A DELUDED WOMAN
HINDIYYA AL-'UJAIMI AND THE POLITICS OF GENDER AND RELIGION IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BILAD AL SHAM

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"Believe that I am the Son of the living God... I am Jesus of Nazareth, submit your self, body and heart to feel my Humanity united with my Divinity… I [Hindiyya] was bewildered and astounded when my comprehension completely reached all of His sacred body… and all of the … images [of the universe] " Hindiyya al-'Ujaimi, a Maronite nun, dictated this rather evocative vision of her material and spiritual encounter with Christ to one of her confessors, Bishop Jermanous Diyab in 1755, as part of her mystical narrative titled *Secret of the Union*. In pronouncing these words she was nearing the climax of a spiritual journey that culminated in a physical union with the eternal body of Christ and a boundless expansion of her knowledge. Yet, these words were not the description of a subjective and ineffable mystical experience. Rather, their public pronouncement was a challenge to the patriarchal hierarchy of the Catholic Church and of the secular societies of Bilad al-Sham. Her visions were "a socially sanctioned activity that freed a woman from conventional female roles by identifying her as a genuine religious figure," bought her to the attention of others, giving her a public language she could use to transcend the limitations of "womanhood" within and without the church. Her words thus became a source of power that allowed her to rise above the possibilities that were open to women at that time. The frenzied set of events that she unleashed-two inquisitions by the Holy See, a concerted campaign on the part of Jesuit missionaries to discredit her, turmoil within the Maronite church between supporter and detractor-are testimony to the radical nature and perceived magnitude of her transgressions across gender lines. Her tale-which had been tucked away into the folds of history by order of the Propaganda Fide-is thus more than a life story; it is a historical journey through the politics of gender and religion within the Maronite and Catholic churches during the 18th century.

There are many distinct and interrelated levels at which to unpack this tale. At the most basic level Hindiyya's history provides at least one woman a space amidst scholarly discussions of religion in the Middle East. While the role of women and gender in shaping various aspects of Middle Eastern societies have been recently, and are being explored in path-breaking studies, women rarely appear in discussions of religion except as subjects. This is even more glaring in studies about Christianity in the Middle East. The topic, which as a whole is almost absent from the annals of English-language scholarship on the Middle East, has received but scant attention with mostly descriptive religious articles and books. Thus, to write of Hindiyya al-'Ujaimi is to infuse a field with a new perspective on how Catholicism in the Middle East was constructed, and the role that

Rev. Isaac Bird; The rev. Dr. and Mrs. William Goodell, H. H. Jessup, 1910, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, London & Edinburgh.

gender played in the process. In other words, it is to both reclaim the role for at least one woman in shaping a large swath of Middle Eastern Catholicism, while simultaneously exploring how gender underlies the social and political construction of the normative aspects of that religion. However, the more modest and necessarily cursory aim of this paper will be to argue that as part of their attempt to Latinize Christianity in Bilad al-Sham, Jesuit missionaries sought to textualize belief and rituals, and to promote a controlled spirituality among women. Hindiyya, through her life and visions, represented a counter-project which localized Christianity (and to a certain extent Arabized Christianity, even as it Christianized Arabic), superseded religious textual authority and sought to replace it with mystical knowledge, and interjected a feminine voice into public religiosity. In other words, this paper will introduce a critical moment in the formation of Middle Eastern Christianity through the life of one woman who sought to embody an indigenous religiosity paradoxically inspired by and opposed to a globalizing Catholic church.

Hindiyya al-'Ujaimi née Hannah was born in Aleppo on the 31st of July 1720, at a time when this Ottoman metropolis was undergoing remarkable changes. Demographically, the city had grown by the dawn of the 18th century into one of the largest cities in the Ottoman Empire with an estimated population of 100,000 inhabitants. Collectively, the Christian communities in Aleppo (Maronite, Greek Orthodox or "Melkite", Greek Catholic, and Armenian) constituted the most dynamic part of this increase. By various estimates their numbers in the first half of the 18th century ranged from twenty to thirty thousand. Economically, Christians as a whole, and the Maronites in particular, were also experiencing an expansion in their fortunes. After 1675 the commercial treaties signed between European powers and the Ottomans, allowed for the employ of local Christians as translators ("dragoman") for the European merchant houses based in the empire. In Aleppo, as elsewhere, this provided local Christian agents with the added legal and economic benefits of extraterritoriality. Coupled with greater and relatively faster access to European markets, these new privileges translated into the rise of many wealthy Maronite families across the 18th century. Among these was the family of Hindiyya al-'Ujaimi. Her father Shukrallah Ujaimi and her mother Helena Hawwa both came from well-off Maronite families who had made their fortunes in mercantile activities. For instance, Hindiyya's maternal cousin was a "turjman [dragoman],…[and] one of the elites of the city." Moreover, her family lived in the suburb of Saliba al-Jdaydé "home of the Christian elite, where houses in the thousands of piasters were standard."

Equally pertinent to Hindiyya's narrative is the spiritual revivalism and flux that gripped Aleppo beginning in the 1680's and carried through well into the latter part of the 18th century. Driving this religious effervescence and upheaval were two main, and at times, clashing factors: an expanding and reforming Maronite church, and increased Latin missionary activities. In the 18th century the Maronite church was in the throes of stoking spirituality amongst lay people by "professionalizing" and educating the clergy, establishing more parochial schools, and expanding the number and presence of monks and priests. Much of the impetus for this change came from those monks and priests who were the graduates of the Maronite College in Rome (established in 1536) or of the local Maronite schools. This reform movement culminated in the 1736 Lebanese Synod which codified many of these attempts while at the same time bringing the Maronite Church closer to the Vatican - albeit over the course of the following 150 years and never in a complete fashion.

