), we find that the British officer E. B. Sloane states that "*Kirkuk is full of uniforms containing the scum of the town, often drunken brutes [...]*", but also adds: "*I found everywhere an astonishing honesty and rough goodwill that wins the heart of a stranger*".

Sloane comments as well about the language: "*[...] The Chaldeans who are found living among the Kurds [...] have retained their language, both written and spoken*".

Kirkuk, Galletti remarks, is a melting pot. According to the above-mentioned Sloane, "*Kirkuk is thus a collection of all the races of Eastern Turkey - Jew, Arab, Syrian, Armenian, Chaldean, Turk, Turkoman, and Kurd*".

³ Jean-Pierre Varognes, *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient. Des origines à nos jours*, Paris, Fayard, 1994, p. 742

McDowall's mentions of Kirkuk, "*the jewel in the Kurdish crown*", are frequent in his book.

He writes that in mid-July 1959, Kirkuk "*was a town waiting to explode [...]. Half the population of 150,000 were Turkomans, rather less than half were Kurds and the balance Arabs, Assyrians and Armenians*".

And he tells us this about the city in 1972, when Iraq nationalized its oil facilities. "*For the Kurds this heightened apprehensions that Kirkuk's oil would be turned into 'Arab' oil. For the United States it provided a more important reason to undermine the Baath regime, for if it could be toppled, a 'new regime might let us back into the oilfields'*". Mulla Mustafa proposed Kirkuk as the 'capital' of Kurdistan but "*there could be no meeting of minds over the fate of Kirkuk*".

Emigration

This reviewer's opinion is that the most important part of Galletti's book is that which refers to emigration, the diaspora and the future of Assyrians.

We have previously noted Galletti's comments about the Assyrian flight from their homes in 1915. On this, it is interesting to read a quoted passage from an article in "*Il Corriere della Sera*" which is titled "*The Tragic Destiny of the Last Assyrians*": "[...] *It happened thus that the greatest nucleus of Assyrians that existed at the time had to emigrate and abandon their own country, now completely dominated by the Turks [...]*".

The massacres of 1933 eviscerated Assyrian aspirations of autonomy and independence. Mordechai Nisan, as quoted by Galletti, remarks that "*in a certain sense Assyrian history ended in 1933*"⁴.

For better or for worse, the destiny of Christians of Kurdistan is inextricably bound to the destiny of Kurds, especially of Iraqi Kurds, in the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan. Galletti notes that in North Iraq there has been a positive political progress for all of the population, and not only for the Kurds.

When it comes to the country as a whole, Galletti points out that the Iraqi constitution grants rights to Assyrians. In spite of the repressive measures, what this author calls the Aramaic culture and the language of Christian minorities of the Syriac tradition have been preserved better in Iraq and in Iraqi Kurdistan than in other Near East countries. Galletti's book was published well before the current discussions taking place in Baghdad, intended to produce a new constitution by 2005. In fact, the Iraqi Governing Council adopted a 'transitional law for Iraq' in early April 2004, after receiving its stamp of approval from the United States authorities. This document is said to be the working draft for an eventual constitution to be adopted by the Iraqi people at a general election in early 2005. Whatever form the document may take in its final incarnation, it will not be the first time that an Iraqi constitution promises a variety of rights to its people, including its minorities. Over the years Iraq has possessed a constitution

⁴ Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East. A History of struggle and self-expression*, Jefferson (N.C.) - London, McFarland & Company, 1991, pp. 156-169.

replete with guarantees. The problem has not been the lack of a fundamental document, but the lack of respect for it. Therefore, it remains to be seen what the future constitution shall portend for the Christians.

We arrive at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. The Second Gulf War (1991) accelerated the migratory flow of Christians to the West. Like the rest of the population, Christians suffered embargoes, political instability and an uncertain future. Galletti notes that more Assyrians than Chaldeans emigrated. (No doubt in this context Galletti equates 'Assyrians' to 'Church of the East' adherents). The Assyrian exodus goes back to the First World War when Assyrians who fled from the massacre took refuge in Iraq, while Chaldean emigration is a more recent phenomenon.

