

History of the Maronites

by Fr. John H. Nahal

The One Church of Jesus Christ

The concept of the Christian church was derived from New Testament references to the gathering of Christ's followers:

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."²⁹

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven, there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gives them ability.³⁰

The concept behind the term *church*, other than defined as a building specifically designated for worship, evolved from the Greek word *ekklesia*,³¹ which originally simply meant assembly. The concept developed to signify a communal gathering of believers; hence, since early Christian times, the term *church* has been used to designate an

²⁹ Mt 28:16-20.

³⁰ Acts 2:1-4.

³¹ *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, Limited, [1903]), 225-226.

organized community of those faithful to Christ and his teachings. The early Christian assembly was a unique reality, whose characteristics were described by Saint Paul as the mystical proof of Christ's presence on earth and, in heaven, of the holy company of all those whom He saved.³² Thus, the Christian assembly was different from all other kinds of organizations and assemblages known up to that time.

The increasing number of Christians eventually led to the expansion of the Church and the attendant creation of various offices and services to the needy of many Hebrews and Hellenists. Consequently, there emerged dissatisfaction and disquiet between these two groups.³³ About the middle of the first century A.D., a dispute involving Jews and gentiles was finally referred to church leaders, who convoked the Council of Jerusalem in response.³⁴ One of the hotly contested issues decided upon during this convocation was that the early Christian community would be composed of both gentiles and Jews. The Church would have to adapt itself to the political, social, cultural, and spiritual realities of the times.³⁵

The Origin of Independent Churches

There is no evidence of a consistent or uniform ecclesiology in the early Church, rather there were New Testament Churches with distinct and varying emphases on theology, worship, and practice.³⁶

³² 1 Cor 1:1-2; 12:27.

³³ Acts 6:1.

³⁴ Acts 15:1-41.

³⁵ Raymond E. Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 20-24.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 146.

From the very beginning of Christianity, the ruling Roman Empire subjected the Church to cruel persecution. Yet despite serious adversities, the gospel message of Jesus spread throughout the Roman Empire in the second century. The Acts of the Apostles described the expansion of Christianity into Syria, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Greece, Southern Italy, Gaul, and Rome.³⁷

Tradition says that John arrived at Ephesus some time in A.D. 44 and established one of the first Churches outside of Jerusalem. When Paul visited Ephesus about A.D. 55, he found a well-established Church there. Although Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province of Asia, the official military headquarters of the whole of the Eastern Empire was Antioch. After the Ascension of Christ, a number of Christians fled to Antioch to avoid the persecutions of the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. It was from Antioch that Paul set out on his missionary journeys, and where Luke actually wrote his Gospel.

Mark, a close associate of Peter, founded the Alexandrian Church in A.D. 59. Alexandria was the education center and home for many Greek philosophers, and the Church in Alexandria was able to exercise freedom of speech not permitted in other imperial centers such as Antioch or Rome; thus, the Church in Alexandria became the second Christian center after Ephesus. The Church in Rome was established with the arrival of Peter and Paul about A.D. 61.³⁸

In addition to the concentration of Christians in Palestine and Asia Minor by the end of the second century, Christians were to be found in sizeable numbers in Italy,

³⁷ Peter B. Roberts, *In Search of Early Christian Unity* (New York: Vantage Press, 1985), 7-8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-19.

including Sicily and Sardinia, and along the North African coast with its center in Carthage. In the third century, Tertullian (A.D. 160-220) said there were Christian communities established under local bishops in Spain, France, Armenia, and Britain. Some went beyond the Roman territory. “Due to severe persecution under the Emperor Valerian (A.D. 240-267), many leading Christians had to leave their cities to go into hiding. Because of persecution, many Christians in Palestine and Egypt found it safer to leave the empire altogether and fled to Persia, the present day Iran. At the same time, others from Caesarea in Cappadocia crossed over the border into the hill country of Armenia.”³⁹

In general, early Christian Churches developed simultaneously within and outside the confines of the Roman Empire, each with self-government and without direct control from any external authority. Before Constantine, the Churches in Armenia, Persia, and India enjoyed a certain degree of freedom and even approval from secular rulers. The Syriac-speaking Christians in Armenia, Persia, Edessa (the metropolis of the Syriac-speaking Church) before 214 A.D., and India comprised the Churches outside of the Roman Empire.⁴⁰ Though the bishops of these areas were independent, they were part of the general organizational structure of the Church.⁴¹ Ultimately, the intellectual power of the Byzantine world and the political power of Rome were to fall sway to the

³⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁰ Francis C. Burkitt, *Early Christianity Outside the Roman Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1899), 11.

⁴¹ Samuel G. Pothan, *The Syrian Christians of Kerala* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1963), 21.

teachings of the followers of Jesus. It is obvious from the history that a variety of Churches and communities of the faithful were in existence from the very beginning of Christianity.

The Early Church at Antioch

The primary purpose of this research project is to identify and focus on ways to promote the growth of the Syriac Maronite Catholic Church of Antioch in the United States of America, in order to spread the Word of God. However, there can be no success in the future without remembering the past. We cannot safeguard the traditions of the Eastern Christian Church without understanding them. Therefore, we shall familiarize the reader with the Eastern Church's history, limiting our scope to those events that directly affect the churches of the Antiochian Tradition.

It is to Antioch that we turn our attention, for it was from there that the Maronite Church traces her origin and much of her religious tradition. Seleucus the Great of the Seleucid Empire founded this ancient city, now called Antakya in modern-day Turkey, in 300 B.C. Located on the fertile banks of the Orontes River, it quickly became a major center of trade, culture, and architecture. Jews also were among the first inhabitants of this city; while they certainly did not enjoy full citizenship, they "enjoyed the right to observe their own customs as a distinct group."⁴² When Syria fell to Roman invaders in 64 B.C., Antioch became the capital of the Empire in the East, and its Jewish population

⁴² Raymond E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 30.

was now able to use the Mosaic Law to decide intra-communitarian problems.⁴³

Relations between Jew and Gentile in Antioch appeared to be good, with many gentiles appearing curious about the Jewish religion.⁴⁴ This curiosity would prove helpful during the early stages of evangelization. Whether Jew or Gentile, the ancient city of Antioch was culturally quite Hellenized, and Greek was its principal language.

The church at Antioch was founded several years after the death of Jesus, but most likely before A.D. 40, and it was there that the followers of Jesus were called Christians for the first time.⁴⁵ The noted American priest and biblical scholar John Meier comments:

Antioch was the first important urban center of the Christian movement outside of Jerusalem. From Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in the second century, to John Chrysostom, priest of that church in the late fourth century, Antioch was the home of great theologians and strong bishops (recognized later as patriarchs), the seat of a celebrated school of exegesis, and a hotbed of heretical tendencies as well. Anyone interested in the development of NT communities of the first century to the Catholic Church (Ignatius' *he katholike ekklesia*) of the second centuries must pay special attention to Antioch.⁴⁶

The Origin of Patriarchates

Patriarchates are neither of divine institution nor of apostolic origin, but of divine providence. Their formation indicates centralization on a regional level necessitated for

⁴³ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Acts 11:26.

⁴⁶ Brown and Meier, 12.

better government of the Church as a whole.⁴⁷ Major cities and the provincial capitals of the Roman Empire were the centers of life because of their size and large population, and they naturally became important centers of Christianity as well. It was obvious that the Church tried to spread the Gospel from these centers that had the best means of communication and audience. Gradually the civil provinces became ecclesiastical units, and eventually the elevation of the political rank of a city had as its logical consequence the elevation of the ecclesiastical rank of its bishops.⁴⁸ Whenever bishops of a particular region wanted to resolve certain major theological and social issues, they convened local and regional synods under the guidance of super-episcopal (metropolitan) or super-metropolitan (patriarch) bishops. Such synods, convoked sporadically and without any system, could not suffice to give the Church of a particular region the aid it needed, especially in the fight against heresies.

In order to give that Church such assistance, a close relationship or unification under one principal bishop became necessary. The existence of heretical sects forced the Church into a certain concentration and unification of several Churches under the authority of one bishop. In the majority of cases, it would be the bishops of major cities initiating leadership; and while at first such bishops were called ‘metropolitans,’ they eventually became known as ‘patriarchs’ and the area of their influence ‘patriarchates.’⁴⁹ Hence, this hierarchical system furthered the change from ‘primates’ to patriarchs. In

⁴⁷ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, Second Series, *Eusebius* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 224.

⁴⁸ Eusebius, *Historiae ecclesiasticae*, in Jaques P. MIGNE, *Patrologiae cursus completus*, vol. 5 (Paris: Series graeca, Bibliothecae Cleri universae, 1800-1875), nn. 24.

⁴⁹ Joannes D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collection*, vol. VI, (Florentiae-Parisiis, 1901-1927), 70

ecclesiastical usage, 'primate' generally means the chief prelate of a land or of a people. The early hierarchic organization followed the political division of the Roman Empire, but the terms applied to the higher officials of the Church changed in the course of time. In the East the system was headed by patriarchs, under whom were eparchs in the provinces or eparchies and, below them, exarchs. In the West this order finds its counterpart in the relation of the pope, the primates, and the archbishops. All of which served to contain the original freedoms in local Churches that had been exercised by individual bishops.

Bishops of the major cities outside the Roman Empire were called *Katholikos*.⁵⁰ The patriarchates and "Katholikates" of the East, both inside and outside the Roman Empire, evolved from below rather than from above. In the ancient Church, there were four patriarchates: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem; a fifth, Constantinople, was added to the list only after Emperor Constantine the Great elevated the city's political rank, making it the second capital of the Roman Empire. Over time these great religious centers, or patriarchates, while sharing the same faith delivered to them by the Apostles, developed their own unique schools of theology and liturgical practices based on the language, culture, and attitudes of the local populace.