The Maronite church was also motivated in its reforms by competition from the ever encroaching presence of Latin missionaries in areas it regarded ecclesiastically as traditionally its own. By the 17th century Aleppo had become a proselytizing center for Latin missionaries in the region. The Lesser Friars of the Holy Land came to Aleppo in 1571, they were followed by the Capuchins and the Jesuits in 1625, and finally the Carmelites arrived in the city in 1627. This intensified presence was explicitly intended to bring into the Catholic fold of the Vatican the "heretical" Eastern Christians, Arabic-speaking Greek Orthodox and Jacobites, and the efforts bore great many fruits in Aleppo. Latin Catholic missionaries sent account after account to the Vatican describing a steady stream of men and women who joined the Uniate (Catholic) movement. According to one estimate three-quarters of the Suryani Christians had become Catholic by the end of the seventeenth century. In a report sent by the Jesuits to the Propaganda Fide, they maintained that between 5,000 and 6,000 individuals were taking communion from them in Aleppo by 1714. Even the Orthodox patriarchs of Constantinople, Jerusalem and Antioch had to admit in a report sent to the sultan that the majority of Melkites in Aleppo had become Catholic.

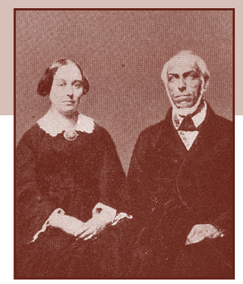
Underlying these large scale and highly contested and tumultuous conversions was the introduction of elements of the "modern" and bureaucratized Catholic Church amidst the "traditional" and fractious Greek Orthodox parishes. For example, Thomas Philipp contends in his *The Syrians in Egypt*, 1725-1925, that rivalries between the Aleppine and Damascene communities were manifested in a schism between the two

segments of the Greek Orthodox church which led the former to the Unia. In comparison, the Vatican presented-at least outwardly-an image of a worldwide church that is highly organized. The Jesuit missionaries epitomized this post-Tridentine Catholic Church with their hierarchical organization along practically military lines, their regular and formalized reports about the mission field, and their highly structured approach to proselytism which emphasized education as a means to form the minds of young men and women. But the Jesuits also embodied-and brought with them to Aleppo-another significant element of the new church: a strong emphasis on a spiritual link between the individual and Christ coded in a "scientifically" modern and restraining language. As with al-Ghazzali who sought to marry Sufism (subjective and unrestricted experience of God) with Sunnism (communal and shari'ah bounded submission to God), the Jesuits were part of a paradoxical effort to stoke personal spirituality but contain it within the impersonal rubric of the Church. This spiritual revivalism was brought about by a door-to-door campaign of spiritual education and exhortation. Augmenting this missionary zeal was the translation of spiritual guidebooks and the lives of saints into Arabic. Amongst these was *Le Guide du pécheur* by Louis de Grenade which the Capuchins translated into Arabic around 1635; the life of Teresa de Avila was rendered in Arabic by the Carmelites in 1662 and over 20 other spiritual works were translated by either Latin missionaries or Maronite clergy educated in Rome. Father Butrus Tulawi, a Maronite cleric educated in Rome, alone translated into Arabic several spiritual guides and books including *Le Miroir de l'âme, La Vie Monacale*, and *La Vie de Ste Thérèse*. Finally, the Jesuits introduced the ideas and practices of the worship of the Sacred Heart of Christ (a concept they were intimately involved in promoting in France) into Aleppo by establishing a brotherhood of the Sacred Heart around 1695, and by translating *Chemin de la dévotion au Coeur de Jésus* in Aleppo in 1724.

Hindiyya al-'Ujaimi grew up in this religiously dynamic time and environment. Her parents, and in particular her mother, received Jesuit missionaries at their home and were exposed to the new wave of spirituality. For example, in the first inquisition to which she was subjected (1755) Hindiyya mentioned to the interrogator, Fr. Desidario, that "my mother would call me in the middle of the day and make me say these prayers, and she also made me say them at night at bedtime." Helena, the mother, was also in the habit of taking her daughter with her to various Latin confessors. The second confessor of "my father, and sisters and me" was a Franciscan priest, followed by Father John of the Lesser Friars of the Holy Land, and after the age of fifteen she began confessing to a sequence of

Jesuit priests. But Hindiyya's exposure to the new religious teachings was not limited to brief encounters with Latin confessors. Rather, the financial affluence of the family gave her access to new religious iconography imported from Rome and Paris: pictures of Christ and various saints, and three dimensional representation of Christ on the cross were to be found throughout the house. Hindiyya recounted being moved to tears by a painting of baby Jesus with Saint Anthony of Padua. Antonio Venturi, Hindiyya's first Jesuit chronicler and confessor in Aleppo, also noted in his *Sirat Hayat al-Bint al-Batoul Hindiyya*, that her father Shukrallah was particularly fond of a painting of the Virgin Mary holding Christ. Hindiyya may very well have also seen the painting of Ne'meh the Aleppan and his son Hananiyya al-Musawwir whose paintings depicting scenes of the Day of Judgment hung in the Armenian Church of Forty Martyrs which stood next to the Maronite church in Aleppo. In addition, the comfortable circumstances of the 'Ujaimi household (and other Maronite elite families) along with the introduction of missionary schools in Aleppo, provided Hindiyya with the opportunity to learn how to read at least at a rudimentary fashion (but not write). Invariably, the texts she mentioned reading in her youth and later were religious. Growing up she would ask her brother Nicholas (who himself joined the ranks of the Jesuits) to read aloud to her the Passion. Her companion Katerina noted in her deposition to Fr. Desidario that she and Hindiyya would take turns reading from the translated tome, *The Christian Perfection* by Alphonse Rodriguez (1531-1617). The printing press in Shuwayr (Mount Lebanon) produced a series of printed translations between 1734 and 1744 that were available and in much circulation than the previous manuscripts.