Even though Iraqi Christians can publish their magazines, have their own TV channels and radios, Assyrians and Chaldeans continue to emigrate due to the chronic uncertainties of the region. Galletti analyzes the reasons for this exodus. According to her, they leave partly because they are afraid, but also in hopes of acquiring a higher social status.

McDowall also gives reasons for emigration: "*these evacuees, representing some of the best educated people in the region, were the core of a growing emigration of more sophisticated Kurds, Assyrians and Turkomans who saw no future in the internally riven region*". And in Turkey, "*Invoking Islam, some [aghass] drove Assyrian and Yazidi villagers from their land near Mardin [...]*"

Pope John Paul II adds his point of view: The motivation for Christians to emigrate from the Middle East is compelling. They long for a more promising future, which they imagine can best be achieved in the West. Moreover, the existence of Islamic fundamentalism in their midst only energizes their desire to relocate.

The Diaspora

Galletti devotes a special chapter to *The Diaspora*. This is where we can address the *second* meaning of the title, i.e. "*from*" rather than "*of*" Kurdistan. Galletti examines the life of Assyrians in the diaspora. In our opinion, this is the most polemical part of the book. Are the Assyrians destined to disappear? Galletti gives arguments for both viewpoints, and leaves it up to the reader to decide.

Assyrians face dangers on all sides. In the Middle East where they live, they run the risk of being absorbed by Middle East societies. When they emigrate, they are absorbed by the Western societies to which they emigrate. The day isn't far, says Galletti, when the greater part of Assyrians, Chaldeans and Syrians (a common shorthand reference to the Syrian Orthodox) will reside in the diaspora. Emigration takes on an irreversible character.

The question a reader may ask and that possibly remains unanswered is, what will happen - or what is happening - when this irreversible emigration takes place?

Assyrians have organized themselves in political parties and associations, and they publish periodicals, thus cultivating the sense of belonging and

strengthening community ties among groups dispersed in some fifty countries. It is Galletti's opinion that satellite antennas and the internet are able to forge a new international solidarity, giving a sense of ethnic belonging. A person has only to click on a search engine with the words "Assyrian" or "Chaldean" to find numerous sites all over the world. But the question is, how many diaspora Assyrians do that? In the past, Assyrians and Chaldeans did not have the tools they do now to instantaneously communicate to the four corners of the world and this is obviously a positive. At the same time, however, in the past we did not have CNN, BBC, etc. invading homes everywhere. This means that whereas there was a time in the not distant past where the Assyrian/Chaldean home might be considered a haven for the preservation of one's culture or language, now there is this pervasive 'foreign' influence which invades the family even in its home.

In this chapter about the diaspora, Galletti inserts the translation into Italian of an article written by Arian Ishaya and published in *Nineveh*.⁵ Alessandro Mengozzi, who has helped Galletti in other parts of her book, besides being the translator, offers his opinion regarding the magazine: "[...] *it is an expression of Assyrian-speaking Eastern Syrian communities that maintain [...] their Assyrian identity, declaring themselves descendants and heirs of the glorious Assyrians from the first millennium before Christ [...]*". In other words, when we read Ishaya's article we must keep in mind that she accepts as a fact the theory of "direct descendancy", which is not Galletti's point of view, as we noted previously.

Ishaya describes at length the life of Assyrians in the USA, with interesting remarks. For example, "A woman is never herself, but is always someone's daughter, sister or wife". As a personal aside, this reviewer can attest to the fact that this condition prevails not only in the USA, but in such places as Uruguay, her own country.

Ishaya's descriptions of family life are a good way of showing the world what Assyrians experience in the diaspora. "As children, the Assyrian-born generation of Assyrians had the hardest time in coping with their children. That is because, unlike their parents, they had to participate in two entirely different social worlds both of which were unfamiliar to them. The home and the school environments were worlds apart to them in terms of language, culture, manners, food and dress. Consequently they were unable to form a stable sense of identity, since the home environment was so different from the rest of America. Instead of helping them to integrate into the society, the family actually disoriented them".

Immigrants have traversed a whole century of history and have proceeded from the old to the new world, literally in one night.

