THE MYSTERY OF DEATH-LIFE IN THE MARONITE CATHOLIC CHURCH

by

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SUMMARY

THE MYSTERY OF DEATH-LIFE IN THE MARONITE CATHOLIC CHURCH

This study reflects the belief systems of a nation living their lives as though in exile. It is also an 'echo' of their spiritual journey, stretching from the dawn of humanity until the time of Jesus Christ. It is the testimony of the people who lived in Phoenicia, Antioch, and the holy mountains and valleys of Lebanon.

From the time of early Christianity they structured their beliefs according to the general admonition and teaching of the Scripture, and looked forward to the imminent 'return' of Christ. They lived in an atmosphere of preparation for the ready welcome of the 'heavenly Bridegroom'.

The background to and the reasoning supporting this study and exposition, is that of understanding the history, spirituality, and the ritual deriving from the beliefs and thought systems of the Christians of the Maronite Catholic Church, and their understanding of the hereafter. It is an attempt to relate the many factors which comprise the 'life' and ritual, the biblical foundation, and the theological and eschatological views of the Maronite Church and its members.

KEY TERMS

Jesus Christ

Christianity

Maronite Church

Mystery / Sacrament

Death-Life

Resurrection

Phoenician

Lebanon, Lebanese

Theology

Eschatology

Spirituality

Custom

Ritual

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

From the dawn of humanity until the present, humanity has been searching for answers to the 'meaning of life' and what comprises truth, the reality of death and whether there is a continuation of consciousness after death which could be termed the process of death-life. These questions and reflections are at the heart of every human endeavour and aspiration.

On a basic level we are all concerned about the 'last things', where we come from and where we are going to. Answering the call of the soul for knowledge and comprehension of the 'place' occupied by each human being in the scheme of life, both at present and after the death of the body, is an exciting and stimulating journey. Understanding and enlightenment evolve through careful observation of the processes of the mind, human nature and human behaviour. This constant reflection on the 'meaning' of life and death leads the believer to his or her concept of the afterlife, and its relevance to the individual. For Christians, this process leads to a belief in the resurrection of the body and the rule of a victorious Christ in the 'kingdom', always remembering that this 'kingdom' is seen variously as corporeal or incorporeal in essence. The idea of the 'kingdom' is understood under two aspects by Christians: for some it is a visible and solid reality which will come about at the 'end' of time; for others it is already existent in its invisible and spiritual aspect. Thus, the 'kingdom' may either be understood as a heavenly reality or as a reality which must find its place in the physical world at some future undefined date determined by God. The study of the afterlife is not meant to be an advanced report of things to come - for it is not so much the present that casts its light upon the future, as the future that illumines the present.

The Christian who takes the teachings of the New Testament seriously, and examines them carefully, will find that the Word of God is the supreme guiding principle underlying and sustaining life, death, resurrection, heaven and earth and, indeed, all creation. For Christians, it is a fact that God has revealed the essential features of their future destiny, while at the same time withholding the disclosure of the complete picture. Not only Christians, but all believers in God, must be content with a limited clarification and comprehension of the world of spirit and the actuality of life after death. For God has chosen to reveal only the core and kernel of that 'life' and nothing more. The Christian does not claim to have access to all knowledge or to know everything pertaining to their future life in spirit, but they do claim to know the essentials. The Gospel writers in their turn did not claim to have recorded all the teachings or words of Christ, but that which they did include were the essentials necessary for the spiritual salvation of the believer. Thus, the Church looks to the Holy Spirit for further enlightenment and 'fulfillment' of the original core message and teachings of Jesus Christ.

2. Statement of the Problem

According to Biblical sources, from the very dawn of humanity, human birth was marked by the 'seal of death' resulting from the disobedience of Adam and Eve and the murder of their son, Abel, by his brother, Cain (Genesis 4:1-8). In this manner humanity's most feared enemy, death, entered the world. God gave life to man, but humanity treated this

gift with extreme carelessness and, through the use of violence 'snuffed' it out. It could thus be said that God created life and man 'created' death.

The study of the afterlife does not produce a 'heavenly' and, therefore, unimpeachable report of things to come, but is a tentative study to reveal at least some information about death-life. There is nothing certain about these studies except a cautious probing of a process which is to all extents and purposes not provable by known means. This does not mean that the approach to this subject should be accompanied by unwarranted skepticism, as this will only obscure and negate the search for truth. While our almost complete ignorance of the process of death and resurrection, as understood within the parameters of scientific enquiry, is not to be denied, it must be remembered that the enquiry into the cause of consciousness and the intuitive ability is similarly hampered by a lack of objective proof, yet these 'states' clearly exist in reality.

The Christian, knowing the fallibility of his or her own perception, believes that God as the Creator and the supreme guiding and creative principle present in creation, reveals to humanity those truths which they are capable of comprehending. In any investigation by a Christian, therefore, there is a strong element of faith which does not allow destructive cynicism but trusts in the revelation of God's word through his chosen servants and prophets.

The theological insights stemming from, and to some extent sustaining, the belief in resurrection, are not meant to be understood as being of a fictional nature, nor an attempt to pierce the impenetrable darkness of the future, but rather to present a 'science' of the present illumined by the future, resurrection being the final realisation of a promise that lies in the past. The present life should not be seen as a 'waiting room' from which the Christian emerges into the eventual reality of the afterlife, which would be comparable to a commuter in stasis marking time until a train arrived. In a certain sense the Christian does not so much interpret the future as 'build' it in sympathy with God's plan for Creation.

For the Christian, the knowledge and understanding of spiritual life whether on earth or in the hereafter, is a direct result of the revelation and teaching of Jesus Christ the Word of God. It is Christ who sheds light on the believer and on his or her pilgrimage and journey to the reality of the transfigured and Risen Lord who will glorify his creation in the 'end'. However, the believer should not focus so much attention on the understanding of the 'last things', but should concentrate on a personal face-to-face encounter with the Easter Christ; an encounter that will unite humanity with divinity. In Christ's death and resurrection the believer finds his or her destiny and the consummation of the soul's salvation.

The question as to whether there is a continuation of consciousness and personality after death remains largely unanswered, as experience alone can never solve the impenetrable mystery of death-life. The most that can be hoped for is that the 'cloud of unknowing' which obscures the vision of God, will part slightly and allow some light to penetrate the darkness of human incomprehension. When the Christian faces the reality of death he or she must also face the reality of the degenerate self, and the vital need for watchfulness and obedience to God while the opportunity for grace still presents itself.

Death can come with shocking suddenness; it may be unwelcome and bitterly resented and remains the surest leveller of arrogance and pride. It spares none, not king or pauper, saint or sinner, young or old, and demands that we depart from the world as naked and alone as when we arrived. To face the inevitability of death, is to face the need for humility as we ponder and meditate on the reality of the unknown.

3. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to obtain a more viable comprehension of the process and meaning of life and death, and the conclusions about its nature reached after centuries of contemplation, reflection and scriptural investigation. These conclusions and their influence on the rituals and customs practised within the Maronite Church is looked at in some depth, especially the manner in which the spirituality of the early Christian community, their belief in Jesus Christ and his teachings about life after death, were inculcated within the framework of the teachings of the Church.