All of these elements appear to have promoted or sustained in Hindiyya an intense level of spirituality and a religious ideology that clashed not only with the gendered elite ideals of her Aleppan milieu, but ultimately with the gendered prescriptions of the church. Her hagiography states that this distance between Hindiyya and her environment became apparent at a very young age. It describes, for instance, a Hindiyya who eschewed children's games "out of respect for His [Christ's] glory." Without ascribing too much discerning thought or even veracity behind such claims, it does point to a trend that only becomes more pronounced and more conscious in later life. By adolescence she was avoiding wearing fine clothes and worldly adornments such as gold, pearls and the like." Her hagiographer narrates how at the wedding of her maternal cousin, her parents wanted to adorn her with fine clothes and she accepted this only begrudgingly, while internally she continued to practice her



Rev. and Mrs. D. Bliss; Rev. and Mrs. H. A. De Forest, H. H. Jessup, 1910, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, London & Edinburgh.

worship of Christ and to converse with him. This desire to shun the trappings of wealth was equaled by her avoidance of the social rituals expected of young women of her marriageable age. Despite her "great beauty," she rejected attempts to attract attention to her physical being, and she remained distant from social gatherings either in private homes or in the surrounding orchards. She recounted how she found the conversations burdensome and "trivial" compared to the dialogues she was having with Christ in her almost daily visitations.

Through her ecstatic visions Hindiyya came to see the world around as hopelessly mired in a materialism that only distanced people from the true source of happiness: the love of Christ, and Christ's love for humanity as embodied in his "sacred heart." For Hindiyya the way to intensify this knowledge of Christ-and hence universal knowledge-was to feel in however small a measure some of the pains he felt. Thus, by her accounts to Father Venturi and Fr. Desidario-the first inquisitor-she subjected her body to corporeal punishments on a regular basis. To Desidario she confessed that she followed a regimen of depriving her body of food and rest, feeding "instead on the Eucharist and on prayer." Going beyond severe fasting, Hindiyya took to subjecting her body to the discomforts of coarse clothes, sleeping on pebbles and thorns, and to wearing a "belt of iron with sharp needles, about a finger in length, turned inwards." She also practiced beating herself with a "whip of iron with sharp needles as well."

As latter day observers we need not accept that Hindiyya actually practiced all these "traditional" forms of Christian ascetism and self-denial. In fact, even if none of these matters transpired exactly as narrated or at all, their meaning remains the same. Hindiyya saw these practices (real or imagined) as the religio-cultural model for a visionary woman who was distancing herself from her worldly milieu to be closer to her "Beloved." This mental and spatial separation from her family and society was an implicit rejection of the life that a young woman was expected to follow, even if explicitly she never intended it to be so. Rather than adorn herself and engage in social rituals that would lead to marriage and motherhood, Hindiyya rejected these gender roles. On one hand, she practiced or pretended to practice the self-mortification rituals carried out by earlier women saints and visionaries like Gertrude, Catherine of Sienna, Teresa de Avila and Francesca the Romanian whose hagiographies she had encountered in Arabic translated texts. By 1750 Hindiyya went a step further and rejected her prescribed role as a woman by completely abandoning her own family and retreating from the larger society into the monastic life. While other women (not more than a hundred) has chosen this life before

Mrs George E. Post, H. H. Jessup, 1910, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, London & Edinburgh

or around the time of Hindiyya, the orders they joined tended to be less reclusive. Her rejection of her family was so total that she refused to even speak to one of her sisters who came to visit her in Mount Lebanon. "One day her father sent a woman to speak to her [Hindiyya], when the woman approached to speak to her on behalf of her father she shunned her and did not wish to listen to her words. Rather she said to her, Our Lord Jesus Christ said that whosoever does not leave his father and mother…will not deserve my love. And she left without listening to what her father had to say." None of these decisions were simply subjective personal choices that were tucked away from public view. Rather, family and strangers saw in Hindiyya's behavior a repudiation of the roles assigned to women, and a transgression of gender boundaries. As Carolyn Bynum argues convincingly in her *Holy Fast, Holy Feast,* the repudiation of food was not looked upon by contemporaries as a sign of anorexia (as some historians have contended) but as the rejection of one of the most central aspects of social relations in women's "traditional" lives. In the case of economic elites this repudiation also acquired a rejection of a very tangible symbol of wealth and social distinction. Hindiyya affirmed the tensions that her ascetism produced in her social milieu when she noted, for instance, that her mother, sister and neighbors first attempted to dissuade her from her "deprived" life by insisting that she eat "delicious foods and wear expensive and alluring clothes." By her account, they also ridiculed her vision of "otherness." In responding to a question by Fr. Desidario about graces that Christ bestowed upon her, she answered:

I will tell you another thing that I do not know if it is appropriate, and that is at the age of four or five I would feel in the heart a clear voice telling me that I will establish a confraternity of men and women and that I will be its president, that is its founder… and I would repeatedly tell that to my mother and sisters. My mother would laugh and my sisters would chastise me and tell me not to repeat such words… My sisters would persecute and hit me sometimes because of that…

Outside her immediate family, Hindiyya depicted herself as being equally tormented. Although as a young adolescent Hindiyya was sought out by men and women of the Akabir in Aleppo, their admiration turned into ridicule once she became of marriageable age. Her insistence on shunning men ("I hate men" as she said to Christ in one of her visions) and marriage was perceived as abhorrent explicitly because it overstepped the social boundaries constructed for women of her age.