The Patriarchate of Antioch

Regarding the Church of Antioch, Maronite Chorbishop Seely Beggiani explains:

⁵⁰ Krikor Maksoudian, "Katholikos," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, vol. 7 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), 226.

In their prayer and worship, these early Christians of Lebanon and Syria would have been influenced by the liturgical practice of Jerusalem and Antioch. Further to the east and in the small towns and villages of the countryside, the Syriac culture developed by the early Christian communities of Nisibis and Edessa and crystallized in the writings of St. Ephrem and James of Saroug had the greater impact. Thus the theological and liturgical matrix out of which the Maronite Church would arise was already in development.⁵¹

In A.D. 284, the Emperor Diocletian reorganized the old province of Syria (that had been in effect since 64 B.C.) into the Diocese of the East, which as W.P. Tayah tells us,

included Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, Arabia, and the Southern parts of Asia Minor. Syria itself was reorganized during the Fourth Century in [to] seven provinces: Syria I (Antioch), Syria II (Apamea), Syria Euphratesiensis (Hierapolis), Phoenicia *ad marem* (Tyre), and Phoenicia ad Libanum (Homs), Palestine I (Caesarea) and Palestine II (Beisan). Within these administrative boundaries, the Maronite Church will see the light, will spread, and still expands today its patriarchal territories.⁵²

For the most part the Churches in these provinces remained in communion with each other in a loosely autonomous federation of sorts. In addition to sharing the same faith, they also shared the same body and blood of our Lord in the Eucharist. Nevertheless, with no real recognized central authority like the Catholic Communion enjoys today, schism and heresy were always lurking in the shadows, waiting to tear them apart.

The religious jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Antioch at its zenith extended over all of the Roman province of Syria, Cilicia, other parts of Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and at one time all of the Persian Empire. All the Christian Orthodox in these areas were obedient to him. Those territories that lay outside of the Roman Empire, such as Persia

⁵¹ Seely Beggiani, *Aspects of Maronite History* (Glen Allen, VA: Saint Maron Publications, 2003), 2. Available from <http://www.stmaron.org/history.html>.

⁵² Wadiah Peter Tayah, *The Maronites: Roots and Identity* (Lebanon: Bet Maroon Publishers, 1987), 5.

and India, came to be known as “the East.” In this manner, the title *Patriarch of Antioch* came to include this additional region of “the East.”

It goes without saying that all Catholics within the Catholic Communion of Churches recognize that the Bishop of Rome, as successor of St. Peter, is the ultimate authority in all religious matters, and that this authority extends beyond the boundaries of the Western or Roman Patriarchate. The Maronite Church also believe that the Bishop of Rome has had those powers from the time of St. Peter. That said, this Roman understanding of Papal primacy took several hundred years in the West to develop and was never universally recognized anywhere within the Eastern churches, the Maronite Church being an exception (1099), until well after the Council of Florence. For the most part, two radically different views of primacy developed, one in the East and one in the West, based primarily on each church’s system of ecclesiology. These two schools have come to be known as universal ecclesiology, advocated by Catholic theologians, and Eucharistic ecclesiology, accepted by the Orthodox.⁵³ Nicholas Afanassieff explains in his article “The Church Which Presides in Love” that “according to universal ecclesiology, the Church is a single organic whole, including in itself all church units of any kind, especially those headed by bishops. This organic whole is the Body of Christ or, to return to Catholic theological terms, the Mystical Body of Christ.”⁵⁴

Proponents of the opposing school maintain that the fullness of the Body of Christ is contained in each local church headed by a validly consecrated bishop. Afanassieff continues, “Every ‘local’ church is the Church of God in Christ, for Christ dwells in His

⁵³ Nicholas Afanassieff, “The Church Which Presides In Love,” in *The Primacy of Peter*, ed. John Meyendorff (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1992), 92.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Body by virtue of communicating in the Body of Christ. The indivisibility of Christ's Body implies the fullness of the Church dwelling in each of the 'local' churches.... The local Church is autonomous and independent because the Church of God indwells it in perfect fullness."⁵⁵

The Bishop of Rome, considered first among equals amid his brother patriarchs, was given primacy of honor as the head of the most important diocese within the Roman Empire. As the rivalry between the major Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch grew, they would often appeal to Rome in the hopes of obtaining a theological ally for themselves against the other. Rivalry notwithstanding, every prelate in the East was secure in the knowledge that no other Patriarch had the authority to interfere in his territory.⁵⁶

A Christian nation

In A.D. 312, a miraculous event transpired that would produce a lasting impact on not only Christianity, but on the whole history of our planet. The ancient historian Eusebius⁵⁷ tells us that during a military operation Roman Emperor Constantine "looked up into the sky and saw a cross of light in front of the sun. With the cross, there was an

⁵⁵ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁶ John McManners, ed., *The Oxford History of Christianity* (London: Oxford University Press, 1993), 136.

⁵⁷ Thomas Bokenkotter, *A Concise History of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 49.

inscription: 'In this sign, conquer.' As a result of this vision, Constantine became the first Roman Emperor to [eventually] embrace the Christian faith."⁵⁸

No one knows how much truth there is to this "romance," but some profound religious event did indeed take place on the battlefield, and guided Constantine toward a nascent belief in the Christian God. The following year, the Emperor summoned his equivalent in the East, Licinius, to a conference at Milan. Although the two were bitter rivals, they agreed to a policy that historically has become known as the *Edict of Milan*: religious toleration of "Christians and pagans alike."⁵⁹ In addition to an end of state-sponsored persecution, property, religious houses, and cemeteries that had been previously seized were returned to former owners, whether Christian or pagan. This did not mean, however, that Constantine had become a Christian, or that he himself was baptized. That ceremony, history records, he put off until shortly before his death.

How sincere Constantine was in his faith, no one but God will ever know, but what is not in dispute is that this master politician and statesman was able to see that the Church could be extremely beneficial to his reign. Over time, "he increasingly identified the interests of the state with those of Christianity. Anxious to secure unity in the Church as well as the state, he did not hesitate to intervene in Church affairs and tried to use the power of the state to end the Donatist schism in Africa."⁶⁰

In A.D. 324, Constantine decided to move the seat of his government eastward. He selected the city of Byzantium on the shores of the Bosphorus. There he created a

⁵⁸ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 16.

⁵⁹ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), 122.

⁶⁰ Bokenkotter, 50.

new capital, which he named after himself, 'Constantinoupolis' [*sic*]. The motives for this move were in part economic and political, but they were also religious: the Old Rome was too deeply stained with pagan associations to form the centre of the Christian Empire which he had in mind. In the New Rome things were to be different: after the solemn inauguration of the city in 330, he laid down that at Constantinople no pagan rites should ever be performed. Constantine's new capital has exercised a decisive influence upon the development of Orthodox history.⁶¹

The Christological Controversies

The church of the fourth century, as the Emperor was acutely aware, was not one big happy family, far from it. From the very start of the Christian church, there always had been disputes and controversies among its members. Some were easily settled, others were not. "In Paul's time, the burning issue was the relationship between Jewish and Gentile converts. Then came the crucial debates about Gnostic speculation. In the third century, when Cyprian was bishop of Carthage, the main point in discussion was the restoration of the lapsed."⁶² The fact that over the years many of the churches were no longer Greek-speaking further exacerbated the growing tensions between them. Latin, for the most part, had replaced Greek in the West; Syriac had become the prevailing language in many parts of the East; and Coptic was the most commonly used tongue in Egypt. It seems unquestionable that members of any group (be they national or religious) who do not communicate effectively with each other are eventually going to have major misunderstandings. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the debates over the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ.

⁶¹ Ware, 18-19.

⁶² Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 158.

Most recognize today that one of the necessities for being able to correctly call oneself Christian is that person's acknowledgement of God as Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, however limited or incorrect their perception of that concept might be. An essential key to this understanding is to acknowledge Jesus Christ as truly and fully human, but also truly and fully divine. This theological understanding took over half a millennium to be adequately defined, with many disagreements, schisms, and controversies among the Churches.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 condemned the principle of the Monophysite heresy by declaring that "while Christ is a single undivided person, He is not only from two natures but *in two natures*"(human and divine).⁶³ This phrase was taken directly from Pope Leo of Rome's *Tome*, which was declared to be in keeping with the faith.

Regardless of Leo's triumph "the bishops, however, were most reluctant to accept any new Greek formulary, and when it became clear that the Roman legates were demanding this, they tried to get one which (like the formulary of 433) left room for either 'one nature' or 'two natures.' The plea was rejected."⁶⁴ Try as they might, a consensus could not be reached. The Alexandrian Church, along with most of the Syrians, felt that the adoption of Leo's "in two natures" could under no circumstances be accepted. Consequently, the second major and lasting schism occurred between the Eastern churches. Major portions of the Syriac Church along with the Alexandrian and Armenian Churches broke communion with both Rome and Constantinople.

⁶³ Ware, 25.

⁶⁴ Chadwick, 203.

St. Maron and The Monastery of St. Maron

Almost a hundred years prior to this watershed event, a man named Maron was born in 350 near Apamea, a city in Syria II,⁶⁵ a political division of the Byzantine Empire. For many years, he lived the life of a simple priest; later, he withdrew to the outskirts of Antioch to praise God as a hermit. Eventually, this too proved unsatisfactory for Maron. As Beggiani tells us, “Maron decided to leave the world and to seek solitude on top of a mountain, probably somewhere south of Cyrrhus and northeast of Aleppo. He had been a disciple of Zebinas, who was known for his assiduousness in prayer, spending all day and night at it.”⁶⁶ St. Maron, most scholars record, lived the bulk of his adult life in the open air, taking shelter only in the most extreme cases. “His life of poverty, fasting, holiness, and prayer, and his ability to heal illnesses”⁶⁷ caused him to become quite famous, inspiring many followers.