According to Ishaya, the new generation of Assyrian young people is now more aware of its roots and it is rediscovering traditional values.

⁵ Nineveh, vol. 11.2-3 (1988), p.4-8.

Galletti (or rather Alessandro Mengozzi) also quotes from a lecture delivered by Ishaya at Berkeley in 1998⁶, which is 10 years after the just-cited article. Here she poses questions such as, what will happen when our generation is not here any longer? Who will speak our language? Who will sing our songs? Who will ...? This brings forth a perhaps deeper question: How is it that Assyrians, who have maintained their identity and their traditions during millennia in the Near East, have been assimilated in America in the course of two or three generations? (It bears recalling once more that Ishaya adheres to the ‘*direct descendancy*’ theory).

Ishaya’s answers to these questions are basically positive and optimistic. For one thing, she says, Assyrians are organized. American laws have allowed immigrants to bring their families, thus favoring patriarchal cohesion. She remarks that the attraction of Assyrians to America was not as ‘a place to earn more and achieve material gain’, but that it was a country where they would be treated as equals. This insight runs contrary to a common assumption about immigration to the West, and it is also at odds with Galletti’s conclusion that “*they leave in hopes of acquiring a higher social status*”.

For this reviewer, another of Ishaya’s remarks is also open to question, when she writes: “*The Assyrians in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq have had little or no contact with one another*”. This of course is true. But then she adds, “[...] *In the United States, such barriers were removed and there has been an increasing rapprochement among the ‘Jacobite’, ‘Chaldean’, and Nestorians on a national level, with consequences on a worldwide scale*”. But have these barriers really been removed? A cursory reading of the commentaries found on the internet and in various publications, and this reviewer’s personal observations in visits to the United States (albeit brief ones) would suggest otherwise.

The Return to Their Home

Before going on to the second part of Galletti’s book, let us examine the question of Assyrians’ ‘return to their home’.

Galletti quotes a “political report” of the ASMAE (“Historical Archive of the [Italian] Ministry of Foreign Affairs”), in regard to the Assyrians’ wish of having a ‘home’: “[...] *The request is absurd and not feasible since Assyrians have always refused to be located in the plains of Southern Iraq where things would be relatively easy, and they wish to remain in the North, in the mountains of Kurdistan or in the Mosul area. [...] The government of Ankara would have to take measures in order to avoid raids in that region of Hakkari to which they aspire [...] and consider their only and veritable country*”.

The author adds that in a 1992 document the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), insisted on what Assyrians had asked for since 1933: the return to their villages. This would be extremely difficult, if not impossible since,

⁶ Nineveh, vol. 21.3 (1998), p.2-6. “*Assyrian-Americans at the Threshold of the 21st Century*”, based on a lecture delivered on May 1, 1998, at the Center for Middle Studies at the University of California, Berkeley

according to Joseph Yacoub, whom Galletti quotes, the last five Assyrian villages of the province of Hakkari were emptied in the 80's and their inhabitants took refuge in Europe.

Testimonies and Interviews

Part II of Galletti's book contains testimonies and interviews.

Father Raphael Benjamin, in Iraqi Kurdistan, states that "*this is our country. [...] Europe destroys us, gives us habits we never had*". According to him, Iraqi Christians are practicing Christians, but when they return from the West they have lost their faith. No problem has been solved for Christians. Father Benjamin's views offer a stark contrast to those of Arian Ishaya.

Father Joseph Habbi, in Iraq, says it is pernicious to publish pessimistic analyses regarding the extinction of Christians in the Middle East. "*We are going through a crisis, but you can't talk of disappearance*", he avows. He continues to offer his opinion about emigration: "*[...] the departure of Christians isn't good for anyone. For centuries Christians have been an element of equilibrium in the region. Pluralism and heterogeneity abate tensions; they avoid the formation of a compact Islamic block against the West and Israel*". It is unclear to this reviewer why the fate of Israel becomes an Assyrian concern.

Also according to Father Habbi, the Church is trying to recover its cultural patrimony that was devastated by the wars.