There is no doubt that Hindiyya eluded these pressures in part because of her extraordinary will, and deep conviction in her vocations, which she demonstrated repeatedly throughout her life. However, augmenting this

will was the religious revivalism of the eighteenth century which afforded her a legitimate language of dissension. Being chosen by Christ, as the sequence of her visions indicated, imbued her with an authority that transcended that of mere mortals. When she indicated her hatred of men, for instance, Christ retorted by saying, "and who do you think implanted that aversion in your heart. It was me." When she pleaded with Christ that "my father and other men are telling me that my visions are from the devil," Jesus dismissed their knowledge as limited and-more subversively-as worldly knowledge tarnished by the sinful desires of men. Moreover, the small but quite influential Latin missionary presence provided Hindiyya with an alternative structure of power and authority that she could employ in her rejection of familial and social expectations. The Jesuit establishment whose priests and friars were seen at once as the representatives of the Vatican and of the King of France-encouraged Hindiyya's ascetism and visions. For example, in one of her many moments of doubt about the source of her visions (whether it was truly Christ or the devil), Father Venturi assured her saying, "do not think it is trickery by the devil, rather I believe that you are doing the will of Jesus Christ." Jesuit missionaries also, at least before 1748, provided Hindiyya with the countervailing stories of young women who had chosen the religious life as a positive alternative to the secular one. Moreover, they offered religious confirmation of her vocation as a mystic woman by narrating her visions within the genre of vitae of women saints in the Catholic Church.

It was highly ironic then, and even infuriating, when Hindiyya refused to remain bounded within either the narrative or infrastructure of Christian spirituality as defined by the very same Jesuits. By the time Hindiyya was in her late teens she came to reject Jesuit authority and admonitions/advice even as she had willingly accepted their support earlier in her life. The first signs of conflict between her and the Jesuits emerged over the future of her religious vocation. In Aleppo, and all through 1748, Hindiyya had had repeated visions of Christ instructing her to establish a religious order in the name of the Sacred Heart to be located in Kisrawan in Mount Lebanon. Her confessor, Father Venturi attempted ceaselessly to dissuade her from this goal. At times he attempted to entice her with offers of being the leader of a Jesuit confraternity established in Aleppo around the 1690s. When she was eighteen years of age she had another vision of Christ exhorting her to establish the religious order in Kisrawan. "I felt aflame with love of Jesus Christ and that I am inclined to establish the Association of the Sacred Heart of Christ, and I was filled with indescribable love… then I told my confessor Father Antonio [Venturi], but he did not wish to listen and he immediately cut me off saying: this is impossible… If you wish to establish an association

then I can bring to you the members of our confraternity here in Aleppo and you can address them about spiritual matters."

Threats were as often used to divert Hindiyya from her insistence on establishing a new religious order. Father Venturi, upon hearing Hindiyya recount how Christ repeatedly ordered her to establish a new religious order, exclaimed that such ideas can only come from the devil and he "ordered me never to speak of such matters." When she brought the subject up at a later date Father Venturi "became angry with a great anger." During her stay at the convent of Aintoura the pressure on her mounted immensely, and the mother superior of the convent began to "persecute" Hindiyya. After exhausting the patience of the nuns of that convent by her refusal to don their habit, the mother superior told her: "… you will be a nun whether you wish it not. So I answered her, if I do not wish to become a nun then how can you make me a nun? She answered: I will tie you to a pole and force you to wear the monastic habit with the help of some priests." After the failure of such tactics to convince Hindiyya, the confessor of the convent Father Guinard resorted to even more radical measures. On coming back from Damascus not long after the above incident he declared to Hindiyya that if she did not join the convent then "she will go to hell."

Despite the intensity and extent of Jesuit opposition to Hindiyya she persevered in her "obstinacy" and refused to submit to the authority of either Father Venturi or Antoine Guinar the father superior of Jesuits in Lebanon, or to the threats and pleas of the nuns at the Aintoura and Hrash convents. Her persistence in seeking support from the Maronite church succeeded in attaining the patronage of first Bishop Jermanos Saqr, and then three subsequent Patriarchs of the church. On March 25 (Annunciation Day) in 1752 Hindiyya donned her habits, took her vows as the mother superior of the new religious order of Sacred Heart of Jesus, and entered with several other nuns into the newly dedicated Bkerki convent. At this point she was no longer alone in facing the wrath of the Jesuits and "other Latin missionaries," but she now had the support of at least part of the hierarchy of the Maronite church.

If the Vatican was previously mildly concerned about Hindiyya's "naïve" and "womanly" claims, it became manifestly alarmed when Maronite clerical support imbued her "pretensions" with greater authenticity and authority. From the Vatican's perspective, Hindiyya, her order and fraternity became symbols of the attempts of the "old" guard in the Maronite

church to remain outside the political and religious control of Rome. The portrayal of Hindiyya by two consecutive Maronite patriarchs, bishops, priests and lay people as a living saint who spoke directly to Jesus gave her spiritual and theological independence from the Holy See. In ecclesiastical terms, this independence was manifested in new religious celebrations, rituals and rites that departed from the guidelines set by the Vatican. One such instance centered around whether meat could be eaten on the Friday during the celebration of the devotion of the Sacred Heart. Such seemingly inane topic drove Hindiyya's opponents into a tizzy as they claimed that she was desecrating Catholicism and making light of the commandments of the Vatican. For example, the Bishop of Aleppo wrote, in June 1774 to the Sacred Congregation complaining that "I have learnt that your Sacred Congregation condemned eating meat on the Friday that coincides with the Feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which the Patriarch has allowed against the wishes of the bishops of the sect… and there is no reason for this except to satisfy the wishes of Hindiyya… As soon as she found out that I have prohibited my disgusted people from eating meat on the mentioned day…she got angry. So she with her stubbornness and pride, to humiliate me further, no I dare say… to demean the orders of your Sacred Congregation,… showed nothing but resistance and disobedience."