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To acquire a better understanding of the early Eastern Catholic Church and community.

- To approach Christian practices and theory in an academic and objective manner requiring honest evaluation, and to a certain extent rethinking the conclusions reached in ancient times.

- To measure the importance of Christian faith in the Maronite Church's traditions, customs and history, and thereby come to an understanding of that which comprises the essence of their belief in Christ and his teachings.

- To return to the roots of the Maronite Church and, by researching the background to the beliefs that stemmed from these 'beginnings', to renew them and bring them into line with more enlightened ideas and practices when this is necessary; not withstanding the duty to remain faithful to the spirit and essence of Christian spirituality.

- To attempt to reach a common understanding of the beliefs and practices inherent in Christianity and its various communities, bearing in mind that these communities all stem from one 'family' and background, this being the Mystical Body of Christ, which comprises the Church and its 'communion of saints' in heaven and earth.

4. Methodology

This study admits of a theoretical and cultural difficulty in that it does not deny the lack of empirical proof of the survival of consciousness after the death of the body. However, it does clarify the approach of the believer to these matters. The Christian accepts that there are processes which are beyond comprehension at present, and relies on faith to underpin his or her beliefs. The difficulty lies chiefly in the fact that it is easier to study an object and examine its nature, than to examine an idea which defies objective scrutiny. The most subjective and problematical reality is that of death. Death is an 'objective' fact, but it is also potentially a catalyst leading to another reality, that of the continued existence of the soul and, presumably, the various states of consciousness the soul experiences after the death of the body. From this perspective it has been easier to approach this study using available *historical*, *traditional* and *theological* and *oral* material, rather than attempting a complex analysis and exposition of personal theological and spiritual insights.

It must also be remembered that the Gospel writers did not reveal everything there was to know concerning the teachings of Jesus made available to them during his earthly sojourn. The Christian believes that, through the ages, the Holy Spirit has served to further enlighten and bring to 'fulfillment' the initial teachings of Christ. This is why the traditions of the Church are believed to be of great value to the Catholic Christian for, to some extent, they are the result of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Holy Trinity.

The historical sources used in this study are also problematic, and must be approached with the understanding that linguistic and interpretational differences between the language used in the original writings and the language of translation are fairly pronounced. The usage of Aramaic as the common lingua franca by the early Christians, and translated into English for the modern age, tends to suffer a metamorphosis of meaning. Thus the "Lord's Prayer" becomes a literal translation without the emotional and psychological content of the original. The cultural and spiritual perspective of the later Christians differed greatly from that of the Jewish members of the early Church at Jerusalem, and interpretational questions regarding Scripture are, therefore, a constant source of concern and confusion. Tradition attempts to 'bandage' this dilemma of interpretation by quite often ignoring it and presenting the issues as finally resolved. Thus, in any study concerning theology, spirituality and tradition, it is imperative that a balanced, almost humble, attitude and approach is maintained, ensuring that the personal bias of the student is not a factor. It is necessary when approaching the ancient practices and writings to 'burrow into the mind and century' of the writer.

To a certain extent reliance on the unbroken tradition of the Church and its apostolic inheritance is viable and, hopefully, a safeguard to the veracity of the teachings found in this study. The believer must, after all, rely on faith to continue in the 'Way'. Although he or she feels the truth of it, it cannot always be objectively proved using available empirical means. The believer must trust with St. Paul that, in the 'next' life, what is now seen and understood in an unclear manner as though looking through a dark glass, will be made clear and comprehensible.

Finally, matters such as these can only be delved into on a superficial basis due to their theoretical nature and the lack of proof in matters of faith. It follows that tradition and custom also suffer from an imperfect interpretation, and must be viewed with the attitude that at least a kernel of truth is hidden in their substance. Like the smallest particles proposed in physics, truth and faith cannot be measured or proved but is inferred, therefore, a 'scientific' and objective approach is sometimes the only option available; the methodology used being a simple examination of available materials and their literal exposition, instead of a mystical search into the essence of 'meaning'.

5. Summary

By way of summary, the present work is delineated as follows:

Chapter One provides a general introduction and overview of the main points discussed in the other chapters, as well as a statement of the problem, methodology used, and a general summary. Chapter Two provides an overview of the background and history of the Maronite Catholic Church. The relevance and connection of Jesus Christ with Lebanon is also looked at, as is the founder of the Maronite Church, St. Maroun, his disciples, and the Christian's journey of faith from the time of the foundation of the Antiochene Syriac Church to the present. Chapter Three explores Maronite Lebanese funeral traditions and customs and their meaning and content before Christianity and after Christianity. Chapter

Four presents a general view of death-life in the Maronite liturgy, especially as it pertains to the seven Sacraments which are considered a provision for the believer's journey in his or her present and future life. An overview of the memorials to the deceased in the Maronite calendar year is also included. Chapter Five offers a discussion and general theological and eschatological conclusion and view of death-life in the Maronite Church. It makes recommendations for further studies in Christian spirituality, and a more profound and exact understanding of what the process of death, and the survival of consciousness afterwards, entails.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF THE MARONITE CATHOLIC CHURCH

1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the history of a nation's spiritual journey, the testimony of the people of Antioch or Theopolis. Antioch is also known as the 'City of God' (Greek: Polis = city, Theos = God). It concerns the Sacred Land of Mount Lebanon where the Maronite community flourished. Its sacredness derives from the fact that Christ is reported as having once walked its ground and, to distinguish it from Israel the Holy Land, it was called the Sacred Land. It is generally accepted that the first Christian community was established in that region, with the Gospel or 'Good News' having been brought to its people, initially by Christ, together with his disciples. After Christ's ascension the mission was then passed on to the Apostles. Finally, it was taken up by St. Maroun and his disciples.[1]

Lebanon is the land spoken of by the Psalmist: "The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon" (Psalm 92:12).[2] According to Theodoret bishop of Cyrrhus, Antioch was the first Christian missionary centre, a fact confirmed in the Acts of the Apostles (11:26). It is stated that it was here that Christ's followers were first called Christians. Of the hermit St. Maroun, Theodoret said: "He is the one who has planted for God the garden which flourishes in the region of Cyrrhus" (Dau 1984:159-160).

The Maronite Church is the only Christian Catholic Church bearing its founder's name. Its members are largely the descendants of the Phoenicians (c. 3000 B.C.), the 'People of the Sea', whose ships were the first to circumnavigate the world, and Syrian and Jewish Christians who immigrated to Lebanon. The Maronites affirm, through their liturgy and customs, the life and teachings of Christ from his birth to his death, resurrection and ascension. They also believe in his return as judge (Pantocrator) of the living and the dead on the 'last day'. This is known as the doctrine of the Second Coming.

This chapter outlines the origins of the ancient Antiochene Eastern Church, summarising the main historical epochs from early Christianity to the present day.