After his death, many of his supporters, with the help of Pope Leo and Theodoret, founded a monastery in the valley of the Orontes River. It soon developed into a thriving “religious center of considerable size and wealth.”⁶⁸ Concerning the monastery itself, Bishop Dib tells us:

The Monastery of Saint Maron was a large edifice surrounded by 300 cells, and possessing object of gold, silver, and very precious stones. It was from there that the Maronite monks spread out in all directions. Historical documents tell us that this monastery was already fully active in the first years of the sixth century.

⁶⁵ Faris, 50.

⁶⁶ Beggiani, 3.

⁶⁷ Anthony J. Salim, *Captivated By Your Teaching: A Resource Book for Adult Maronite Catholics* (Tucson: E.T. Nedder Publishing, 2002), 101.

⁶⁸ Faris, 50.

A report addressed to Pope Hormisdas in 517 by the monks of Syria II is signed by Alexander, Archimandrite of St. Maron. This report tells us of the violence of the persecution unleashed against them by the Monophysites. It also indicates the importance of the community since 350 monks were massacred and various monasteries were burned. Also, the fact that Alexander signed first shows the pre-eminence of his monastery over the others.⁶⁹

Chorbishop Beggiani states that “the founding of the Maronite Church is due to three historical events: the life and deeds of St. Maron, the establishment of the Monastery of Bet Maroun (‘the house of Maron’), and the organization of the Maronite Patriarchate.”⁷⁰ But a fourth event is undoubtedly of equal importance, because the Maronite Church can directly trace its roots back to these noble Syriac Christians associated with the monastery who desired to “defend the orthodox teaching of the fifth century Council of Chalcedon.”⁷¹

As noted above, the majority of West Syriac Christians rejected the decisions of the Council. Those loyal to the Council became known as the Melkites, from the Syriac word *malka* for king or emperor. Beggiani notes, “the monks of St. Maron took the lead in preaching the true doctrine and stopping the propaganda of heresy. The monks describe their activity in a memorandum sent by the priest Alexander, who was the head of the Monastery, to the Bishops of the region. This memorandum was inserted into the acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 553.”⁷² Despite the fact that the Maronites have often been accused by some historians of the heresy of Monothelitism,

⁶⁹ Pierre Dib, *History of the Maronite Church*, trans. Seely Beggiani (Detroit: Maronite Apostolic Exarchate, 1971), 4-5.

⁷⁰ Beggiani, 1.

⁷¹ Salim, 10.

⁷² Beggiani, 7.

the Maronite Church has never at any time in her history broken communion with the Church of Rome, and therefore has no Eastern or Oriental Orthodox counterpart.⁷³

The early Maronites lived a precarious existence, fending off outright persecution from the Monophysite majority and pressure from the increasingly powerful Byzantine Empire. The Patriarch of Constantinople attempted to make the Maronites more Greek in both custom and liturgical practice; thus, it was only natural that the early Maronite Church would look to Rome for guidance and protection. As already noted, in 517 the Maronite monks appealed directly to Pope Hormisdas, asking for his aid and support. In their letter, the monks detailed the persecution they were enduring at the hands of those who would later become known as Jacobites.⁷⁴

Maronite Martyrdom

Located between the warring Persian and Byzantine Empires, Syria proved to be a convenient battlefield. In the war that lasted from 611 to 614, Persia was able to occupy most of the major cities in Syria, including the Apostolic Sees of Antioch and Jerusalem with “disastrous consequences.... In Jerusalem alone, Persians killed 57,000 Christians, took 35,000 Christian captives, burned the churches, arrested Patriarch Zacharias, and took the Holy Cross.”⁷⁵

⁷³ Salim, 85.

⁷⁴ Butros Dau, *History of the Maronites: Religious, Cultural and Political* (Lebanon: NP, 1984), 173.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 204.

John Maron, First of the Patriarchs

With the murder of Anastasius II in 609, Antioch ceased to have a residential Patriarch. Constantinople continued to appoint successors to the first See of Peter who lived in “princely splendor in Constantinople,”⁷⁶ but in fact the See remained vacant. Making matters worse, the Arabs who conquered Syria in the 7th century refused to allow any Christian under their control to have any contact with their bitter enemy Constantinople, thus any future patriarchs of the Antiochian See were going to have to be independent. Facing threats from numerous religious groups in the region, the Maronite community acknowledged the need for an at-home leader and elected as Patriarch John Maron, a bishop associated with the monastery of St. Maron.⁷⁷ The Maronites enjoyed good relations with the Muslim rulers in Damascus, who, as the enemies of the Byzantine Melkites (the Melkite party split during the 8th century⁷⁸) and the Pre-Chalcedonian Jacobites, recognized John Maron as Patriarch. The date of his ascendancy is unclear, but we can say with reasonable certainty that this event took place somewhere between 686 and 704. Of the first patriarch, Dau writes:

St. John Maron was not only a church leader, but also a civil leader. In both capacities, he was the founder and organizer of the Maronite hierarchical structure. As civil leader, he was the guide, father, and organizer of the Maronite body as a political, national and military body capable of maintaining Maronite rights and independence against Byzantine and Muslim encroachments.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 205.

⁷⁷ Faris, 50.

⁷⁸ Tayah, 316.

⁷⁹ Dau, 207.

The tenure of John Maron was given added validity when the Syrian Pope Sergius I included John in the diptychs. With the establishment of the Maronite Patriarchate, a hierarchy independent of all other churches, and a separate clergy, the Maronites became not only a church in every sense of the word, but they also became a political nation state. Labaki tells us “once elected Patriarch, St. John Maron inspired the Maronites with a new vigor.... His nephew, Abraham, was the military leader of the Maronites. In 694 at Smar Jbei, Lebanon [*sic*], he defeated an army sent by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian II, who at the instigation of the Caliph Adbel el-Malik, attempted to crush the Maronites’ growing independence.”⁸⁰

The Monothelite Controversy

As indicated above, the Maronite Church since its beginning has always remained loyal to the Catholic faith, despite accusations of Monothelitism. This doctrine was nothing more than the empire’s attempt at reconciling the split between the Chalcedonian and the Monophysite parties. It held that “while Christ had two natures, he had only a single ‘activity’ (a doctrine for which Dionysius the Areopagite provided clear support) or, better, only a single, divine will.”⁸¹ In 638, Heraclius promulgated the *Ekthesis*, mandating the belief in this doctrine. Both the Patriarch of Constantinople and Pope Honorius I accepted the mandate. It failed to achieve the intended results, as both strict

⁸⁰ George T. Labaki, *The Maronites in the United States* (Louaize: Notre Dame University of Louaize Press, 1993), 7.

⁸¹ Chadwick, 210.

Chalcedonian and Monophysites found the concept to be a worthless compromise. In 649 Pope Martin I, speaking for the Western Church, reversed his predecessor's acquiescence in the heresy and condemned it. Then the entire church followed suit in 680 at the Sixth Ecumenical Council.⁸²

With regard to the Maronite Church and its official doctrine, Archbishop Dib comments:

The dogma of the two physical wills of the Savior is found in an implicit state, as it had been among other Chalcedonians before the Monothelite quarrels. The human will in Christ would not be denied, since Christ possessed our whole nature except sin. What is denied is the possibility of a conflict in Jesus Christ opposing the human will to the divine, for if the two wills 'are conformed to each other, one ends up with one will.'⁸³

In other words, while there are two wills, there cannot be a conflict between the two of them. Thus many "Maronite scholars, including F. Naironius, S. Doueihy, J. Debs, J. Darian, ...[would] admit that their church has held to a moral Monothelism, a moral union of the Two Wills, when in the process of action."⁸⁴ As mentioned before, the Council of Constantinople III officially condemned a Monothelism by nature, and nowhere do the Council Fathers indict the Maronite Church with spreading this heresy, nor is any Maronite named on the official list of the accused.

The Maronites as a Nation

⁸² Gonzalez, 248, 258-259.

⁸³ Dib, 23.

⁸⁴ Tayah, 35.

By the year 701, the Maronite Nation was firmly established in what is now “the main part of Mt. Lebanon, from the limits of Saida in the south to Akkar and Nahr-al-Kebir River in the north, and from the Baqa Valley in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west,”⁸⁵ with their own set of civil and religious laws. It was “headed by the patriarch as national and ecclesiastical chief, [and] administered by two princes: the prince of Baskinta, governing Kesrawan and the southern half of the Maronite state; and the prince of Byblos, administering the northern half.”⁸⁶ The Maronites had a powerful and much feared army called the *Al-Maradah*. In 750, the Abbassid dynasty attempted to limit Maronite influence in the region, and the two opposing camps fought numerous battles over this well into the tenth century. Caliph al-Mansur encircled the Maronite state by stationing fortified tribes around her border.⁸⁷ In order to maintain their relative independence from the Muslim hordes literally at their doorsteps, the Maronites were forced to seek help from other Christian powers in the region, most notably from the Byzantines.

Western Discovery of the Maronites

The Maronites were granted control over their own civil affairs sometime near 745, when Calif Marwan II recognized the Maronites as a separate ethnic and religious faction.⁸⁸ Latin Crusaders on their way to Jerusalem helped reestablish communication

⁸⁵ Dau, 337.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 340.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 339.

⁸⁸ Faris, 51.

between the Maronites and the West. History records that the Maronites were anything but hostile to their Latin brothers; rather, they embraced them with open arms. The Maronites, renowned for their military expertise, were eager to lend both moral and military support to their fellow Christians.