Therefore, it was not only that Hindiyya "stubbornly" refused to submit her body and mind to the authority of the Jesuits, but that she threatened to upset the existing chain of Catholic religious authority. Her stature in Mount Lebanon, which was very high between 1750 and 1778 amongst lay and religious alike, made that threat more real. Public testimonies of miracles she performed-regardless of whether they were true or not-fostered a belief in the saintliness and powers of Hindiyya. For example, in 1751 sheaths of testimonials about Hindiyya's miracles which were sent to the Vatican. Amongst the many she reportedly cured, there was "Abu Najm… who had been crippled for six years till he was sprayed with the holy water of Mother Hindiyya and he was immediately cured." Her visions only amplified that belief, and implied that Hindiyya had an alternative source of religious authority that was higher than that of the Vatican: Jesus. In one of those visions, she asked Christ why he is "burdening" her with the difficult task of establishing a religious order especially when the Vatican, and the missionaries were telling her to abandon such thoughts because they are of the devil. Christ responded that "men" have maligned the Truth through their books and writings, and that the only way to save humanity from hell is through the Order of the Sacred Heart. Thus, as with

Dr. W. W. Eddy, H. H. Jessup, 1910, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, London & Edinburgh.

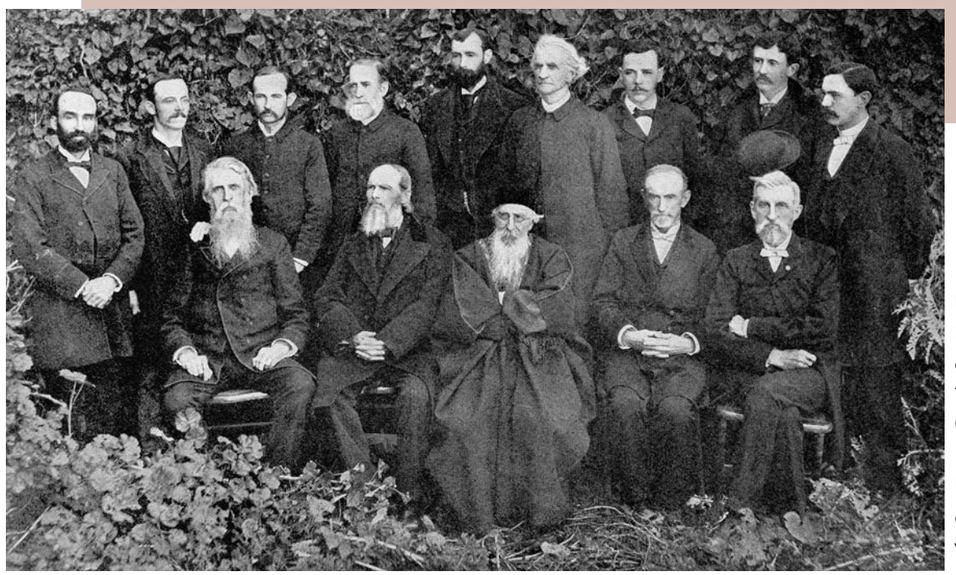
Hildegard of Bingen in the 12th century, Hindiyya (who always depicted herself as a "poor and ignorant" woman, as did most visionary women before her) had to save Christians because men and the Church had failed to do so. Obviously, for the Vatican these claims were most troubling. They not only struck at the heart of religious authority as embodied in the male hierarchy of the church, but they also pushed aside religious textual knowledge which had been almost exclusively the domain of men and the source of their authority. As one cardinal put it, "Hindiyya needs to be counseled against the pride inherent in her writings, as demonstrated by her belief that she does not need to learn through human means-like everyone else kl mean through holy books.., but imagines and thinks that she has guidance not only from angels but straight from God, and not once but on a daily conversational basis!" From this perspective we can then understand the urgency and determination with which the Vatican condemned Hindiyya.

At an even more profound level, Hindiyya's story "points us to a fundamental issue in the history of religion-that of the nature of spirituality itself". The language of bodily ecstasy and intimacy with which she spoke of her physical union with Christ introduced into religious dialogue a high degree of physicality-of her experience as a woman. For instance, in her *Letter of Union* where she describes her coming together with Christ, she states, "I supplicated Christ, who appeared to me in his human body, to save me from temptations because I hated to be close to men, and to deal or talk with them. So it was that Christ addressed me saying:"who do you think put in you this abnormal inclination other than me?"...then I showed my amazement at the beauty of his heavenly body… and I felt in a real sense that body in all its parts." This intense level of physicality made Hindiyya's writings and visions "unintelligible and often repugnant" to most local and Roman theologians, and threatened to undermine their "Truth" by positing an alternate path to God. This was a threat that the Catholic Church had encountered again and again in Europe, beginning in the 12th century, and in Latin America. What the cardinals seem to have found most offensive was her claim that Christ materially imprinted his wounds by placing his hands against [her] hands, and both his legs and sides against her legs and sides, and his head against her head." This rejection is not surprising as most Catholic theologians in the 18th century accepted Thomas Aquinas' contention that: "… the mind that sees the divine substance must be totally divorced from the bodily senses." In other words, Hindiyya's visions could not be accepted by a church that not only saw divine nature as immaterial, but also rational nature to be

essentially incorporeal.

More to the point, by casting doubt on Hindiyya's rationality and sanity they sought to invalidate her visions as an alternative path to God. Hindiyya's extremely physical knowledge of Christ only reaffirmed her irrationality, and by extension, that of all women in the eyes of the "Doctors" of the Church. For her detractors, the incomprehensible visions which included "such childish talk as that Saint Michael, the archangel, is the leader of a chorus of apostles who continuously and daily chant hymns to please [Hindiyya]… only shows her stupidity and naïveté and that of her two confessors." Even her allies held forth similar views on women, in general, and their theological capacities in particular. One priest, in defending her, testified that Christ must have given the visions and rule to Hindiyya because it is impossible for "a simple and ignorant virgin to understand" the depth of the spiritual secrets evident in them. In either case, the idea-intended or otherwise-was to push women out of the realm of religious knowledge and to place them intellectually and morally in a position subordinate to that of men, in general, and male clerics in particular. Hindiyya's words and stature stood in the way of such a project.