Notwithstanding the problem of ascertaining historical accuracy, and the fact that certain sources spring from oral tradition, legend, and from information that cannot be checked for accuracy, it is fairly certain, if present Church dogma and tradition is taken into account in relating these facts, that we remain fairly close to the truth. It is therefore, essential in relating these facts and in trying to clarify objective historical study, that we are careful to compare them with present historical truth as taught and followed by the Church. Because of the difficulties involved, this is the only method, besides archeological research that bring historical facts to light in the form of papyrus manuscripts and memorial stones. Taking historical research and academic studies into account, we are fairly confident of reaching an approximation of historical truth.

[1] *Moran, Maron, Maro* from Syriac-Aramaic word means 'our lord, our teacher'

[2] Unless otherwise indicated all Biblical references are taken from: New International Version. South African Edition, 1978. Cape Town: International Bible Society.

2. Jesus Christ and Lebanon

Galilee and South Lebanon, according to Scriptural evidence and tradition, were the scene of most of the miracles performed by Jesus of Nazareth - hence his name, the Galilean. According to the Hebrew historian, Josephus (37-100 A.D.), Galilee was bounded by Akka and Carmel to the south, Tyre and its region to the north, Tiberius and Jordan to the east, and the coastal plain to the west. It was divided into Upper and Lower Galilee (Vigouroux 1903:87).

The Galilean Jews in northern Palestine were ruled by the Canaanites and Phoenicians, following an ethnic war around the middle of the second century B.C. Because of this dominance since the time of Isaiah in the eighth century B.C. the area was called Galilee of Nations. The Bible refers to non-Jewish peoples as 'nations'. Thus, Christ grew up in an environment where the Phoenician/Lebanese ethnic and cultural traits dominated over Jewish traits. Moreover, Christ spoke Aramaic, a language understood and used by Maronites and people of Lebanese descent.

Tyre and Sidon were the most famous cities in the proximity of Galilee and played a major cultural role in Christ's time. The historian Strabo, a contemporary of Christ, attests to the cultural, scientific and philosophical eminence of the two cities: "Nowadays, as well, any person seeking education in all fields of knowledge, can find in Tyre and Sidon the sources of learning which he cannot find elsewhere" (Dau 1984:159-160). While there are no references to Christ's formal education he must have had access to several educational sources. It would be reasonable to assume that he availed himself of the learning institutions of Tyre and Sidon, in view of their proximity to Nazareth.

The most famous religious sites held sacred by the Canaanite/Phoenician/Lebanese people in Christ's day were those at the foot of Mount Hermon (Mark 9:1-7). Mount Hermon, the highest mountain in the region, 2,800 metres, forms the southern part of Lebanon's eastern ridge of mountains. Its high peaks overlook the regions of Tyre, Sidon and Galilee. The ruins of several temples erected at the foot of this mountain testify to its sanctity. The word Haramoon (Hermon) means 'holy' or 'sanctified'. These temples were not only religious but also educational centres, containing historical manuscripts on religion and philosophy.

The historians Herodotus (484-420 B.C.), and Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260-340 A.D.), attest to the importance of these centres, where students of both the religious and profane sciences used to study (Jidejian 1986:85-93). The same applies today. Monasteries were and still are primarily concerned with the study and practice of religion. Living in Galilee near Mount Hermon, Christ must have known of the religious sites in the region. Some researchers specify the summit of Hermon, and not Mount Tabor, as the place of Christ's transfiguration. The evangelists mention that the transfiguration took place on a high mountain (Mark 9:1-7). Tabor is only a hill compared to Mount Hermon.

Christ began his public mission on earth at the age of thirty in the fifteenth year of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. He was baptised in the river Jordan by John (Matthew 3:13, Mark 1:9, Luke 3:19). The poets have called the river Jordan Lebanon's 'first-born'. Christ performed his first miracle in Cana of Galilee, at a wedding banquet, where he manifested his glory, and where his disciples "... believed in him" (John 2:1-12). Eusebius, the first ecclesiastical historian, confirms that Cana is a village in the Galilee of Nations on the road to greater Sidon. In the Vulgate, the Latin version of the Scriptures translated largely by Saint Jerome (c. 340-420) directly from Hebrew, and used by the Roman

Catholic Church, Saint Jerome concurred with Eusebius concerning the location of Cana (Joshua 9:25-28) (Goettinger 1870:271). Modern researchers have found it more difficult to pinpoint with unequivocal certainty the location of the biblical Cana, due to the fact that there is more than one village known by that name, usually with accompanying myths and traditions supporting their claim to be Cana of Galilee. Added to the confusion is the fact that the area of Galilee was much more extensive in historical times, when it was known as Galilee of the Nations and included parts of what is now known as Lebanon.

Some researchers and archaeologists have, therefore, concluded that the location of Cana of Galilee coincides with the location of Cana of Lebanon, some 12 kilometres south-east of Tyre. Cana of Lebanon is always mentioned in the Bible in relation to Galilee as 'Al-Jalel'(holy man), whereas the other two villages are known as Kfarkenet and Kherbet (ruin) Cana. The Lebanese Cana of Galilee is located around a hill, on the top of which is a shrine called by the inhabitants, Al-Jalel. This shrine is honoured by people of all sects in the region and is built over the ruins of an ancient temple (Harb nd:29).

Worth mentioning here is the fact that dozens of Lebanese towns and villages carry names of holy men and prophets who have been honoured by the Lebanese through the ages. The ruins of the shrines, connected to these villages and dedicated to holy men and women, are mostly still in existence.

Among the remains discovered in Cana of Galilee are stone water pots like those described in the Gospel of St. John 9:6-7. The size of these pots correspond to the capacity of those mentioned in the Bible, two or three firkins, viz. eighty to one hundred and twenty litres. These stone water pots can still be viewed in the main yard of the ruined temple, which was spacious enough for wedding festivities. Near Cana of Galilee there are stela dating back to the early centuries of Christianity. One of these stela shows twelve figures surrounding a thirteenth of more prominent size and probably greater importance. This could be representative of Christ and the twelve disciples. It is possible that the first Christians made the stele to commemorate Christ's first visit with his disciples to Cana in South Lebanon.

Christ's second miracle in Lebanon was that of his healing of the daughter of the woman of Canaan/South Lebanon. With his rough and dry words to the woman: "I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the people of Israel" Jesus was testing her faith in him, and her faith was so great that her request was fulfilled (Matthew 15:24). The miracle was most likely to have taken place near Tyre. Christians still honour the stone where Jesus met with the woman (Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-31). Christ travelled to Tyre and Sidon, as the Apostle Matthew reports: "Jesus then left that place and withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon", which meant that Christ travelled some 70 kilometres through Lebanon. Commemorating his visit to their city, the people of Sidon, from the crusades to the present, have honoured a stone in a niche in the city church. According to tradition, Christ on his way to Sidon, reputedly sat on this stone when he preached.

Lebanese annals indicate that Christ's visits to Lebanon were not brief ones. Maghdouche or Our Lady of Mantara (which means 'waiting' - to commemorate the Virgin Mary's waiting for Christ's return from his mission to Tyre), was one of the villages visited by Christ and his mother. There is no doubt that the fame of Tyre and Sidon in those days made Christ visit them and the people there. According to some researchers, Tyre and Sidon were the starting points for Christ to carry out his mission in other Lebanese regions. This mutual sympathy between Christ and the Lebanese, namely the people of Tyre and Sidon, is due to the common ground linking the Lebanese people and land with Christ, man

and mission. Athough Christ stated that his mission primarily concerned the "lost sheep of Israel" (Mark 7:27) in reality he preached to and healed many of Gentile origin, especially the Lebanese, his only requirement being faith in God.