From the twelfth century on, a special relationship has existed between the Maronites and the Church of Rome. During the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, Patriarch Jeremias Al-Amshitti became the first leader of the Maronite Church to visit Rome and, according to Chorbishop Faris, was the only Eastern Council Father.⁸⁹ That same year, Pope Innocent III formally recognized the Maronite Patriarchate by granting the use of the pallium to our patriarch and his successors.⁹⁰ All subsequent popes have recognized the right of the Maronite Patriarch to the See of Antioch. One has to note here that although today two other Catholic Churches, the Syrian Catholic Church and the Greek-Melkite Catholic Church, also are recognized by Rome as Patriarchal churches of the See of Antioch, there is no doubt that the “Maronite Patriarchate was [for centuries] the only Catholic patriarchate representing the liturgy and disciplines of the tradition of Antioch. Would not this point alone suffice to allow us to consider the head of the Maronite Church as the legitimate heir to the See of Antioch?”⁹¹

During the crusades, the Maronite Church found itself in a very privileged position, but by 1291 all of the Franco-Roman conquests had been lost and Maronites in Lebanon again found themselves in a precarious position. Rather than stay under the

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Dib, 45.

⁹¹ Ibid.

thumb of their Muslim Syrian masters, many of the Maronites in Northern Lebanon immigrated to Cypress, an island acquired by Guy de Lusignan. “He opened the doors of this island not only to Franks who had been chased from their domains, but to the Christians of Syria who, molested by their conqueror, looked elsewhere for refuge.”⁹² To this day, there is a strong Maronite presence on the island of Cyprus.

The Maronites and the Mamelukes

Syria, which included what is now Lebanon, was under the complete control of the Mamelukes. History has shown us that most people are not willingly conquered and therefore most invaders are forced to rule by ruthless intimidation and brute force. The Mamelukes were no exception. Contact with foreigners or foreign powers even for religious reasons naturally were looked upon as a threat to the established order. As a result, communication between the Holy Father and the Maronite Patriarch was difficult at best, if not in many cases impossible. The Mamelukes divided the area into administrative districts, with the bulk of the Maronites occupying Northern Lebanon. Local leaders called *mouqaddamin* administered towns and villages.⁹³ Although these *mouqaddamin* were under the control of the governor in Tripoli, most were subdeacons, and they “administered the temporal affairs of the Maronites, trying their best to protect their compatriots from the tyranny of the Mamlouks [*sic*].”⁹⁴ Life was in many cases

⁹² Dib, 65.

⁹³ Labaki, 10.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

extremely difficult, and many suffered immeasurable persecution. Despite their hardship, by the close of the fourteenth century the Maronites “had grown in numbers and occupied a considerable number of towns and villages.”⁹⁵ Had it not been for the steadfast perseverance of both the Maronite people and their saintly patriarchs, who were often the focus of the Mamelukes’ hostility, many would have converted to Islam.

Tayah writes that there is a lack of correspondence between the Maronite Church and Rome between the years of 1245-1439; but by 1450 there is a regular exchange of letters between the Churches.⁹⁶ Rome had again turned her eyes toward her children in the Middle East and had begun sending missionaries into the region. One such group was the Franciscans. In 1439, when Patriarch John Al-Jajji asked the Franciscan Prior of Friars Minor to represent the Maronites at the Council of Ferrar-Florence, the governor of Tripoli retaliated and dispatched troops to sack the monastery of Maiphouq, which was the home of Patriarch John Peter. The following year, Patriarch John Peter relocated his lodging to Wadi Qadish.

In discussing this period of the Mameluke regime and the incoming Latinization influences on the Maronite Church, Chorbishop Beggiani writes:

The figure who dominates Maronite History of the fifteenth century is that of Gabriel ibn al-Qilai’i. He was born in 1450 in the village of Lehfed in the province of Jebail. During his mission to Lebanon, Friar Gryphon chose him along with two other Maronites to enter the Order of St. Francis. After their religious profession at Jerusalem, all three went to Venice and Rome to complete their studies. Returning to Lebanon, Brother Gabriel instructed the people in the faith and wrote against the Jacobite or Monophysite heretics [those who say there is only one nature in Christ]. He excelled in the composition of *zajaliat* [a type of popular poem]. He composed and translated into Arabic many works of theology,

⁹⁵ Beggiani, 16.

⁹⁶ Tayah, 64.

history and canon law. In 1507, he was consecrated Bishop of Nicosia for the Maronites of Cyprus and remained in his See until his death in 1516.

Bishop al-Qilai'i defended vigorously the perpetual faith of the Maronites against accusations he found in his reading of Latin sources. He exercised a profound influence on the life of the Maronite Church, but also furthered the Latinization of Maronite liturgy and discipline.⁹⁷

Under Ottoman Rule

The sixteenth century proved to be pivotal to the Maronites in two very different ways. Firstly, in 1516, one year before the advent of the Protestant Reformation, the Ottoman leader Selim was able to conquer and solidify control over all of the Middle East. What is now modern Lebanon would remain under the domination of the Ottoman Empire until the signing of the Armistice in 1918. Labaki describes the situation in the region as “administrative anarchy due to the exactions and intrigues created by the Turkish governors, persecutions, extortions, vexation, and slaughter.”

The Middle East was divided into *Wilayet* (general governorates), *moutassarificates* (prefectures)[,] and *qaimaqamates* (subprefectures). At that time, the Maronites gathered in the district of Beshare in northern Lebanon were under the governor of Tripoli. The Maronites continued to be governed directly by their *mouqaddamin*, who were subcollectors under the collectors of taxes appointed by the Turks.⁹⁸

Father Wadih Peter Tayah wrote a painfully descriptive account of the plight of the Maronites under their Muslim taskmasters. In his detailed depiction of the status of Maronites as “Peoples of the Book” in Muslim-ruled territories, he explained:

⁹⁷ Beggiani, 18.

⁹⁸ Labaki, 11.

The current conflict in Lebanon could not be fully understood unless one relates it to the centuries that helped shape the conditions of the “Peoples of the Book” in the territories conquered by Islam.

The Maronites of Lebanon, in particular, have been used as a buffer zone, a testing ground for Islamo-Christian [*sic*] relations. Their general context could be described as a continuous struggle to escape the status of *Dhimmi*, to which all their Christian and other Non-Muslim neighbors were submitted early.

From the outset of the Islamic conquest, the Peoples of the Book, Christians, Jews, and Samaritans, were granted a special status called *Dhimmi* or *Dhummia*. This status, a direct condition of Jihad, was bestowed upon those who did not convert to Islam, yet accepted to submit to the new conqueror, pay the *Jizyah* (capitation) [fee], abide by certain discretionary rules, which could be changed or rescinded at the discretion of the Moslem. In exchange, the “Raiyahs,” or subjects, were tolerated to live in the Islamic Society, following their own “personal status.”

The origins of the *Dhimmi* go back to Muhammad and his *Ansars* (followers) who, after conquering the Jewish oasis of Khaybar, northeast of Medina, allowed its settlers to keep cultivating their fields and practicing their religion, against ceding half their crop to the Moslems. Muhammad reserved to himself the right to break the agreement at any time.

This precedent will serve as a model for the “treaties” which were to be given by the Caliphs and other Moslem conquerors to the “minorities.” A coranic [*sic*] concept, essential because of its wide implications, is the ownership of the earth. “Land belongs to Allah and to His Messenger,” proclaims the Moslem creed. Whence the clear distinction between the land already owned by the Moslem and called *Dar-el-Islam* (House of Islam—of Peace) and the land to be conquered still by the Moslem through Jihad and called *Dar-el-Harb* (House of War).

On a practical ground, the whole earth belongs rightfully to the Moslems and the part still held by the “unfaithful” must be conquered sooner or later, in order to revert to its legitimate owner.

The status of *Dhimmi* has its place within this wider context. Whatever is left to the non-Moslem, including his family and his own self, are property of the Moslems. The practice of his faith and freedom is conditioned at the “discretion” of the Moslem. In his exhaustive study on the legal status of the non-Moslems inside Islam, A. Fattal offers a Convention-Model, inspired from the teachings of the Imam Ash-Shafi’i (d. 820), one of the most moderate teachers of Islam, and the founder of one of the four Schools (*Madhaheb*) of the Sunna.

The contract is unilateral, granted by the Moslem, enforced by the Moslem, and able to be rescinded at the discretion of the Moslem. The subject “Dhimmi” is given protection (*Arnan*), on the condition he observes the following clauses:

- Submit to Moslem rule.
- Abstain from uttering any offense against Muhammad and Allah’s Book.
- Abstain from marrying a Moslem woman, from attacking a Moslem, or dealing with the enemies of Islam.
- Abide by Moslem rule in all matters of mixed jurisdiction.
- Build no new churches, nor restore old ones. Crosses could not be shown, nor prayers said in a loud voice, and funerals must be [discreetly] conducted.
- Christian dress must be distinct: a visible belt (*Zuimar*), a black turban, a special patch on the chest and the shoulder.
- No horse riding. Christian may ride either a mule or a donkey, with a non-decorative saddle. Mounting must be sidesaddle; walking and riding must be on the left side, leaving to the Moslem the right side and the wall side.
- Each adult male must pay a capitation [fee], a (*Jizyat Ra’sihi*), a *Kharaj* (income tax) and submit to any possible *Avany* (Bals) [*sic*].

This status remained in force until 1919 with minor variances, at best, in the modern state of Lebanon. It is in vigor in most Moslem states, at least in its substance. The first four Caliphs, the Ommayyads, the Abbasids, the Fatimids, the Mameluks [*sic*], and the Ottomans have imposed it, without any distinction, to all the territories conquered by their arms, from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic, and from the Sahara to the Danube and to the Steppes of Central Asia. There was a short-lived intermezzo: the era of the Turkish Tanzeemat (1839-1861). The initiatives of Sultans Mahmud II and Abdel-Majeed were prompted by the rapid disintegration of the Empire, the pressures of their European allies, and the disastrous military setbacks in the Balkans and in Syria. They were enacted, not in a spirit of true liberalization and fairness for all races and religions, but in a spirit of despotic autocracy. In fact, to the various national movements within their Empire, the Turks opposed a Pan-Turanian Nationalism, an early brand of Nazism. That same racial chauvinism led the Turkish Junta of Enwer, Talaat and Jemal to the catastrophic fall of 1918.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Tayah, 83-85.

