

## **Understanding Hasyo Hanna Dolabani**

Personalities with their distinctive characteristics, who have become part of the identity of a society, are individuals who have attained to the secrets of the city in which they live. These personalities generally, have taken ownership of the depths of the spirit of the city they love. Their greatest thrill is to contribute a glow of light into the socio-cultural life of the city, and to leave their trace on it.

In the rich history of Mardin, the Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan Bishop Hanna Dolabani (1885-1969), was one such personality.

In one of his writings he expressed his love of country: “If history has a delicious taste, it is the spiritual taste of the light one sees when he first opens his eyes in the land of his birth. This delicious taste in some people is manifested when they explain the events of their country, and in others when they put it down in written form.

Mardin (the region called Turabdin) is not merely the place where Syriac people were born and raised. In spite of the migrations and difficulties it remains the cultural catchment basin where they have remained faithful to their values and language. It is a geography. A hope. A passion.

In the last century one of the dearest personalities to experience, and to lead others into the experience of this hope and passion, is Hasyo Hanna Dolabani.

Though lived alone, he drew a busy croud around him. He left traces of meaning and usefulness behind him.

He is a deep, multi-dimensional, spiritual personality, who well represents the spirit of Mardin with his intellectual and cultural equipment.

Although he has been inserted in the chain of the history of Mardin as an original and distinct ring, he deserves to be discovered and understood even more as if he were a missing link.

Even though he was surrounded by the weaknesses and inadequacies of his time, his zeal for life, his loyalty to values, his courage, his devotion, his identity with the people, his patience, his endurance, his consistency and his faithfulness, constitute an exemplary school of thought summed up in his own person.

So far as can be understood from his life, the philosophy and teaching of Saint Ephraim of Nisibis (303-373) became his lifestyle. St. Ephraim wrote, **“If you do not read every day, books will not benefit you. Rather, know that you will be defeated by devils, and be counted among those who are put out to pasture.”**

The saying of Saint Thomas Aquinas, the 13th century Medieval thinker, who said, **“beware of the one-book man,”** was his guide.

With regard to responsibility and taking ownership, he still enlightens the thoughts and behavior of those who love him in the back streets of life.

He is a co-laborer who can be clearly discerned within the context of his mission. He is a man of vision in harmony with the conditions of his own period.

In his vision his instincts drove him to fill in for whatever was lacking. He did not yield to self-centered and hyper-critical attitudes.

He was not caught in a one-dimensional flow of thought. He did not promote absolutism. He was against posturing as if superior to others, arrogant looks, and exploitation, which alienates human beings from humanity. He was zealous to

empower people with personality and ethics in the realm of effective action. He endeavored to fill in the spiritual pot-holes.

He is a poem of meanings that has taken wing. Though he struggled and thrashed about, he did not substitute instruments for the goal. He saw material as instrumental. His essential goal was meaning. He did not forget that he was a twig on the vine. He did not abide in the parts, but in the whole. That is why he moved with the banner of absolute truth and faithful to his essential goal. He was motivated to serve in the realm of responsibility, to contribute, and to create a difference. In his life, he gave power to these three principle axes and to meaning.

He was inspired to live with the understanding of the early church fathers who taught, **“in order to grow in Christ, it is a glory to become small in the world.”** And he ascended to a position of respected spiritual authority in human hearts.

In the estimation of those who are anxious for and think hard about the cultural and religious future of the Syriac people, Hasyo Hanna Dolabani is a master of his own era. He is the literary cogniscenti who became the heart, thought, language, pen, hand, and foot of the Syriac people. He is the gardener of Syriac language.

Without observing any difference between churches and denominations, no one was more in touch with the problems of the Syriac people than he. No one experienced on an emotional level the Syriacs' joy, sorrow, tears, longings, and losses of control, as he did.

Difficulties and abstractions could not extinguish the flame of his efforts or his determination to resurrect and bring life to the Syriac language.

Malfono Numan Karabash, a great man of letters and a master raised up by Dolabani, sums up the goal of his teacher's life in these words: **“Stated more frankly, he wanted to resurrect Syriac, which had died.”**

He counted it a great honor to water and fertilize the soil of Syriac and of the church, which had become a desert.

He collected the meanings of these words, **“You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:31). He received inspiration and power.

He was an enlightened thinker who noticed sooner than others that truth is fertile and productive. He was an intellectual.

He taught that truth which finds life, which is life, which offers life to development and civilization, was dependent upon the bonds in society which develop with equal justice.

According to the 10th century Syriac thinker and writer, the metropolitan bishop **Elia of Anbar**, **“The word of truth and equal justice is the deed of trust from God. In order for the Holy Spirit to give life to society, he entrusts the deed to a master.”**

Yes, Hasyo Hanna Dolabani, was a great master entrusted with the reality of truth. He was a rational thinker, a good hearted bishop who grafted into others the will to overcome difficulty. He was a productive writer.