2.1 The Evangelization of the Lebanese Coastal Cities

After his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection, and prior to his ascension, Christ said to his disciples: "Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptise them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19-20). The disciples were to carry this promise of salvation to all the peoples of the earth (Acts 1:8). When the disciples began to carry out their mission persecution began. Stephen, stoned by the Jews of Jerusalem, was the first martyr. Persecution of Christianity forced some followers to seek refuge in Lebanon around 34 A.D. Moreover, it is mentioned in the Acts 21:3-6 that, when St. Paul visited Tyre in 58 A.D, he met with the disciples and stayed there seven days.

After St. Paul had Christianized the Mediterranean region he longed to visit Jerusalem. He sailed from Ephesus and landed in Tyre. There, where Christ had previously influenced the southern Lebanese community through his preaching, he found a hospitable, devoted Lebanese Christian community. Indeed, here in the area of Tyre and Sidon, the community, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, advised St. Paul not to go to Jerusalem. He stayed, preached, and baptized many people in the region of Sidon, Tyre and Sarepta.

"But when our time with them was over, we left and went on our way. All of them, together with their wives and children, went with us out of the city to the beach, where we all knelt and prayed" (Acts 21:5-6). Christianity also spread in Sidon as it had in Tyre. In the Acts it is mentioned that St. Paul was allowed, on his way to Rome as a prisoner around 60 A.D., to meet his friends again in the cities of Tyre and Sidon. "The next day we arrived at Sidon. Julius was kind to Paul and allowed him to go and see his friends, to be given what he needed" (Acts 27:3).

After Tyre and Sidon, Christianity spread throughout the Lebanese coastal cities because the disciples had to pass through Lebanon on their way from Jerusalem to Antioch in the north, and vice versa. By the end of the first century A.D. the Church had been organized by the disciples and their followers in all regions and under one authority, Antioch.

The Synods held later on, confirmed this organisation, which followed the political and administrative organization of the Roman Empire. Thus, the Church included five main Patriarchates - Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople. The Church of Lebanon followed the Patriarchate of Antioch, which included at that time, the three metropolitan dioceses of Tyre, Beirut and Baalbek.

3. Antioch 'Theopolis' (The City of God)

Antioch was founded c. 312 B.C. by King Seleucus I of Babylonia, one of the generals of Alexander the Great. Its geographical situation (on the eastern bank of the Orontes) made it an important commercial centre, and the hub of Hellenistic culture in Asia Minor and Syria. The historian Maurice Barres said: "My heart does not place anything above Antioch" (Abi-Nader 1972:1). It was in such a cosmopolitan environment that St. Maroun and his followers found themselves. Centuries before the establishment of the Papal See in Rome, Alexandria or Constantinople, it was, as previously mentioned, at Antioch that the

believers were "...first called Christians" (Acts 11:26). This community consisted not only of pagan converts but also Jews driven out of Jerusalem by persecution (Galatians1:2).

Antioch was the main center of the early Christian Church, especially after the ascension of Christ (Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:50-5, Acts 1:9-11). Then St. Peter moved from Jerusalem to Antioch (c. 34-36 A.D.) ruling the church until 42 A.D. It was here at Antioch that the First Vicar of Jesus and chief of the twelve Apostles, Peter, formulated the apostolic rules and tenets based on Jesus' teachings (*The Catholic Encyclopedia Dictionary 1941:*52).

For this reason, Peter is considered the founder of the Antiochene Church and of the first Christian See. We know from St. Ignatius that the feast commemorating the Chair of St. Peter in Antioch has its origins in earliest Christianity. The Maronite Church celebrates this feast on 22 February. It is also for this reason that the Maronite Patriarch is accorded the title of 'Peter, Patriarch of Antioch and all the East'. Peter's stay in Antioch lasted seven years, then, according to St. Jerome, he was instructed by the Holy Spirit to move to Rome and establish the headquarters of the Church there. St. Evodius, followed by Ignatius, succeeded to the Chair of Antioch. The latter was martyred in Rome in 107 A.D.

The Apostle to the nations, Paul, together with Barnabas, as well as other Apostles, also visited Antioch. From Antioch, Paul and Barnabas set out on the missionary journeys to Asia Minor and Greece (Acts 13:18).

In 284 A.D. the Roman Emperor Diocletian re-organised the Empire's provinces, modifying their boundaries. Within these provinces were later established ecclesiastical jurisdictions; one of them became the Eastern diocese, corresponding to the former Patriarchate of Antioch. The Patriarchate of Antioch embraced the following dioceses or provinces: Lebanese-Phoenicia, Syria, Palestine, Cilicia, Arabia, and the southern parts of Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Osroene, Euphrattesia. Thereafter in the fourth century Syria was divided into seven provinces (Dib 1971:14-17).[3]

Finally the Christian Church of Antioch became one of the five great original Patriarchates, namely: Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople.

3.1 The Division of Antioch

In his book, Awit (1994:13) says: "Antioch has always been a city of openness, dialogue, and bold initiative". Antioch was a great city of that age, and the driving force of early Christianity. Indeed she is considered to be the 'mother' of Christianity, especially by Eastern Catholics. Christopher Dawnson says: "The Coming of Christianity to rural areas was accompanied by a great revival of cultural activity. It saw the rise of a vernacular literature and the awakening of a national consciousness. To the Syrian people, thus torn asunder by rival Empires, Byzantine and Persian, and dominated by an alien culture, Christianity became a vehicle for national traditions and ideals" (Tayah 1987:6,8).

After the first Nicaean Council (325 A.D.), divisions occurred among the Antiochene Christians for the first time. The Council had condemned the heresy of Arius (256-337 A.D.) who denied Christ's divinity. As a result, the followers of Arius, who had been excommunicated (323 A.D.), broke away from orthodox Nicaean theology and formed the Arian sect.

[3] Syria 1 (Antioch), Syria 2 (Apamea), Eupratesiensis (Hierapolis), Phoenicia (Tyre), and Lebanese Phoenicia, Palestine 1 Cesarea and Palestine 2 (Beisan).

The Christians of Antioch were now split into two group: Arians and Nicaeans. This rift created a political crisis within the Church. There were now two Patriarchs for each of the five Partiarchates: heretical Arian and orthodox Nicaean. The orthodox doctrine upheld by Nicaea prevailed, thanks to some of the Council's influential members (now ranked as saints) viz. Antony, Maroun the Hermit, Jerome, Basil and Ephrem.