It should also be noted that despite the oppressive conditions, life under the Ottomans was generally better for the Maronites than under the Mamelukes. Most Maronites lived away from large urban centers, so control on their lives was less direct. The Maronite Patriarch, who was the real leader of the Maronite people, did not have to be confirmed by the Sultan.

Relations with Rome

The second event in the sixteenth century that had a major effect upon the Maronites was the Protestant Reformation. After successfully winning back all of southern and much of central Europe, the Church of Rome with the help of the Catholic superpowers of France, Spain, and Portugal was eager to increase its influence outside of the confines of Western Europe. New religious orders such as the Jesuits were more than eager to take up this task and sent scores of missionaries not only to the New World, but also to the Middle East. Rome became an international city, as more and more young men entered her gates from countries overrun by Islam or the Protestant Reformation to study for the priesthood. The Maronites of Lebanon were no exception, and the Maronite College in Rome opened in 1584 for this specific purpose. Tayah writes, “The candidates who had left their people early spent an average of ten years in Rome. They returned to be ordained by the Patriarch, when not by a [M]aronite bishop residing in the [c]ity. They took back with them the ideas, customs, and moods of the West to be looked at by their admiring folks as a rare breed, hardly adjusting to the [E]astern realities. For centuries, their element will keep up pressure in opposite directions. One segment will advocate

open Latinization...while others will struggle to overcome their identity crisis and preach a return to their ancestral practices. . . .”¹⁰⁰

The mentality of the Church of Rome after the Protestant Reformation and the Council of Trent can only be described as a sort of “siege” mentality. Heresy was seen everywhere, even when it did not exist. Rome tended to associate doctrinal orthodoxy with ritual correctness, and so an attempt was made to make all liturgy, custom, and practice to conform to the Latin Church. The Maronites, despite their continued good relations and correspondence with Rome, did not escape such “purification.” Wadih Tayah gives us an excellent example, reproduced at length because of its importance to Maronite Church history:

In 1567 a dispute between the monks and the *hennits* of Bqaufa, a monastic cluster nested in the Qadeesha Valley, led to a brief schism in the Nation. The opposition sent letters to Pope Gregory XIII accusing Patriarch Michael EI-Ruzzi (1567-1581) of heresy!

The Patriarch’s delegate, already in Rome, returned with a team of investigators: the famous J. B. Eliano and a companion, T. Raggio, both Jesuits. Their specific mission: examine the faith of the Patriarch and check the liturgical books of the Maronites. Eliano, born from Jewish parents in Egypt, enjoyed a wide culture and spoke Arabic, not the Maronite dialect of the epoch. Once in presence of the Patriarch, it took the Papal Legate little time to ascertain the true faith of his host. Then he was given escort to tour the country, in order to witness first hand the faith of the people. Eliano made three lists: One of the errors found, one of the dubious matters, and one of the chapters to be reformed. Spectacular autos-da-fé of ancient manuscripts, suspected to contain heresy, were staged on public plazas. Recalled instantly to Rome by order of his General, Eliano presented the Pope with the material collected. He had brought with him also two young students. At the same time, he stressed to the Pontiff the desire of the Maronites to see a college erected in the city for the education of their priests.

¹⁰⁰ Tayah, 66.

Back to Lebanon in 1580, Eliano brought another confrere, J. Bruno. He too was carrying the pallium to the Patriarch. In his luggage, he had a list of articles to be used as an agenda for a synod, along with a load of printed books and church supplies.

On August 16, the intended synod was held in Qannoubine, during which the articles were presented for approval. They included a general statement covering the Doctrine and the Sacraments...where ancient Maronite uses, such as Confirmation and Communion of [I]nfants were discontinued. Article 10 condensed the Catechism of [Bellarmine] and prescribed that a synod be held every three years. It asked the Patriarch to visit the parishes in person or through his vicars. In addition, it stressed the provision of the churches, the adequate preparation of the candidates to the priesthood, the [C]hristian formation of the people and the censure of religious books. Finally, the [a]ddition of “Who was [c]rucified for us” to the Trisagion was forbidden. Only a [L]atin copy of this synod has been conserved.

This Synod gave new food for skepticism about [M]aronite orthodoxy. In the Roman circles, rumors were spread, mainly by Easterners, that Eliano had converted the Maronites-once more! Such rumors reached the ears of Sarkees (1581-1597), who had succeeded his brother Michael in the Patriarchate. Sarkees wrote Pope Clement VIII asking for a new investigation.

This time too, a Jesuit, Jerome Dandini, came in. A synod was held September 18, 1596. Twenty-one canons were decreed, a repeat of the 1580 synod. Among many rules prescribed were mandatory use of the Missal printed in Rome in 1592; priests could not celebrate barefooted, and were to keep their fingers joined between Consecration and Communion; the use of the holy water in church; restricted reading of heretical books, etc.

Sarkees died while Dandini sojourned in Qannoubine. His nephew, Joseph (1597-1608), succeeded him. The three of them had come from the same hermitage of Bqaufa. Dandini completed his work, adding a few more canons, one of them encouraging the clergy to embrace celibacy, then left back to Europe. Later in his *Relazione*, chapter 22, he took a noble defense of the orthodoxy of the Maronites, stressing that the errors attributed to them were either differences of usages or materials drawn from heretic books found in their territory.

Such tragic events, touching sometimes to the ludicrous, illustrate the atmosphere of diffidence, which for more years to come will dominate the relations between Rome and the Maronites. They lived under a constant threat, both from their enemies in the East, and from their friends of the West. In order to give a peremptory proof of their Catholicity, they were faced with the abdication of their most venerable traditions. Paradoxically enough, [L]atinization becomes the sole way to distinguish them from their [E]astern neighbors!

One sample? Patriarch J. Ruzzi will inaugurate a furious [L]atinization of his nation's customs: he will adopt the Gregorian Calendar, drawing opposition from his own people and bloody persecution from the non-[C]atholics and the [M]oslem governors. Bishops were released from their traditional vow of abstaining from meat; fish and wine were permitted during Lent for the faithful, and the long days of fasting and abstinence preceding the major feast were drastically shortened.

Such excessive relinquishing of old customs was slowed down by Pope Paul V in 1610, to no avail. The process, once started, was to reach devastating proportions. Soon, it will affect the spirit and the very structures of the ancient Church. A significant incident: in 1633, a Roman alumnus, G. 'Amira, reaches the Patriarchal throne. For the first time, the Patriarch did not come from a monastery.

'Amira, in spite of his excellent qualities and best dispositions, remained handicapped by his Roman background and personal aloofness. He was given the sobriquet of "Roman Patriarch"!¹⁰¹

By the middle of the 16th Century the process was even aided by Maronite patriarchs as bishops were eventually allowed to eat meat and did not always come from the monasteries, as had previously been the case. The Lenten fasts were relaxed, allowing the faithful to eat fish and drink wine, and celibacy of the clergy was encouraged.¹⁰²

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, Latin practices and the Roman Missal to some extent were now firmly in place. Nevertheless, some Maronite practices were also preserved: a married clergy, the reception of both the Body and Blood of Our Savior in the Holy Eucharist, continuing to allow infants to receive Communion, and most interesting, the retention of the Orthodox date of Easter.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Tayah, 67-70.

¹⁰² Tayah, 69.

¹⁰³ Beggiani, 31.

In 1644, Joseph Aqouri became Patriarch of the Maronite Church. He was a strong supporter of both the supremacy of the Pope of Rome and the preservation of Maronite customs and liturgical practices. He began his tenure by calling a synod of bishops and priests that same year. The fathers of the synod forbade bishops from eating meat and attempted to reign in the activity of Western missionaries in Maronite churches without the authorization of the Patriarch.¹⁰⁴

Fakhreddin II and the Creation of the Lebanese State

In the later days of the sixteenth century, a young Druze prince was born, and his subsequent ascendancy to power would have far-reaching consequences on the creation of the modern Lebanese state. During his early years, historians note that his mother hid him in the Christian section of Kesouran. By the time he came to power in 1598, the Ma'am family had consolidated their power base in Lebanon. Over the next few years, many of his more powerful neighbors saw his influence as a threat to their existence, and he was forced to leave the country. He sought refuge in Florence, and was eventually given protection by one of the most powerful political families in all of Europe, the Medicis. Being so close by, he took frequent trips to Rome, where he cultivated the talents of several Maronite scholars and even visited Pope Paul V.

While in Europe, he was able to cultivate the friendship and support of several European heads of state, most notably France, all the while promising military assistance to free the Holy Land from the Muslims. When he returned to Lebanon, his positive

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 30-31.

experience in Florence and the neighboring Italian states led him to expand greater ties with the West, and his encouragement of Western Culture certainly resulted in increased prosperity. With the help of European designers, engineers, and laborers, he modernized the nation's infrastructure by building roads, bridges, seaports, and aqueducts. Although he never converted, throughout his reign he was very tolerant toward and even protected Christians. There is no doubt that he had a particular fondness and perhaps trust for the Maronites, as he allowed the Patriarch to govern them and as many as 20,000 proudly served in his military.¹⁰⁵

Almost all historians credit Fakhreddin as the real father of the modern state of Lebanon.¹⁰⁶ Eventually, however, his ambition for independence and his unbelievable political arrogance caused his downfall. When the Turks seized him, he was quickly abandoned by his allies and sent along with his family to Constantinople, where he was executed in 1635. An alliance forged with the Maronites helped his two nephews, first Molhem and then Ahmad, stay in power as Emir(s) for the next sixty years. In addition to fostering the arts and culture, Fakhreddin's lasting legacy was the creation of a political union between Christians and Druze, and during his reign "many Maronites [im]migrated to the Shouf mountains and established themselves under the leadership of their Church, thus expanding the Maronite presence throughout Lebanon."¹⁰⁷

Bashir I succeeded the Emir Ahmad in 1697, and he continued close ties with the Maronites. His wife, Princess Sehrennada, is believed to be the first Shehab to become a

¹⁰⁵ Beggiani, 33.