Reflecting for a moment on this rapid succession of events, it should quickly become clear just how remarkable all of this must have been for Hindiyya. A young woman in her thirties managed to sustain a goal in the face of strenuous opposition from what was her only source of religious support. In fact, the period between 1748 (when Hindiyya abandoned her family and that network of support) and 1752 (when she inaugurated her order) was the most difficult for her as she describes in various sources. Following the tradition of prophets and visionaries, Hindiyya spent much of this time alone in the "wilderness among wild animals and beasts" seeking solace in prayers to Christ. She received her sustenance in the form of visions and exhortations of Christ who kept re-assuring her that he is "capable of everything so do not be afraid."
Certainly, then, Hindiyya's is an intimate story of an individual's search for God outside the framework and limitations of scriptures and religious hierarchy. Yet, and despite her own protestations to the contrary, Hindiyya's private visions were the motor behind her quite public pronouncements and actions. This erasure of the line separating domesticated spirituality from religious power was a challenge to the patriarchal structure and ideology of the Catholic Church (as well as of the secular societies of Aleppo and Mount Lebanon.) Implicitly and explicitly



Syrian Mission in 1893, with Drs Bliss and Post of the S. P. C. Back row (reading from left): March, Hoskins, W. K. Eddy, Post, Hardin, D. Bliss, Nelson, W. Jessup, Doolittle. Front row: H. H. Jessup, Bird, Van Dyck, W. W. Eddy, S. Jessup, H. H. Jessup, 1910, *Fifty-Three Years in Syria*, London & Edinburgh.

Hindiyya repeatedly rejected the authority of the Catholic Church to impose boundaries on her as a woman by positing herself as a conduit to the unparalleled power and knowledge of Christ. Thus, she turned earthly religious hierarchy on its head. Moreover, she interjected an intense sense of physicality into spirituality thus reuniting (as Christ himself had done) the human with the divine in moments of personal ecstasy. This was anathema for a Catholic Church which had spent the better part of the previous two centuries consecrating religious authority and power in its male hierarchy and in disembodied text.

In and of itself, this is an intriguing story. However, what makes it even more compelling is that Hindiyya came to represent-whether by her own devices, the design of Maronite clergy opposed to Rome, or a combination of these two-an indigenous project which ran counter to the Vatican's efforts at Latinization of the Catholic church. In other words, Hindiyya and gender were essential in creating a more coherent and localized identity for the Maronite church which, in turn, enabled it to delay, reject and modify the Vatican's efforts at subsuming Middle Eastern Catholics under the normative rubric of the Roman church. It is this process of establishing a coherent identity and institution which subsequently allowed the Maronite church to become so instrumental in the political, social and economic transformation of Lebanon during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

NOTES

1 Archivio S.C. Propaganda Fide, *Congr. Particulari de Maroniti*, vol. 136, pp. 437-438

2 Elizabeth Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, p. 6

3 For an interesting discussion of this effort as it pertained to the Luwayzeh Council of 1736 read Ghassan al-Ayash's *Majma' al-Luwayzeh* 1736 (al-Mukhtara, Lebanon: al-Dar al-Taqdumiya, 1991)

4 Bruce Masters, *The Origins of Western Economic Dominance in the Middle East,* New York : New York University Press, 1988, p. 42. André Raymond, *Groupes sociaux et géographie humaine à Alep au XVIIIe siècle,* » in Thomas Philipp (ed.), *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century, the Common and the Specific in the Historical Experience*, Stuttgart, 1992, pp. 147-163.

5 Bruce Masters, "Aleppo: The Ottoman Empire's caravan city," in Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (eds.), *The Ottoman City Between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 58.

6 AMPB, *Awraq al-Rahiba Hindiyya*, Vol. 1, "Sirat Hayat al-Umm al-Batoul Hindiyya.", p. 2.

7 AMPB, *Awraq al-Rahiba Hindiyya,* Vol. 1, "Sirat Hayat al-Umm al-Batoul Hindiyya.", p. 4; ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, "Alcune notizie da server il libro Primo della vita della serva di Dio Hendi Ageimi, p. 134.

8 Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1989, p. 320.

9 See Nasser Gemayel, *Les Échanges Culturels Entre les Maronites et l'Europe : du Collège Maronite de Rome (1584) au College de cAyn-Warqa* (Beyrouth : 1984)

10 After the council of 1736 the Vatican repeatedly sent letters to the various Maronite patriarchs complaining, in essence, of the lack of implementation of any of the resolutions taken in 1736. Even more striking is the fact that until today the Maronite church uses the Arabic proceedings of the 1736 Council which differ in significant manner from the Latin version of those proceedings, which is kept in the Propaganda Fide. Among the more than 130 minor and major differences, for example, the Arabic text provides the Maronite Patriarch with greater authority over the Maronites while limiting the authority of the Pope to intervene in the internal affairs of the Middle Eastern church. See Bakhus al-Feghali, "Watha'iq Tarikhiya," *Al-Mashriq*, 1951 p. 556.

11 Fr. Antoine Rabbath (ed.), *Documents inédits pour servir à l'histoire du Christianisme en Orient*, Paris: 1905-1911, vol. II, pp. 87-88.

12 Bernard Heyberger, "Les chrétiens d'Alep (Syrie) à travers les récits des conversions des Missionaires Carmes Déchaux (1657-1681)," *Mélanges de l'Ecole Françaises de Rome* 100 (1988) : pp. 461-99.

13 Bruce Masters, "Aleppo: The Ottoman Empire's caravan city," in Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman, and Bruce Masters (eds.), *The Ottoman City Between East and West: Aleppo, Izmir, and Istanbul*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 54.