However, the split in the Antiochene Church continued until the intervention of Emperor Theodosius I (who reigned from 379–395 A.D.). He convened the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (381 A.D.) which condemned Arianism and confirmed the decisions of Nicaea. To complicate matters, further schisms emerged. These were largely due to the ambitions of Constantine who wished to make Constantinople the 'New Rome' (the capital and heart of Christianity). Thus, political controversies arose between East and West, between Rome and Constantinople. This interference by the Byzantine Emperor led to yet another division in the middle of the fifth century, viz. Between the Chalcedonians and the Monophysitic heretics. The latter held that there is only one nature in Christ, viz. the divine nature.

These politico-religious divisions between Rome and Constantinople led to the formation of a spiritual and ascetic movement in the Antiochene Church known as the monastic life. From this community, a new and independent church was created, namely, the Maronite Church.[4]

It was during this time, and in such an environment that St. Maroun lived (350 + 410 A.D.). It was a time characterised by tragic upheavals, affecting pagans and Christians alike. Divisions arose between Catholic and heretical doctrines such as those of Arianism, Nestorianism, and Monophysitism.

Out of the prevailing politico-religious turmoil, and compounded by social corruption a spiritual revolution was inevitable. This was affirmed in the emergence of the monastic movements and the hermits. It was a revolution based on self-denial and on Christ's injunction: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8:22). In this historical context, deriving from ecumenical decisions, notably those of the Nicaean Council, was born the Maronite Catholic Church. Its sphere of influence extended throughout Antioch and to both the East and West. The Maronites originally belonged to an ascetic community founded by St. Maroun, a Syrian hermit (c. late fourth and early fifth centuries). Later, under the leadership of St. John Maroun, the first Maronite Patriarch of Antioch (685-707 A.D.) a monastic Church was established in a politically independent land (Lebanon). Thus, the Maronite Church may be seen as a perpetuation of the original Antiochene Church founded by Christ's disciples.

[4] The Maronite Catholic Church is an independent Church in full communion and unity with the Holy See in Rome.

4. The Life and Influence of Saint Maroun (±350 - 410 A.D.)

4.1 St. Maroun's Life

St. Maroun lived in the north of Syria in the fourth century A.D. and died at the beginning of the fifth century A.D. This was to initiate a new epoch and effect a transformation from paganism to Christianity in Lebanon.

No record exists of Maroun's origins. Parents, place and date of birth remain a mystery. Awit says: "He simply appeared there like Melchizedek, leaving after him a memory never to be forgotten, just like the Apostles" (Awit 1994:8). To date the most definitive biography of St. Maroun is chronicled in the *Historia Religiosa* (Dau 1984:163-168). It seems that he spent most of his life on a high mountain in the diocese of the city of Cyrrhus, a region of Antioch. According to the Maronite historian Patriarch Douaihy, this mountain was Ol-Yambos, known in antiquity as Mount Nabo, or Yambo in Syriac. He also lived in the village of Kefar-Nabo, located on the slopes of Ol-Yambos. Here, there existed a temple dedicated to the Assyrian god, Nebo. Within this temple was found a Greek inscription with the names of three of the cult's venerated gods. In the late fourth century, this temple was converted into a Christian church by the hermit, St. Maroun (Dau 1984:164-166).

St. Maroun is the patron saint (spiritual father and protector) of the Maronite Antiochene Syriac Catholic Church. His contemporary, Theodoret, described him as the ornament of the divine choir of saints. When he decided to live in quiet solitude, the saint ascended the summit of a mountain once sacred to the pagans.[5]

Maroun was an ascetic of the strictest order. He spent most of his time in the open air exposed to the harshness of nature. However, near the formerly pagan temple, he erected a small tent, which he rarely used except, perhaps, when compelled to seek shelter from extreme weather conditions. As an ascetic, he found the ordinary disciplinary practices unsatisfactory, and added to them his own more gruelling exercises as a means of gaining spiritual purification and enrichment.

It is claimed that he was gifted with miraculous powers. As a result of his numerous healings, his fame spread to the surrounding districts and farther afield. People needing his help came in ever-increasing numbers. He could cure not only the physically afflicted, but also victims of demon-possession. Moreover, he must have been endowed with charisma, for he was known to have influenced people to overcome their failings.

Within a religious and spiritual context, such a quality would be afforded greater value, and seem more miraculous than that of physical healing. After all, the primary concern of religion is the healing and cultivation of the soul - not the body. In this holy garden many other virtuous individuals also flourished. It seemed that the grace of God was prevalent in this garden, in which the healing of bodies and souls took place.

[5] *Pagan*: Lat. paganus from pagus or country (they moved from the city to the countryside)

The second piece of biographical evidence is a special letter addressed to St. Maroun by St. John Chrysostom while he was on his way to his exile (404-405 A.D.). The translation of the letter is as follows:

> To Maroun, monk and priest: the relations of friendship and love which bind us to you represent you as being always before our eyes, because the eyes of love pierce through the distance, and length of time does not weaken them. We would like to write to you often, if it were not that the distance is so great and that those who go from here to your region are so few in number. Now we send you our best greetings. Be sure that we never cease to remember you wherever we are, because of the high place you have in our esteem. Do not be shy of giving us your good news because this news gives us great consolation and joy in our lonely exile. When we hear that you are in good health our soul rejoices. All we ask you is to pray for us (Dau 1984:162).

4.2 Saint Maroun's Death and Relics

St. Maroun informed his disciples that when he died he wished to be buried in the same sepulchre as the hermit Zabina, his spiritual father. Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus, writes that St. Maroun left this life after a short illness which revealed together the weakness of his body and the strength of his spirit. After his death, the inhabitants of the neighbouring places fought for possession of his body, because it was believed that having a holy person buried close by would bring blessings and cures. Theodoret informs us that the inhabitants of the nearest and largest village came in great numbers, took possession of the precious body and built over his burial site a magnificent church. This village is called Brad (or Kapro-Brad, in the Byzantine era) (Dau 1984:166).

Theodoret tells us that in his day the relics of St. Maroun were venerated with great public solemnity. The relics were reputed to occasion miraculous cures. It was Theodoret's greatest regret that he never met this saint. But, Theodoret, realised that: "Even though we live far away from his benedictions, his blessing touches us and his memory is present in his relics, we must be satisfied with invoking his name when we cannot visit his temple" (Tayah 1987:25).

The skull of St. Maroun, in its reliquary, is in Volperino-Italy. It was brought by Michel degli Atti with the Crusaders from the east in 1130 A.D. according to oral and written history. The precious relic was then placed in a valuable silver reliquary. Since the twelfth century, the village of Valperino, celebrates the feast of St. Maroun and his relics on 17 and 18 of August (Marzetti 1998:1-2).

4.3 The First Open Air Monastic School

Established by Maroun, this school demanded of its pupils a strictly ascetic life. They were expected to suffer exposure to the natural elements in compliance with a vigorous system of bodily mortification. Maroun's monastic life was one of sacrifice and prayer. In the third and the fourth centuries there were two famous monastic schools: The first was the monastic school of Egypt, founded by Anthony the Great, 305 A.D. who established the life of seclusion, and individualism. Then St. Pachomius, 318 A.D. developed coenobitical monasticism in southern Egypt, and introduced the monastic common life. Both St.

Anthony and Pachomius lived in a shelter. The second was the monastic school on the river Euphrates and was established by St. Jacob of Nisbienne, who lived in winter in a cave, and in summer in the open air.