¹⁰⁶ Tayah, 92.

¹⁰⁷ Labaki, 13.

Maronite Catholic. In 1706, the Lebanese nobles elected Haidar to succeed Bashir. So politically skilled were he and the Shehab family, that his direct descendants managed to stay in power for the next 80 years.

The Synod of Mt. Lebanon (1736)

At the urging of the Maronite patriarch and many of his clergy, a meeting of Maronite bishops and representatives from Rome took place at the monastery of Louaize in 1736 that would forever change the structure of the Maronite Church. Although under the direction of the Roman legates far too many Latin-rite practices would be cemented into the customs and liturgy of the Maronite Church, some traditions were sustained and survived. For the first time, the synod codified its particular law, and Papal approval was given to the actions of the synod in 1741.

The synod officially opened on September 30, 1736. Dib notes, “The sessions began...with two sessions each day [and] lasted for three consecutive days. They were held with particular solemnity, and the Maronite Church had never known such an assembly.”¹⁰⁸ He goes on to record that “the debates bore principally on the following points: mixed or double monasteries, division of the eparchies, formation of the clergy, the discipline of the sacraments, rights exercised on the occasion of Holy Orders,

¹⁰⁸ Dib, 133.

distribution of holy oils, matrimonial dispensations, and the lifting of ecclesiastical penalties.”¹⁰⁹

The biggest alteration in the internal administration of the Church was the adoption of the Western-style diocesan system. Like all other Eastern Churches of its day, the Maronite Church was largely monastic. As Salim describes:

From the time of the Monastery of St. Maron and throughout the centuries, the Maronite Church was a community formed from and characterized by the monastic tradition. People gathered in the monasteries to worship and to pray both the Service of the Holy Mysteries as well as the canonical prayer hour of the Divine Office. Bishops—including the Patriarch—were chosen from among the monks. Bishops did not always live in the center of their eparchies, but in community with the Patriarch.¹¹⁰

In 1736 the only bishop who in fact lived in his own see was G. Hawshab, of the See of Aleppo.¹¹¹ Out of eighteen bishops, sixteen resided in monasteries and only one in Rome. Bishops were much like itinerant judges in the Middle Ages: they would be assigned to an area for a specific period, go to that district, hear complaints, settle arguments, and collect the money to help pay the Pasha of Tripoli.

To be sure, there was much opposition to the imposition of so radical a change in Church administration and life. Although new and distinct dioceses were created and headed by a residential bishop, many still chose to live in monasteries as before. Tayah tells us that this practice continued until 1835, “when Paul Musa, [A]rchbishop of Tripoli, who had lived in Ghazir, became a pioneer by having a permanent residence between Kfarfu and Karmsaddle. Slowly the other bishops followed suit.”¹¹² The bishops were

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 132.

¹¹⁰ Salim 107.

¹¹¹ Tayah, 103.

¹¹² Ibid., 104.

ordered to tour their eparchies every two years and the right to consecrate new bishops was reserved for the Patriarch.

In matters regarding the Maronites and their loyalty to the Catholic faith, the synod reaffirmed the orthodoxy of the Maronite Church by “citing several letters of the Popes exalting the faith and loyalty of the Maronites.”¹¹³ Yet the synod felt obligated to mandate the use of the *Filioque* in the creed, as well as the use of the Gregorian calendar. It would appear that even at this relatively late date at least some, if not most, of the Maronites had problems, which included the Western interpolation when reciting the Creed and the adoption of a Western calendar.

Throughout Lebanon and much of the Christian East, it had been common for monks and nuns to live together under the same authority and sharing the same goods, but divided by a cloister wall. While there is no real evidence that widespread immorality ever took place, the synod discontinued the practice of living arrangements in the double monastic houses, for the sake of propriety.

Some of the corrections instituted by the Synod were badly needed reforms. Priests were now forbidden to remarry, marriage dispensations were no longer obtained for a price, and the Blessed Sacrament was to be reserved in a tabernacle in every church building, whether it be in a major town or a small village.

The synod also spent a lot of its time with liturgical practice and the administration of the Holy Mysteries. Many of the previously mandated Latinizations were now codified into Maronite particular law, but the Patriarch was also given extensive powers with regard to liturgical practice. One of the more telling Latinizations

¹¹³ Beggiani, 45.

was the discontinuation of a trademark of Eastern sacramental administration, the passive voice at the conveying of the sacrament. The active voice replaced this, in most cases. The practice of infants receiving simultaneously the Mysteries of Initiation (Baptism, Chrismation or Confirmation, and the Holy Eucharist) by the priest was discontinued. Confirmation was given only to those who had reached the age of reason, and then only by the bishop. This practice would continue until after Vatican II. The Eastern practice of giving communion to infants was also suppressed. Other changes included the prohibition of anyone below the rank of deacon receiving the Blood of Christ at Holy Communion, and the other sacraments took on a distinctively Roman Catholic look as well.

Confirmation was reserved for the bishop and conferred apart from baptism, bells replaced wood to call the faithful to worship, and Latin vestments and articles of worship replaced those of the Syriac tradition.¹¹⁴

The Divine Liturgy fared no better, despite the failed attempts by the synod fathers to include in the *Anaphorae* older, more traditional words of institution at consecration. The bread used for consecration was to be unleavened and round, composed of only flour and water. No oil or salt could be used. Roman vestments and altar furnishings were mandated for use along with something entirely new: the introduction of Mass said without a deacon. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the office of the deacon, except as a sort of internship for the priesthood, had fallen into disuse. In addition to having aided bishops and priests in their ministry, the Mass parts for the deacon had held a prominent place in most if not all Eastern liturgies, and the Maronite liturgy had been no exception.

¹¹⁴ Beggiani, 12-13.

The synod also requested that schools be built in cities and major villages where children could be taught at no expense to their parents, and that seminaries for the training of the clergy be erected in monasteries and principal cities. Overall, despite the Latinization, the Synod of 1736 produced positive reforms within the Maronite Church.¹¹⁵

The Mystic Hindiyeh

No history of the Maronites would be complete without a retelling of the Hindiyeh controversy. Spanning a period of almost 30 years, this episode would involve a mystic nun and several popes and Maronite patriarchs, and would cause division among both the clergy and the laity of the Maronite church. Ann Ajami, who would later be known as Hindiyeh (Indian), was born in 1720 to a virtuous and devout Maronite family in the now-Syrian town of Aleppo. From the time of her youth, little Ann was attracted to mysticism. Many were later to recall that she had visions of Our Lord and his Blessed Mother, and no one disputes that she lived a rigidly pious Christian existence. Through the influence of her Jesuit teachers, Ann became devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and eventually founded a religious congregation dedicated to its honor. Founded in Bkerke in 1750, its *regula* was granted patriarchal approbation by Simon Peter Awad. With her success, however, came rumors of “eccentric conduct and doctrinal aberrations”¹¹⁶ stirred

¹¹⁵ Beggiani, 43-47.

¹¹⁶ Tayah, 114.

up mostly by the Jesuits, and the Patriarch was forced to intervene. After a careful investigation, she was cleared of all charges, but the Jesuits appealed to Rome. The Pope overreacted and “censured Patriarch Simon Awad for his having pronounced on an affair of such importance without having consulted the Holy See beforehand. He suppressed the Congregation of the Sacred Heart and ordered Hindiyeh transferred to another convent.”¹¹⁷ The Pope sent a representative to Bkerke to investigate, but when the legate returned and issued a report favorable to the Maronite mystic, the Pope was even more determined to find evidence against her. He commissioned others to investigate her writing, and eventually the Holy Office wrote to the Patriarch condemning Hindiyeh’s teaching. This, however, did not stop her reputation as a true Christian mystic from gaining so much widespread acceptance that her convent became a popular “site for pilgrimage.”¹¹⁸ By 1766 her community had grown to almost 40 nuns.

In that same year, the tireless reformer Joseph Estephan became Patriarch and was quite zealous in ensuring that the reforms of 1736 be implemented. Tayah describes him as a “highly cultured man [who] was motivated by noble sentiments....”¹¹⁹ Not all of his policies met with universal approval and his enemies, unable to defeat him legitimately, instead used his close association with Hindiyeh. Beggiani relates:

The Congregation of the Sacred Heart, under the auspices of the Patriarch, had risen anew. The Patriarch was an ardent apostle of the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. He made the Feast of the Sacred Heart a holy day of obligation in the Patriarchate, and ordered that it be celebrated with as much solemnity as Easter and the Ascension. In addition to approving the Congregation at Bkerke, he aggregated three other religious communities to it.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Beggiani, 52-53.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 53.

¹¹⁹ Tayah, 115.

¹²⁰ Beggiani, 55.

It is always easy to condemn that which one does not understand: so it was with the teachings of Hindiyeh. Opposition again began growing against her and likewise the Patriarch. Beggiani writes: “So many complaints were sent to the Holy See that it sent two pontifical commissions to investigate. Both sided with the opposition. The second legate made extreme charges against the Patriarch. On June 25, 1779, the Pope suspended the Patriarch from the powers of orders and jurisdiction, except those of a priest. A Patriarchal administrator was named to handle the affairs of the Patriarchate.”¹²¹ This had to have been one of the most egregious overstepping of papal authority in the history of the Catholic Church. The very idea that a patriarch of a separate and equal church can have any power, disciplinary or otherwise, over another patriarch defies current understanding of ecclesiology. Patriarchs can break communion with each other, but nothing more.