14 Thomas Philipp, *The Syrians in Egypt*, 1725-1925, Stuttgart: 1985, p. 19. This view is also supported by the chronicle of the Damascene Orthodox priest Mikha'il Burayk. *Tar'ikh al-Sham*, 1720-1782, Qustantin al-Basha (ed.) m Harissa: 1930.

15 Many Christian manuals were written by the 18th century which were intended to codify the mystical experience. Some were hagiographical works detailing the lives of visionary women and men that provided a normative process for becoming and identifying a visionary. For instance, Father Mancini, who was a theologian asked to examine whether Hindiyya was a visionary, wrote in dismissing her: "If we look at this virgin during her vision we find another evidence of her deceit: while in a state of rapture she maintained the flexibility of the body and its temperature, and her face which is normally pale becomes red…which is contrary to the nature of rapture and its characteristics: as you say Holy Father in the third book about beatifying saints, chapter 49, number 8: Given the mental energy needed to reflect upon divine matters and the necessary temperature needed for these mental energies and the extreme extent of love…then the forces of the body must suffer and the body must become cold, turn pale and sick." (ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, «Father Mancini's Examination of Hindiyya, » p. 447.

16 Louis de Gonzague, "*Les anciens missionnaires capucins de Syrie et leur écrits apostolique de langue arabe,*" *Collectanea Franciscana*, 1932, p. 39.

17 Gérard Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Première partie, Manuscrits chrétiens, t. I, Paris 1972, p. 89. See also Paul Sbath, Bibliothèque de manuscrits, Le Caire : 1928, t. I, p. 59, no. 95.

18 Gérard Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes…*, op. cit., t. 1, p. 90, number 130.

19 ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, "Alcune notizie da server il libro Primo della vita della serva di Dio Hendi Ageimi, p. 725.

20 Ibid, Question 11, 23, 33, and 36.,

21 ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, "Alcune notizie da server il libro Primo della vita della serva di Dio Hendi Ageimi, p. 115r, 119r, 132rv.

22 Sylvie Agemian, "Ne'meh al-Musawwir, peintre melkite 1666-1724," *Berytus*, XXXIX, 1991, p. 205.

23 ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, Interrogation of Katerina, p.532r.

24 Wahid Gdoura, *Le Début de l'imprimerie arabe à Istanbul et en Syrie: Évolution de l'environnement culturel* (1706-1787), Tunis : 1985, p. 167.

25 AMPB, *Awraq al-Rahiba Hindiyya*, Vol. 1, “Sirat Hayat al-Umm al-Batoul Hindiyya.”, pp. 5-7.

26 Ibid, p. 9.

27 ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, Interrogation of Mother Hindiyya, Question 38-53.

28 In fact, Christ showed these saints, in addition to Archangel Michael and Saint Joseph, to Hindiyya in one her visions, and he told her “to seek their succor in her times of difficulties and trials.” AMPB, *Awraq al-Rahiba Hindiyya*, Vol. 1, Letter from Hindiyya al 'Ujaimi to the Daughters and Sons of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, p. 27

29 AMPB, *Awraq al-Rahiba Hindiyya*, Vol. 1, “Sirat Hayat al-Umm al-Batoul Hindiyya.”, pp. 28-29.

30 ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, Interrogation of Mother Hindiyya, Question 12 and 42.

31 ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, Interrogation of Mother Hindiyya, Question 104.

32 Archivio S.C. Propaganda Fide, Congr. *Particulari de Maroniti,* vol. 136, p. 485.

33 Ibid.

34 Op. Cit, p. 474.

35 ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, Interrogation of Mother Hindiyya, Question 93.

36 ASCPF Maroniti, vol. 118, Interrogation of Mother Hindiyya, Question 106.

37 Op. Cit. Question 107.

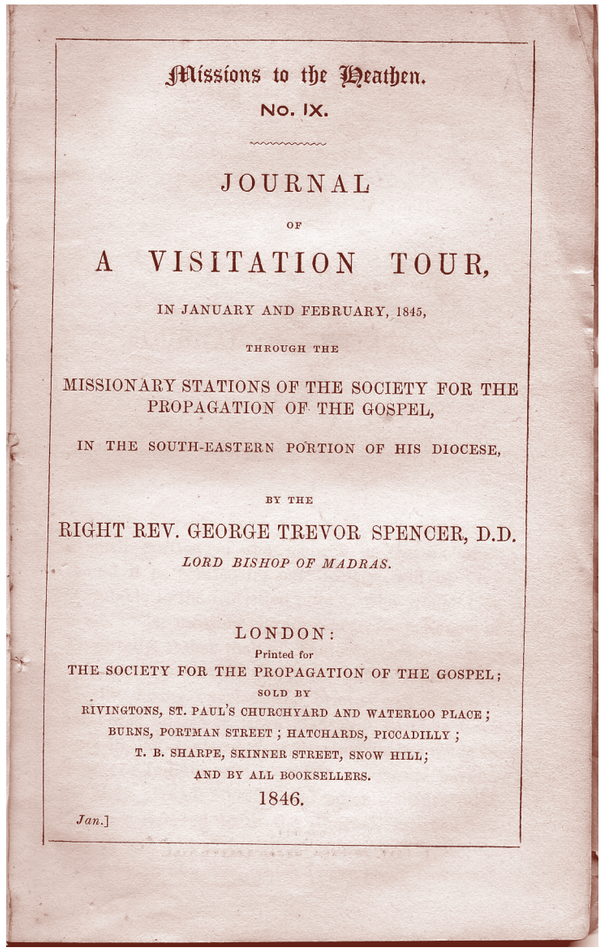
38 Op. Cit. Question 180.

39 Ibid.

40 Maroniti, V. 9, 1775-1776, p.121

41 *Congregationi Particulari, Maroniti*, Vol. 835 (1773), p. 34

42 *Congregationi Particulari, Maroniti*, Vol. 118 (1754), p. 540



Missions to the Heathen.