The present difficulties have increased the number of young people who have heard "the call of God" to become clerics. How is that? Because the young wish to leave the country and a Church career represents hope for a visa. But then, this reviewer asks, isn't this a contradiction with Father Habbi's views against emigration?

In the end, Father Habbi is optimistic. He wants us to stop saying that in Iraq there are only two phrases heard: "*There is not*" and "*It is forbidden*". What there isn't may be had, and as to what is forbidden, there is always the hope that the law is "temporary".

Galletti relates a personal experience in the course of her visit to Jordan. This is the country to which Christians go, waiting for an improbable visa to enter any Western country. She describes her visit to Amman in September 1995. She was living in a boarding house. The rest of the guests were Assyrian or Chaldean, awaiting visas which would enable them to join their relatives who had already emigrated to the USA, Sweden or Australia. She believes some of them were unable to pay their board.

Galletti reproduces some statements gathered after 1996, but regrettably they are rather scattered and she doesn't offer her own opinion about them.

Galletti also interviews Francis Sarguis, from the USA (known to JAAS readers), whose opinion somewhat differs from that of Arian Ishaya. "*The second generation [...] in Western countries loses its identity in a very high percentage. My estimate is that 90% doesn't speak the language of their parents, 98% doesn't read nor write it and a great proportion marries outside its cultural group. [...] Young people do not necessarily believe in their ancestors' values.*"

Furthermore, they are very skeptical because [...] for the most part their parents' assertions cannot be proven".

Another interviewee is Oshana Nissan, from Sweden, whose opinion is that emigration threatens national identity. For Christians, work and survival are the main worries. It is difficult for the new generations to maintain their original identity because it is so easy to integrate into the host community.

And thus ends PART II, with an acute sense of anti-climax: many questions asked, many opinions offered, leaving the reader to create his own answers.

The Present Situation

Galletti's book reproduces the observations of several persons living in Iraq. Yonadam Yusuf Kanna (also known as Yosip Yaku), of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), declares: "*[...] The principal objective is to eliminate Saddam and decide our future in peace. History continues and we must reconstruct the Iraqi people's personality and mentality, which have been deformed by Saddam. [...]*" Since the publication of this book, Saddam has in effect been "eliminated", and Mr. Kanna serves on the transitional *Iraqi Governing Council*, where presumably he is attempting to reconstruct the personality of his Iraqi countrymen. Doctor David Shikwana, who at that time was a prominent member of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, adds: "*[...] even United States' President George Bush is our enemy because he has done nothing for Iraq. [...]*".⁷ Since then, Doctor Shikwana is no longer active in the A.D.M., and he has abandoned Iraq to settle in the West.

Part III

This reviewer sees Part III of *Cristiani in Kurdistan* as a totally different component of the book. It is a "Brief Profile of Neoaramaic Literature", written by Alessandro Mengozzi. It is undoubtedly of great interest for linguists, but it sheds little light on the basic topic of Galletti's book, which is the history and problems of the Christians of Kurdistan.

Mengozzi indicates that the key figure for Western access to Neoaramaic literature of Iraq is probably the French missionary Jacques Rhétoré. He quotes Murre-van der Berg, also known to JAAS readers. And he notes the importance of Lazarist Father Paul Bedjan, mentioned at length by Bugnini in *La Chiesa in Iran*.

Galletti's book ends with a short Appendix where she reproduces at length the opinion given by Giuseppe Campanile in 1818, which she had quoted elsewhere in her book.

The Reviewer's Opinion

McDowall's history is exhaustive and leaves nothing uncovered. His grasp of facts, events and persons is deep and perceptive.

⁷ The first George Bush

Galletti offers a great amount of information, shows extensive research and presents the points of view of numerous individuals who were or are today witnesses of the predicament faced by Christians of Kurdistan. Her approach is somehow more 'human' than McDowall's. Nevertheless, we would have appreciated a more detailed account of her own opinion regarding these matters. It is true that we do find descriptions of situations she experienced, but at times they seem lost in the multitude of contradictory quotes and facts.

This notwithstanding, any person interested in the region, and in particular, in knowing about Christians from that region, will benefit from reading Galletti's book. And for those readers wishing to understand the events taking place in Kurdistan McDowall's book is essential.