As it happened, the administrator, Michael El-Khazen, was an enemy of the Patriarch. It appears that the entire El-Khazen family had never forgiven Patriarch Joseph Peter Estephan for giving the honorary post of consulate of Beirut to someone other than an El-Khazen. Hindiyeh was ordered to recant her teaching, and was forced to live out her days in seclusion. To the slandered Patriarch’s credit, he decided, despite ill health, to venture to Rome to defend himself. His illness, however, prevented him from getting any farther than Joffa, and he was moved to Mt. Carmel. Determined to clear his name and reestablish his reputation, the Patriarch sent a representative to Rome in his place. It took

¹²¹ Ibid., 56.

five years, but on September 21, 1784, the Holy See found in favor of Joseph Peter Estephan. As Beggiani notes:

It is difficult to evaluate the Hindiyeh controversy. It preoccupied three different patriarchs, a number of papal representatives and often the Holy See itself. The Jesuits and certain opponents of Patriarch Estephan chose to consider her as dangerous and suspect. Her charismatic spirituality and her strong will appealed to a large number of the ordinary people, and even the Emirs of Mount Lebanon defended her. Some observers have even seen her as a symbol of national identity in opposition to the self-interest of foreigners. She still remains a mystery to historians. Some have found her teachings to be unoriginal. Others are amazed at how a person who some have considered illiterate could be said to have produced fifteen volumes of meditations, exhortations, spiritual dialogues, hymns, prayers and mystical experiences.¹²²

Conflicts between The Maronites and The Druze

In 1770, Joseph (Youssuf) Shehab became “the first Maronite to govern the Mountain, yet his faith remained a secret” from his Turkish rulers, for obvious reasons.¹²³ He ruled for eighteen years before one of his nephews, the future Bashir II, betrayed him. Bashir Qassem had been summoned by his uncle to help him in running the affairs of state. In true Byzantine fashion and with money he had obtained from marriage to a rich widow, he masterminded the eventual execution of his uncle by the Sultan and the Pasha of Saida, Al-Jazzar (the Butcher). Despite the resulting split with his uncles and cousins, he managed to succeed Joseph. As Emir, Bashir II ruled Lebanon from 1788-1840. Beggiani notes that he “sought to modernize the country and open it to European influence. He promoted commerce, built highways, improved health recourses, and

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Tayah, 96.

introduced the vaccine. He moved his capital from Dayr al-Qamar to Beit Eddine.”¹²⁴

During his reign, Maronite expansion continued and “reached the southernmost boundaries of Lebanon, entering the Shi’a heart of Jabal ‘Amil. Also during this period, several Maronite families were invited to the Nile Valley in order to initiate the Egyptians in the culture of the silkworm.”¹²⁵

In the later days of his reign, decisions by Bashir II would eventually drive a wedge between the Maronites and the Druze. To the south of Lebanon in Egypt, an Albanian officer who was appointed by the Turkish Sultan as Pasha distinguished himself by managing to defeat the British. History knows him as Mohamed Ali. To consolidate his power, he invited his Mameluke rivals to a banquet under the guise of reconciliation.¹²⁶ Once his rivals were seated, the doors of the keep were sealed and all were massacred by his Turkish troops, leaving Mohamed Ali solely in charge. Ali’s empire, although never officially severed from the Ottoman’s, included Sudan, Syria, Arabia, and even parts of Lebanon and Greece. In the late 1830s, the Turks had had enough of Ali’s semi-independence, and with the help of the British decided to force Ali into submission.

A political alliance had been struck earlier between Bashir II and Ali. In 1840, Egypt asked Lebanon for soldiers to aid them in their battle with the Turks. The Druze refused. Bashir sent 7000 Maronite soldiers to aid in the defeat of the Druze insurrection. When the major powers of Europe decided to side with the Ottoman Empire over Ali’s

¹²⁴ Beggiani, 61.

¹²⁵ Tayah, 97.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 164.

Egypt, Bashir's fate was sealed as well. A multi-national fleet attacked Beirut and sent troops to force Bashir's surrender. In October of 1840, he was sent into exile and died ten years later in Istanbul.¹²⁷

A second cousin, who took the name Bashir III, succeeded Bashir II. This soon proved to be the only thing these two leaders had in common. Bashir III quickly set about making enemies with all religious groups, including the Maronites. Already, the sending of troops including Maronite soldiers to aid the Egyptians with their forced conscription of the Druze had caused more than just a growing resentment between the Maronites and their Druze neighbors. In fact, antagonism had already been increasing for years, especially with the expanding migration of Maronites into the south.¹²⁸

In an effort to quell the rising tensions and iron out the difficulties, Bashir III appointed a ten-member panel, with three of its membership going to Druze representatives, but headed by the Maronite Beshara al-Khoury.¹²⁹ The Druze would have none of it and on October 14, 1841, they attacked Dayr al-Qamar, killing "hundreds of [C]hristians, burning 150 houses and holding Bashir III prisoner in his palace. Maronite reinforcement was to drive them away but not before they killed and sacked several villages elsewhere (Choueifat, Jurd)."¹³⁰

In an effort to end the conflict between the parties, Istanbul intervened, deposing Bashir III and appointing a new governor, Omar, Pasha of the Mountain. Omar partitioned Lebanon into two provinces, or *qaemaqamiyats*, a Maronite section in the

¹²⁷ Beggiani, 61.

¹²⁸ Tayah, 165-167.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 167.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

north and a Druze section in the south. Each section was further divided into districts ruled by an administrator called a *Wakeel*. A governor, or *qamaqam*, was appointed for each province. One major problem, however, was that there were substantial numbers of each religion in the other's area. Dau notes that the Christian area

had a population of 74,700 Maronites, congregated largely in the north; the Druze district had 25,450 Druze plus 17,350 Maronites, 5200 Greek Orthodox and 15,590 Greek Catholics. Then there were 10,150 Druzes in the Christian area and Dayr al-Qamar. The total population of the mountain was 213,070, of whom 95,350 were Maronites, 41,090 Greek Catholics, 28,500 Greek Orthodox, 35,600 Druze, 12,330 Matawilah and 200 Jews.¹³¹

Over half of the southern province was composed of mixed districts, and in many, there were Maronite majorities who did not take kindly to being ruled by a Druze.

Another problem was the presence of foreign provocateurs, namely British and Turks, who were very happy to see hostilities continue between the two combatants. They soon got their wish, as fighting erupted again. In an effort to placate Maronite resentment, an additional *Wakeel* was appointed for the Christians. The Druze reacted to this with open antipathy and in May of 1845, Druze militia attacked several Christian sites. Maronites countered by destroying some 14 villages, and the conflict continued to spread.

The sultan had had enough of Lebanese civil strife and sent his foreign minister, Shekib (Chaikib) Effendi, to reinstate order. In record time, Effendi proved to be both a brilliant administrator and gifted reformer. In October of 1845, he established a national council composed of a representative from the *Qaim-maqam*, a judge, and a counselor from each of the communities: Maronite Catholic, Druze, (Rom) Orthodox, Melkite

¹³¹ Dau, 645.

Catholic, Shiite, and Sunni.¹³² Despite temporarily easing tension, Effendi's new order would have other more negative consequences, as Tayah describes:

These new arrangements contributed substantially to centralize the government. Confessionalism was also sanctioned. By appointing directly the two *Qa'emaqams* and their *Majlis*, Istanbul was inaugurating a modern brand of administration, reducing sharply the traditional power of the *Moqate'jis* to the status of simple officers (*Ma'amureen*). A compromise between East and West, between the Rights of the Individuals and the Rights of the Groups, this *règlement* augured fairness and cooperation between the Sultan and his subjects.

Unfortunately, by partitioning the country along confessional lines, religious polarization, compounded by social unrest and rapid economic changes, turned out to become the major evil to be dealt with. On the other hand, the Sultan, with his velleities of reform, never enjoyed the complete backing of his viziers, nor the military strength to implement it, in an environment poisoned by a recrudescence of Moslem Fundamentalism (Wahhabism).¹³³

The Massacres of 1860

Although the massive indiscriminate slaughter of human beings known collectively as the "Massacres of 1860" began in earnest in April of 1860 and continued throughout that summer, its immediate precursor can be traced to, of all things, a common street fight between two boys. One was a Maronite and the other a Druze in the mixed district of Bayt Miri in August of 1859. Once the adults got involved, the fight became a major brawl that left almost two dozen people dead. Order was quickly restored, but more Druze than Maronites had been killed in an area where the Druze inhabitants were in the majority. While the fires of hostility that late summer might have dampened, the embers continued to smolder as kidnappings and murders continued, until

¹³² Beggiani, 63.

¹³³ Tayah, 173.

an unusually hard winter set in. Peace, however, was not to be. The Druze had been receiving arms all winter. On May 29, 1860, the Druze attacked forty villages on the Matn, causing open war between Maronites and Druze in the southern district. In most cases, Maronites took up arms simply to defend themselves, as the Druze had one goal and one goal only. That goal, of course, was the systematic destruction of every Maronite in the southern district. The Turks, who once were there to keep the peace, were more often than not complicit in the massacres. On June 21, Abdessalam Bey, the Turkish commander stationed in the village of Dair-el-Qamar, promised safety to the Christian population if they laid down their arms. Once disarmed, he simply handed them over to the Druze to be slaughtered. On that day, over 2,500 Maronites were butchered. This brutal and duplicitous scenario was played out in numerous villages with the same inhuman results. Although most of those Christians killed were Maronites, other Christians suffered the same fate: in Hasbayya, over one thousand Greek Orthodox were killed, in Rashayya, eight hundred met the same fate.¹³⁴ In less than six weeks, frenzied and out-of-control Muslim fanatics slaughtered as many as 25,000 Christians.

