In November 1948, a new publication was issued from the patriarchal residence in Chicago. In its first issue, the head of the Assyrian Church of the East, patriarch Mar Eshai Shimun, in office since 1920, publicly announced a change of policy, under the title “Light is breaking in the East”:

His Holiness has broken through the Iron Curtain of misunderstanding and suspicion that divided the Assyrian Christians from their neighbors. [...] The change in world outlook is so tremendous that many issues will be occupied with presentation of what is taking place. It can be summed up in the words of an ancient hymn: Nuhra dinakh! – The Light has Dawned. (Shimun, 1949)

This “change in world outlook”, as the readers of the magazine Light from the East would learn, boiled down to a radical break with the patriarch’s combined responsibilities as head of the Assyrian church and the Assyrian people. This historical combination of responsibilities had been reinforced by the difficult circumstances of the Assyrians during the First World War and in the years following it. In the November-1948 issue, Mar Eshai Shimun explicitly and publicly relinquished his responsibilities in the secular domain to the respective governments in which Assyrians lived, in the Americas, Europe and the Middle East.

The importance of this message was recognized by the anonymous editor and constituted one of the reasons for collecting and re-publishing the surviving copies of Light from the East (LE).1 J.F. Coakley, in an early scholarly article that documents this church’s twentieth-century history, identifies the year 1948 as a turning point in the recent history of the Church of the East, and he too refers to Light from the East as his source (Coakley, 1996: 5).

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1 See the anonymous introduction to the photographic reprint of the magazine (available via www.lulu.com/atourpub; undated; acquired by the present author in 2008), thanking the Assyrian author Youel A. Baaba for his contribution. The present editor most probably was David G. Malick, the initiator of many books on Assyrian history available via Lulu.com. A few issues of LE were not available.
Since then, a number of popular overviews have attempted to fill the gap, but mostly have failed to reach academic standards. The most important are Aprim, 2006, and Aprem, 2003. Whereas the latter work is considerably less influenced by the Assyrian nationalist discourse and has more on the Indian part of the Church of the East, the first has the advantage of introducing many new data and sources.

3 This article does not intend to give a detailed analysis of all these issues of LE, though that would certainly further refine our understanding of the history of the ACE in this period as well as of the situation of Assyrians globally. On the wider context of Assyrian journalism and the many magazines that were published first in the Middle East, later in all parts of the world, see Yonan, 1985: 85–6, where she calls LE the first successful “Kirchenzeitschrift” of the ACE, but notes that it discusses much wider themes than ecclesiastical issues alone, which she ascribes to the patriarch’s combination of clerical and worldly responsibilities. According to the collector of LE, the magazine was discontinued in 1954 and replaced by a new magazine published in Trichur, India, Voice of the East.