The monastic school of north Syria, was the creation of St. Maroun the founder of monastic life in the open air, weather notwithstanding. Bishop Theodoret wrote: " Maroun decided to live in the wilderness on top of a mountain, where he took refuge at rare times under a tent made of skins, in order to avoid the very bad weather" (Tayah 1987:19). This holy hermit was described by St. John of Chrisostom as a man of prayer. His new way of life and his gifts of miracles, in particular spiritual and physical healing, made the people swarm around him and seek his blessings. This was the reason so many faithful flocked to him, and wished to become his disciples and members of his community.

The Maronite monastic life is likened to a joyful spiritual journey with the victorious Christ and his edifying Holy Spirit back to our awaiting heavenly Father. This journey from earthly Jerusalem to the heavenly Jerusalem is described in the following terms: three births from three wombs, resulting in the power of the Holy Spirit, present in the mystery of this life and in the next. Thus we remember: (i) life - birth from mother's womb; (ii) baptism - spiritual birth from spiritual womb of baptism; (iii) death - life's passage through the tomb to new life.

4.4 The First Disciples and Monasteries of Saint Maroun

Many peoples gathered around St. Maroun and followed his way of life, living in the open air. Many of them were personally guided and trained by St. Maroun using the example of his own life. These disciples numbered eighteen - fifteen men and three women (Dau 1984:168,170).[6]

The origin of the monasteries of St. Maroun are rooted in the life of St. Maroun, his disciples, his surrounding community, and in the spirituality of the Antiochene Church There were thirty-three monasteries and religious places in the region of Antioch, Syria, the Maronite confederation headed by the monastery of St. Maroun, and united with Rome (Dau 1984:172-183).[7]

[6] Abraham of Cyrrhus apostle of Mount Lebanon, St. Eusebius of Cyrrhus, St. James of Cyrrhus, St. Limnoes, St. John, St. Moses, St. Antiochus, St. Antoninus, St. Zabina, St. Polychronius, St. Moses, St. Damianus, St. Simon Stylites, St. Baradate, St. Telileus, St. Marana, St. Kyra, St. Domnina.

[7] The monastery of Blessed Agapetos, Blessed Theodosios, Blessed Velentinus in Capriolo, Blessed Ezichius, Blessed Theodoros in Vasala, Blessed Belis, Blessed Basil, Blessed Barasoba, Blessed Thalassius, Blessed Gaianus, Blessed Eugraphus, Blessed Papula, Blessed Cyrillus, Blessed John and James, Blessed John, Blessed Paul, Blessed Isha, Blessed Visus, Blessed Asterius, Blessed Paul, Blessed Valentinus, Blessed Simon, Blessed James, Blessed John, Blessed Paul in Aqibrin, Blessed Dorotheos, Blessed Zoara de Thermis, Blessed Luke, Blessed Cyrus Thomas, Blessed Aaron, Blessed Euxerius, Blessed Thomas, Blessed Stephen Mauza Jamnia.

These disciples and monasteries were the foundation of the Maronite community which spread throughout Lebanon, without forgetting that Christianity in Lebanon had been established by the numerous visits and missions of Jesus to southern Lebanon (upper Galilee, Tyre and Sydon), and then later by his disciples. Through the holiness of St. Maroun and his community, Lebanon became the heart of the Maronite community, which strengthened Christianity in Antioch and the neighboring states, and later spread through the whole world, and is still spreading, mainly through the work of Maronite missionary priests.

5. Church of Martyrdom

There is a saying about the life of early Christianity and the true meaning of the word martyr, the meaning being 'true witness' viz. 'The blood of martyrs are the sprouting seeds of Christianity'.[8]

Before Pilate, Christ proclaimed that he had "come into the world, to bear witness to the truth" (John 1:6). The Christian is not to "be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord" (2 Timothy 1:8). St. Maroun and his followers down the ages, realised that in situations that require witness to the faith, the Christian must profess it without equivocation or fear, even if it requires a willingness to sacrifice one's life for one's beliefs.

Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith; it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom the Christian is united by love. He bears witness to the truth of the faith and Christian doctrine. He endures death through an act of fortitude. "Let me become the food of the beasts, through whom it will be given me to reach God" (St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch c. 50-117) (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church 1995:565*).

The Phoenician-Lebanese Church had considerable influence on early Christianity. They carried on the traditions, customs and spirituality of Christ. They supported the true eternal Christian Church headed by his appointed vicar, Simon Peter, the 'Rock': "And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it" (Matthew 16:18). During the first three centuries, the Phoenician Church was a shining light, producing many martyrs and saints especially in the city of Tyre. Here, a bloody persecution occurred in the reign of Diocletian and Maximian (284-305 A.D.) (Dau 1984:156).[9]

[8] These are the early martyrs and witnesses: first, the innocent infants of Bethlehem who were slaughtered by King Herod (Matthew 2:6-18), then Stephen the first Christian martyr (Acts 6-7), St. Takla, the first woman martyr, who was the disciple of St. Paul, Ignatius Theophoros (the God-bearer) martyr of Antioch + 107 A.D. the third successor of Peter to the See of Antioch (feast day commemorated 20 December), Romanos martyr of Antioch, beheaded + 303 A.D. (feast day commemorated in the Maronite Synaxarion, 18 November). Not forgetting the 500 martyrs of Tyre (feast day commemorated 19 February), and the 500 Maronite monks who were killed in the monastery of St. Maroun by the Byzantine army in 694 A.D. (Dau 1971:83, Arabic Edition).

[9] This included the martyrdom of Christina of Tyre (± 300 A.D.), St. Theodosia of Tyre, St. Aquilina of Byblos (± 293 A.D.). St. Barbara of Baalbeck (Heliopolis, 237 A.D.), St. Eudoxia of Baalbeck (± 237 A.D.).

5.1 Disciples of Saint Maroun, 350 Maronite Martyrs (± 517 A.D.)

After the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, which, in 451 A.D. condemned the errors of Eutyches and affirmed that in the person of Christ there was both a human nature and a divine nature. Syria was divided between those who upheld the Council and those who opposed it. The monastery of St. Maroun, and all the cells surrounding it (300 cells according to Arab historian Maso'udi (± 956 A.D.), supported the declarations of this Council and its teachings. "They followed St. Maroun and longed for unity; they were named for him and became his church, suffering persecution and massacres" (Awit 1994:8).

The leader who opposed and rejected the general Council and its teachings was Patriarch Severus; his followers held that in Christ, the incarnate Word of God, there was but a single human-divine nature (Dau 1984:172).