Hostilities, however, were not limited to Lebanon, as fighting spread to Damascus. The Muslim population of the city had for some time harbored “ill-feeling generated by the liberal policies of Ibrahim Pasha and the egalitarian provisions of the Khatt-I Humayun. Impunity for the Lebanese culprits and complicity on the part of the government officials served as encouragement.”¹³⁵ The ruler of Syria at this time was a brutal tyrant named Ahmed Pasha. He had his henchmen paint crosses on the buildings

¹³⁴ Beggiani, 64.

¹³⁵ Dau, 649.

and streets of Damascus. Ahmed, through his agents, blamed the Christians and attacks against the Christian quarters of the city broke out on July 9, first in the Orthodox section where they burned churches and slaughtered the nearby inhabitants, then the Maronite districts. The religious genocide continued for the next two days. History records that when it was over almost 11,000 Christians lost their lives.¹³⁶

Blessed Massabki Brothers and The European Intervention

On the evening of July 10, 1860, brothers Francis, Abdel Mohti, and Raphael Massabki fearing for their lives sought refuge in their beloved Franciscan convent in Damascus. Muslim henchmen gained entrance to the well-protected convent through a secret passage shown to them by one of the paid servants of the friars. It is believed that the friars of the convent were executed first; then, the laity who had sought safe harbor were given a choice: convert to Islam or die. Some of the weaker ones denied their faith, but the three Massabki brothers remained steadfast. Each had his turn and each refused to betray Christ. Francis and Adbel Mohti were hacked to death with hatchets and swords, while their brother Raphael was beheaded. As a testament to their devotion, the Maronites celebrate their feast day on July 10, the anniversary of the martyrdom.

It did not take long for the reports of Muslim atrocities against Christians to reach the ears of their European brothers. Reaction was swift. France was first to act by offering to aid in the re-establishment of peace in the region by sending a military

¹³⁶ Ibid.

detachment. In an effort to ward off military intervention by the French, Turkey decided to send her foreign minister, Faud Pasha, to Lebanon. According to Tayah, he arrived on “July 17, escorted by two frigates the Minister distributed relief to the refugees, then hastened to Damascus where he ordered, on August 20, 167 summary executions. His move, in genuine [O]ttoman style, was aimed at hitting the “heads”, without a serious prosecution of the real culprits.”¹³⁷

When he returned to Beirut, he found some 7,000 French soldiers under the command of General De Beaufort d’Hautpoul posted just south of the city to aid Faud Pasha in his restoration of the peace. Under the guise of bringing an equitable peace to Lebanon and instituting a new civil social structure, a commission was established under the leadership of Faud Pasha. Each of the participating Europeans had their own special agenda, and in the process, what was good for Lebanon or Maronite Lebanon went right out the window. The French under Napoleon III and the rival British each had competing economic and political interests in the region, while Russia and Austria had interests in the Balkans that they hoped to exploit.¹³⁸

Maronites in the United States

With the loss of Beirut, an important instrument of maritime trade and the fertile Bekaa Valley, Lebanon was reduced to a shell of her former self; the Mountain became unable to sustain the growing population. Direct rule under the Turks was harsh and

¹³⁷ Tayah, 185.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 189.

discriminatory. Labaki writes, “Severe restrictions were placed on the property a Christian could own, the animal he could ride, and the dress he could wear. His seal could not be engraved and the Arabic language was too noble for his use.”¹³⁹

It is understandable then that many Christians would seek a better life elsewhere. Because of Egypt’s cultural similarity and large Christian population, Maronites first ventured there to seek a better life and, by all accounts, many were very successful. In 1882, many sought life in the New World. Despite the physical and economic hardships of travel, thousands came to the United States in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. One of the main reasons for the Lebanese emigration to America was the effort deployed in the Middle East by American Protestant missions through the education they offered.

First Immigrants

It is estimated that one-third of Lebanese emigration, prior to the immigration restrictions in the United States, came to this country. Most early immigrants traveled on French liners which they boarded at Beirut harbor. Many immigrants did not know exactly what their destinations were. Some ended their journey in different lands than the ones they were heading for.

Maronites as a people have always been rugged individualists and, as such, life in the United States seemed tailor-made for them. Rather than work for someone else,

¹³⁹ Labaki, 49.

success was to be found by first starting as peddlers, then opening their own dry goods or produce business.

Number of Maronite Immigrants

Determining the exact number of Lebanese emigrants to the United States is not an easy task. “Lebanese emigrants to the United States along with Arabs, Turks, and Armenians were classified under ‘Turkey in Asia’ and after 1899 under ‘Syrians.’ Later when Lebanon became independent in 1943, Lebanese were classified as such.” Estimates are that 90 percent of those who came from the Middle East during those decades were Christians and among these 80 percent were Lebanese, nearly half of them being Maronites.¹⁴⁰

In the United States, the first Maronites came mostly from Lebanon through Ellis Island and settled along the Eastern seaboard. By 1897, the number of Maronites living in New York was estimated at upwards of two thousand.¹⁴¹ In 1920 Bishop Chukrallah Khouri during his visit to the United States estimated the number of Maronites at 40,000 according to the census he took. However, Bishop Khouri added 15,000 to the above mentioned total because he could not visit all the states, and he admitted that it was difficult to have a complete census. Moreover, this stream of emigration was continuous.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 57-58.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁴² Ibid., 60.

Historian Philip Hitti estimated that in 1920 among the Syrians in America “in terms of numerical strength the Maronites lead with some 90,000. The Greek Orthodox come next about 85,000. The Greek Catholics number a little less than 10,000 and the Protestants do not probably exceed 5,000.”¹⁴³

After World War I, the United States restricted immigration by law and therefore Lebanese immigration declined significantly. Lebanese emigrants started looking for new countries like Australia and Africa. Furthermore, with the Turkish defeat and France’s liberation of Lebanon, after World War I the people in Lebanon itself enjoyed a better quality of life. After World War II, emigration was caused in general by unemployment, and emigration from the Middle East to the United States shifted from overwhelmingly Christians from Lebanon to Muslims from various Arab countries such as Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen. However, Maronites in great numbers were forced to emigrate from Lebanon after the civil war of 1975.

For the last 100 years, the number of Maronite immigrants in the Americas, Australia, and Europe exceeds the number of Maronites who live in Lebanon.¹⁴⁴

Distribution and Location

Early Lebanese immigrants were scattered all over the United States. The highest concentration was in the industrial parts of the country, especially the New England states and the Middle Atlantic states. The 1930 census showed the highest concentration of

¹⁴³ Philip K Hitti, *The Syrians in America* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924), 62.

¹⁴⁴ Labaki, 49, 60-61

“Syrians” (mostly Lebanese) in New York with 10,113. In Massachusetts they were at 7,153, and 5,120 in Pennsylvania.¹⁴⁵ Labaki writes in regard to Lebanese immigration:

The largest Lebanese colonies were in New York City, Utica and Niagara Falls in New York State; Boston, Fall River, Lawrence and Worcester in Massachusetts; Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Scranton and Uniontown in Pennsylvania; Detroit in Michigan; and Saint Louis in Missouri.¹⁴⁶

The Need for a Maronite Authority

Although in most cases Roman Catholic churches could be found for receiving the Holy Mysteries, most missed hearing the Liturgy sung according to the rites of their own tradition. In an effort to minister to the Maronites in the United States, Patriarch Paul Massaad requested permission in 1889 from the Holy See to send priests. This request was approved but with severe limitations. Those priests who were sent could administer the Holy Mysteries to Maronites only, and in order to function as a priest they had to first secure the permission of the local Latin Bishop, and, worst of all, married priests were deemed unacceptable.¹⁴⁷ By 1924, Maronites had thirty-seven churches and forty-six pastors in the United States.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ *Abstract of the Fifteenth Census of the United States*, United States Printing Office, 1930, cited in Labaki, 70.

¹⁴⁶ Labaki, 61.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

Amid these first successes, new challenges were soon to arise. The Latinization of the Eastern Catholics was the most difficult challenge among others. From this problem came many others, the first being accepting Maronite young men who had a calling to the priesthood in Roman Catholic seminaries. The second problem facing the Maronite identity was that in order to educate Maronite children in Catholic schools the parents had to register in the Roman Catholic parish that sponsored a particular school.

In April 1960, the official decree approving the establishment of a Maronite seminary in the United States was issued. The decree approved the choice of the site for the seminary in Washington, D.C., and the nominations of Cardinal O'Boyle as official ordinary and of Archbishop Mansour Stephen as National Chairman of the building fund. On May 6, 1961, Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Seminary was dedicated by Patriarch Paul Peter Meouchi. On May 2, 1964, Robert Shaheen, the first graduate of the new seminary, was ordained priest by Bishop Francis Zayek, who had been invited from Brazil. The ordination according to the Maronite rite took place in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.¹⁴⁹

By the mid 1960s, the Maronite population had grown to justify the establishment of an Apostolic Exarchate, an administrative level below that of a diocese or eparchy, for the Maronite faithful. Pope Paul VI appointed the Most Reverend Francis Mansour Zayek, and the Exarchate was under the Latin Archdiocese of Detroit. On November 29, 1971, His Holiness raised the budding Exarchate to the level of an Eparchy under the patronage of our spiritual father St. Maron. Six years later, the eparchy was physically transferred to Brooklyn, New York.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.,98-103

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 102.

In 1994, a second eparchy was created by Pope John Paul II with the Most Reverend John George Chedid, the former auxiliary of Archbishop Zayek, as its first Eparch. Currently, its administrative headquarters are located in St. Louis, Missouri. Its territory spans thirty-four western, mid-western, and southern states, with thirty-one parishes, of which St. George Maronite in San Antonio, Texas, is one; it also includes a convent of nuns and a monastery of monks.