No. IX.

JOURNAL

OF

A VISITATION TOUR,

IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY, 1845,

THROUGH THE

MISSIONARY STATIONS OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL,

IN THE SOUTH-EASTERN PORTION OF HIS DIOCESE,

BY THE

RIGHT REV. GEORGE TREVOR SPENCER, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF MADRAS.

LONDON:

Printed for

THE SOCIETY FOR THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL;

SOLD BY

RIVINGTONS, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD AND WATERLOO PLACE;

BURNS, PORTMAN STREET; HATCHARDS, PICCADILLY;

T. B. SHARPE, SKINNER STREET, SNOW HILL;

AND BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1846.

Jan.]

Phyllis Mack made this apt statement in writing about English Quaker Women, *Visionary Women*, p. 5.

43 *Congregationi Particulari, Maroniti*, Vol. 136, p. 432. This intensity of feeling is shared by many other visionaries like Hindiyya. See for example the description of Bathurst who located her own spiritual power in her womb. (Phyllis Mack, Ibid., p. 9)
Ibid

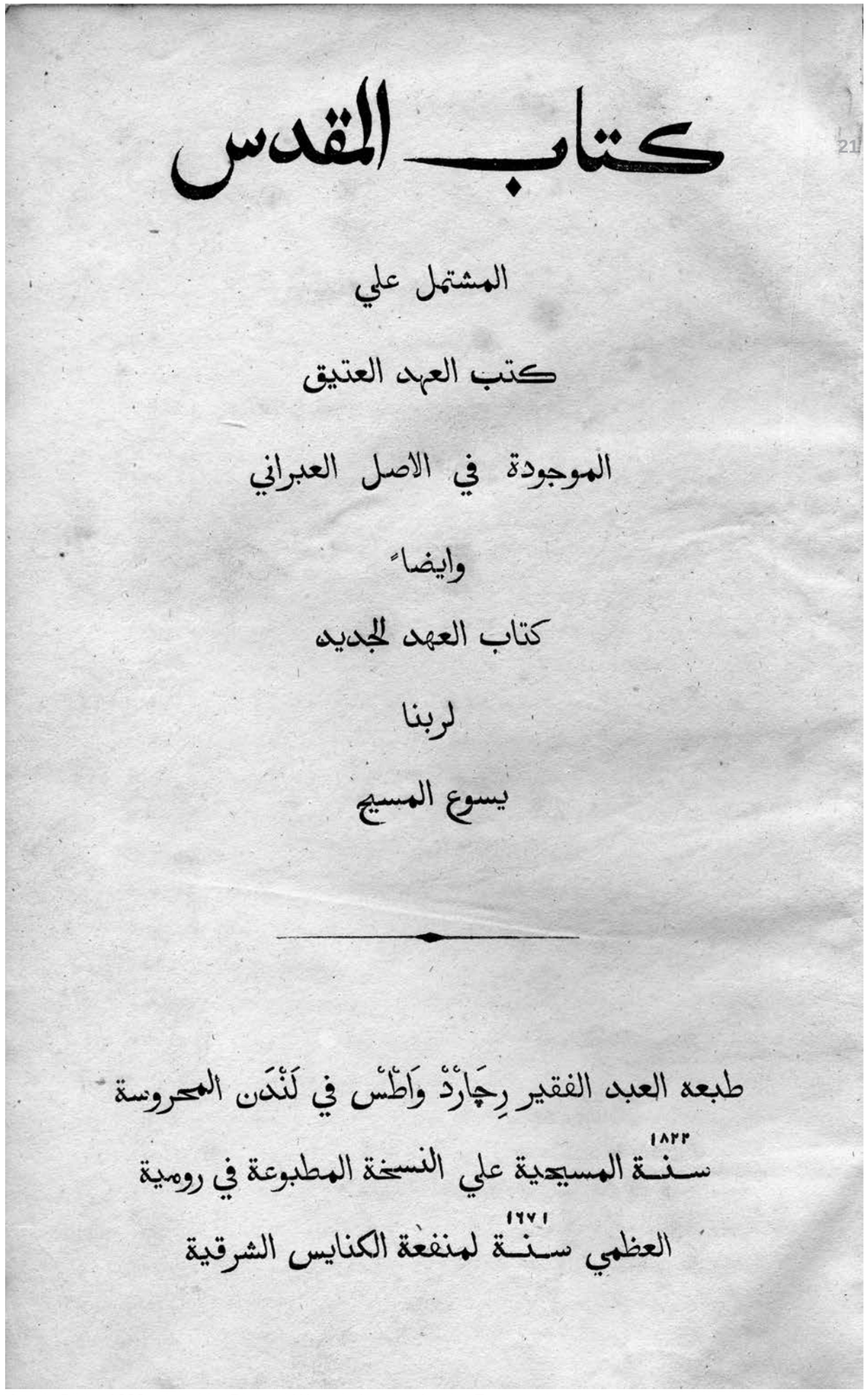
44 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* III, xlvii, Rickaby's translation

45 *Congregationi Particulari, Maroniti*, Vol. 118 (1754), p. 563

46 *Congregationi Particulari, Maroniti,* Vol. 113

47 Ibid.

Book cover, Rev. George Trevor Spencer, *Journal of a Visitation Tour*, Missions to the Heathen, no IX, London, 1846.



كتاب المقدس

المشتمل علي

كتب العهد العتيق

الموجودة في الاصل العبراني

وايضاً

كتاب العهد الجديد

لربنا

يسوع المسيح

طبعه العبد الفقير رِچَارْدْ وَاطْس في لَنْدَن المحروسة

سنة ١٨٢٢ المسيحية علي النسخة المطبوعة في رومية

العظمي سنة ١٦٧١ لمنفعة الكنايس الشرقية

Arabic Bible, 1822 printed by Richard Watts in London for the Eastern churches.