He was an astute shepherd who took ownership of the trust entrusted to him, to bring life to society. He evaluated in a positive light. He was a long-suffering ascetic.

In both his joy and sorrow, he savored of the soil of Bethnahrin (Mesopotamia). He used to talk about the mysteries of its geography.

Hasyo Hanna Dolabani is an accumulation of thousands of years of history come to light. He is a manifestation.

His look, his posture, his voice, and his walk cut a fine figure, like the the history of Nineveh, Nisibis, Urhoy (Urfa), Amid (Diyarbakir), and Kenneshir. He is dignified.

He was so earnest and sincere that his influence and echo propagated itself everywhere. That influence took shape in every corner of Bethnahrin and in all places where Syriac people lived, like a breath.

His greeting like the sun of Bethnahrin, was warm. His speech like the kindness of a mother, was embracing. His brain was productive and his pen-hand was creative. He made history in that historical period, but he always remained the child of a people whom the processes of history badly mistreated. He is a beautiful example of not being swept away by hopelessness.

He was the tongue of a people experiencing exhaustion. He was a trembling voice, a cry full of sorrow. He was a craftsman, himself shaped from a mixture of conscience and hope.

With one foot on the waters of the Euphrates and the other on the Tigris river, he was a monument to morality cooled in moderation.

He was a sage, carrying the cool-headedness of the Syrians in one hand, and their hot flame in the other. He was a corner stone of the socio-cultural structure of Turabdin.

He was in his own person a school of thought. He strove to build not the past but the future. He was the apostle of life who grafted a bud of truth into the Syriac people.

He was a servant-leader who demonstrated the effort to be a pure expression of Christ.

He took interest not in how much was given, but how much love was included in that which was given.

Although he did his analyses and evaluations according to extant social realities and socio-psychological approaches, because his internal system of definitions was different, he was able to face the challenge of contradictions and problems with different formulations. He endured a lot. He bore the burden. His love and his cause were always the remedy for his problems.

He was a pursuer who led the way to search for our lost dimensions and vanished values, as in the parable of the lost sheep.

He believed not in the love of power but in the power of love. Rather than offer his contribution to instruments that produce power, he contributed to instruments that generate service and understanding.

He is a kinsman to every person who finds him, and a close relative to every Syriac.

In his thought there was no place for the alienation and “othering” that comes from social realities. As Christ said, in his heart there was room for everyone: the virtuous, the sinners, the rich, the fallen, and especially, the lovers of books.

All his life he encouraged the love of knowledge and scholarship. He incited the desire for reading books.

His works in Syriac, Turkish, and Arabic, and his translations, are an important contribution to Mardin and the Syriac heritage.

That spiritual personality who savors of the soil, lies at rest in Deyrulzafaran (Mor Hananyo) Monastery, having returned, without getting muddled, to the ground he loved in the heart of Bethnahrin.

He loved not to make himself great, but to come down to lower his levels and humble himself. Like the ripe ears of wheat bend over toward the ground, he continually saw blessing in unpretentiousness.

The saying, **“If a human being who is created from the soil, is not unpretentious like the soil, he has left off being human,”** carried great meaning for the deceased’s spirituality and personality.

He passed on to eternity as he was thinking about the next books he would write.

Once he sat up cross legged in front of his books and said, **“I do not fear death, but I fear that it will break my pen.”**

He thought positively. He wrote well. His ability to express himself in Syriac was especially developed. He had a rich style of forming concepts.

The memory of the saint will preserve its respected place in the heart beats of those who love Syriac and culture. It will continue to motivate their thoughts.





[i] H. E. Hasyo Hanna Dolabani trained and ordained my father, Rev. Tuma Begtaş.

Until my father passed away on September 1, 2005 he would express this distinction by saying of Dolabani, **“my bishop.”** He spoke about his master with praise. Every time he remembered him his joy was refreshed and his chest would swell.

My departed father used to say, **“On the pathways where people walk there will always be thorns. If however, there are no thorns in the spirit and thoughts of those who walk the journey will pass more quickly.”**

The things he learned and passed along from Hasyo Hanna have been useful to me. They opened up my horizon.

The first of September will be World Peace Day. And it will also be the tenth anniversary of the passing of my father, whom I loved very much.

After so much hardship and difficulty, Father Tuma Begtaş never compromised his love of country and his peace-loving attitude. He took ownership of the trust.

In recognition of World Peace Day, in the valued name of those who love Hasyo Hanna Dolabani, I dedicate this writing of mine to my father in memory of the great cost he paid for his faith.