In the year 517 A.D. a large group of monks left the monastery of St. Maroun, and went to the monastery of St. Simon the Stylite, the disciple of St. Maroun near Alepo. On their way to the monastery the monks were arrested by a troop of partisans, followers of the heresy of the 'one nature' of Christ. Three hundred and fifty of the monks were killed. Only a few wounded survived, and managed to escape. Later a report addressed from Alexander, the superior of the monastery of St. Maroun, and the superiors of the neighboring monasteries, wrote to his holiness Pope Hormisdas (517 A.D). and informed him of the massacre by the Monophysites. They also reported that various monasteries were burned, and assured him that they remained faithful to the Church and that they did not fear death. This letter is reproduced below:

> To His Holiness and sublime Sanctity, Hormisdas, the Universal Patriarch, who sits in the See of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, Presented with Prayerful request from the humble servants the superiors of the monasteries in the region of Syria II and all her Monks.
>
> Because the grace of Christ, Our Saviour, inspired us to have recourse to your Beatitude, like one who takes refuge from the heavy rains and storms in a safe port, we believe that you are our refuge, though we suffer the direst hardship, we bear it with joy, believing, as we do, that the sufferings of this world are nothing compared with the eternal glory that will be revealed to us.
>
> Because Christ, our God, has established you as Sovereign and the Shepherd and Physician of souls, it is our duty to reveal to you what persecution we have suffered, and to make you aware of the unmerciful wolves, who are tearing to pieces the flock of Christ, and we ask you to drive away with your Sceptre the wolves from the sheep, and to heal the spirit with the word of the Lord's teaching, and cure them with the prayer, ... both Severus (Patriarch of Antioch) and Peter (Bishop of Apamea) ... for they are the ones trying to compel us to reject the truthful Chalcedonian Council ...
>
> While we were on our way towards St. Simon's Monastery for the well-being of the Church, we were attacked by wicked persons who killed 350 of us and injured as many. Even those of us who hurried to the churches to take refuge there, were killed before the altars. We beseech you, Holy Father, to rise with strength and

> zeal and to have mercy on our lacerated bodies, because you are the head of all ...because you are the true shepherd and the physician who takes care of the sheep, and their salvation: "I know my sheep and my sheep know me ..." (John 10:14-16). So don't neglect us, your Holiness, because every day we face mortal wounds.
> Signed: I am, Alexander, with the grace of God, Priest, Superior of the Monastery of St. Maroun. Then the signature of all the monasteries and fathers (Dau 1984:172-175).

The Pope responded to the letter on 10 February 518 A.D. and encouraged them to persevere in the Catholic faith, and praised the faith of the martyred monks of the monastery of St. Maroun. The Maronite Church celebrates in her calendar the feast of these 350 Maronite martyrs of St. Maroun's monastery on 31 July. Since that time, the Maronites have always faced the challenge of death for their faith. Individual and collective martyrdom have shadowed every century of their existence.

5.2 Saint John Maroun, first Maronite Patriarch and Leader (± 650 - 707 A.D.)

The namesake of St. Maroun the founder of the Maronite Church, St. John Maroun, was the first ecclesiastical Maronite Patriarch and spiritual and civil leader of the Maronites. He was the founder and organizer of the Maronite hierarchical structure, and a patriot who defended his people and accompanied them to Mount Lebanon during their persecution.

John was the son of Agathon of Alidipas, nephew of a French prince by name Carloman who came from France to Antioch. He was born in Sarum (Al-Sermaniat) in the district of Antioch. When he became a monk of St. Maroun, he took the name John Maroun. As a boy he entered the monastery of St. Maroun in Antioch, where he studied Syriac, Greek, the sciences, and Holy Scripture. He later went to Constantinople to continue his studies in Greek, Theology and Patristics. He returned to Antioch when he heard about the death of his parents, and there he was reunited with his sister and her two sons Cyhrrus and Abraham. A few years later he was ordained a priest.

John Maroun commenced to teach, supported the teaching of the Chalcedon Council, and converted many people to the Catholic faith. At the same time he was presented by the French prince Eugene, and the French colony of Antioch, to the Pope's delegate in Syria, who consecrated him bishop of Batroun and Lebanese-Phoenicia in 676 A.D. to preserve the Christian faith, and unity with the Catholic Church. It was then he wrote his book "Explanation of the Faith" to strengthen his people in the true faith. It was at the same time as his ordination in the school of bishops, the Maradites or the Al-Jarajimah [10] (Hitti 1957:66).

The Maradites were seeking an independent life away from the interference of the Byzantine Empire and Moslem persecution. The religion of the Maradites was Maronite. They were known as patriots of the Christian Catholic faith after the Chalcedon Council, and they desired religious freedom and independence from the Byzantine Empire, Muslim encroachment and the Umayyad Empire. They became the military organization of the Maronite community under the leadership of John Maroun, under whom they found their main stronghold and freedom in the lofty reaches of Mount Lebanon (Dau 1984:209). Later the Maradites extended their conquests to the mountain range extending from the region of Antioch to Jerusalem, and all Lebanon (Dau 1984:213).

[10] 'Free heroes of high stature' - Maradites: from a Lebano/Syrian people, the Amorites of the Bible, called Mardu by a Sumerian poet of the year 2,000 B.C.

> The policy of Islam in those days was to give the Christians a choice; either they could convert to Islam, or if they persisted in their faith they could pay a tax, the Jiziah, and accept humiliation, persecution and killing. *"Asslem Tasslam"* was a saying extant at the time meaning 'be Moslem and be safe'.

The Christian population of seven million dwindled until at present, in all Syria, they are numbered at less than one million. More than two million Christians have left their homes throughout the Middle East over the last five years from Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Algeria. The Maronites and Maradites under the guidance of St. John Maroun, decided to defend their freedom and religion, and according to the French historian Michel: "The Muslims suffered a great deal from the Maradites in the Lebanese Mountains" (Chabot 1903:455).

John Maroun joined his flock in Lebanon. Working with zeal, he devoted his life to obtaining freedom and independent rights for the Maronite nation, and working against the Byzantine Empire and Muslim encroachments. Later, at the death of the 69th Patriarch of Antioch, Contantinus, in Constantinople in 686 A.D. the Maronites and their allies elected their leader, John Maroun, as the seventieth Patriarch of Antioch. At that same time the Muslim Caliph Abd al-Malik (685 A.D.), and the Emperor of Constantinople, Justinian II (685 A.D.), objected to the new way of electing the Patriarch without their approval and tried to put an end to the Maradite peril.

Emperor Justinian II directed an armed force in 694 A.D. to crush the Maronite military power with the approval of the Umayyad Empire in the east and the Byzantine Empire in the west. The decisive battle took place at Semar-Gebail, where the Maronites conquered the Byzantine army and killed their generals Maurice and Mauricianos, under the leadership of Ibrahim, the nephew of St. John Maroun the head of the Maronite army.

John Maroun was not only a national leader but was considered a saint full of the zeal of the Apostles. Throughout his diocese he visited his people, teaching them the 'Good News', converting the heretics and sinners, comforting the weak, and healing the sick with his prayers (Dau 1984:220). Patriarch St. John Maroun died 9 February of the year 707 A.D. in the monastery of St. Maroun situated in Kefar-Hay Batroun, north Lebanon, and was buried there in the sanctuary which is consecrated to him (Shartouni & Al-Duaihy 1902:15). Previously, the Maronite Church celebrated his feast on 9 March, but in 1778, His Beatitude Patriarch Joseph Estephan, transferred his memorial to 2 March.

5.3 700 Year Old Maronite Mummies

Another part of Maronite history was discovered by speleologists from the *Group d'Etude et de Recherches Souterraines du Liban (GERSL)*. They found unexpected human remains on 13 July 1990, which consisted of mummified corpses in the 'Asi-al-Hadath Grotto or 'refuge-of-the-persecuted' [11] (*Momies du Liban* 1993:35-57).

[11] 99 KB, 1300 m. above sea level, 700 m. high

Apart from the mummies themselves, the wealth of artifacts found at the site suggest that the people buried there were Maronites from Al-Hadath village, and that their death occurred c. 1283, which corresponds to the reign of the Mameluks and the presence of the Crusaders. This is what happened according the testimony of a witness: "August 22, 1283 the Muslim soldiers headed toward Al-Hadath where the inhabitants took refuge in a magnificent and inaccessible grotto called Al-'Asi. The grotto was besieged for seven years... then its prefecture was burned by fire and the women were taken captive" (Duwayhi 1983:261. *Momies du Liban* 1993:94). A shrouded body belonging to a four month old infant was named Yasmine by her discoverers. They also found four more infants, three adult females, a male skull, and foetus. These companions had shared her grave-yard and kept Yasmine company for some seven hundred years (Hourani 1997:29).

The preliminary examination of the bodies revealed that they were naturally mummified, and had been perfectly preserved for over seven centuries in the grotto. The eight bodies were buried simply but with dignity. These mummies reveal the mystery of the life and death of the Maronite people who lived on Mount Lebanon and in its holy valley Qadisha or 'Valley of Saints' and reveal the faith and martyrdom of its inhabitants. Throughout their history, the Maronites were "so firmly attached to their religious beliefs, that they would prefer persecution to recantation" (Leroy 1963:106).

5.4 The Three Courageous Maronite Martyrs

During the middle of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Lebanon many of the Maronites died for their faith. According to the biography of (Fr.) Marchety while speaking about the French noble Francois De Chasteuil, who secluded himself for the latter part of his life in the holy valley Qadeesha, because he was attracted to the spiritual life of the Maronites and their sacred land, Lebanon, says: "The Maronite population of Mount Lebanon struggles under the banner of Christian self-sacrifice... we may consider this holy people as the purest and the most immaculate Christian nation, nothing disunites it from Christ's faith and his Church, in spite of the hardest difficulties, direst pains and injustice suffered by this nation, in which are realized the words of St. Paul: 'Who, then, can separate us from the love of Christ? Can trouble do it, or hardship or persecution or sword or danger or death?' and 'For your sake we are in danger of death at all times; we are treated like sheep that are going to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us! Nothing can separate us from his love; neither death nor life...' " (Romans 8:35-39) (Dau 1984:571).

5.4.1 The Martyr Abou Karam Ya'qub Al-Haddathy (1640)

The martyr Abou Karam was born in town of Hadath Al-Jubbeh. He was appointed governor by the Turkish in 1635. Later he was seized by the Turkish army and suffered martyrdom for the faith. According to an eye witness, (Fr.) Britius di Rennes, who assisted him in his last moments: "I was present to comfort him during this terrible torture and heard his confession. The pasha offered to save him and to gratify him with honours if he would become Muslim. Our hero explicitly asserted that he preferred to die for the faith and love of Christ. He was continuously praying to the Virgin Mary to assist him. His sufferings were crowned with martyrdom" (Dau 1984:574-575).

5.4.2 The Martyr Younes Abou Rizk Al-Besha'lany (1697)

The martyr Younes from the town Behe'ly-Tartej in the region of Batroun, was a wealthy and prominent man. When the Turkish pasha heard false accusations against him, he seized and imprisoned him with more than fifty members of his family including women, children and the elderly. The pasha promised to save him with all his family if he would deny Christianity and embrace Islam. Younes accepted on one condition, that he alone would accept Islam, but his family imprisoned with him would be given their freedom.

The pasha accepted his proposals, and when they obtained freedom, he sent them to a safe place and presented himself before the Patriarch repenting and renewing his Maronite faith, and denying the Muslim faith in his village and in the Supreme Court. Then after five years the new governor seized and imprisoned him for two years. He was finally condemned to death on the rod. They implanted the stake in the earth, letting him die thus impaled. He was led carrying his stake through the streets of Tripoli to a hill in the vicinity. The stake, about nine feet long, the end of which was sharply pointed, was thrust through his body until the stake appeared through his head and shoulders.

His sufferings were crowned by martyrdom on 21 May 1697. Many miracles were attributed to his relics and intercession.

5.4.3 The Martyr Kan'an Daher (1741)

Kan'an Daher was a governor of the district of Zawyet-Rash'in in the region of Tripoli and Zegharta in northern Lebanon. Kan'an was known for his courage and valour. In the year 1741, the Turkish governor of Tripoli seized him and proposed that he convert to the Islamic faith, giving promises of high position and wealth if he agreed, and threats of torment and death if he refused! When the sentence of death was proclaimed, Kan'an remained unbending and firm, professing his Christian faith. Then, he found a way of meeting his priest to whom he made a general confession, followed by the Last Sacraments and receiving of Holy Communion. Kan'an Daher was beheaded at Bab-Tabaneh in Tripoli. Many visitors to his tomb are reputed to have been granted miraculous graces. His hand, venerated at the Church of Our Lady in Tripoli, has been claimed as the source of many miracles. According to eye witnesses of the past, the miraculous hand of Kan'an was venerated by Christians and Muslims alike (Arida 1937:41-5).

According to the report of (Fr.) Britius, who describes the martyrdom of three other Maronites: "There are countless others who in different places have voluntarily preferred death to denying their faith in Christ and the Catholic religion" (Dau 1984:575).

5.5 The Modern Lebanon of the Maronites

Mount Lebanon the land of the cedars, which had became a refuge and safe haven to all those dreaming of freedom and dignity, faced serious trouble, and in this period the tragic massacres of the mid-nineteenth century and the three wars between Druzes and Christians of 1841, 1845 and 1860 occurred.

In April of 1860 hardly a Christian in the entire Druze region could call his life his own. During a short period of time more than sixty villages of al-Matan and al-Shouf lay in ashes. Many Christians were slaughtered and robbed (Hitti 1957:436).[12]

In the meanwhile the Christians in the Druze district, within a period of ten years, suffered upward of 700 murders and damage to property. These offences were committed with impunity and without even an attempt at investigation. Christians became increasingly insecure (Churchill 1920:111-12).

From Lebanon the persecution spread to Damascus, where the three Maronite Massabki brothers were martyred.

5.6 The Three Massabki Martyrs (1860 A.D)

During the fighting and the massacres in Syria and in Lebanon in 1860, great numbers of Christians were beheaded and killed for their Christian faith. The Scripture relates an appropriate conversation that Christ had with his disciples and his followers: "... then you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and put to death. All mankind will hate you because of me. Many will give up their faith at that time; they will betray one another and hate one another. Then many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Such will be the spread of evil that many people's love will grow cold. But whoever holds out to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24: 9-13).

Among those who 'held out to the end' were the Franciscan fathers and the three Massabki brothers who were all martyred at Damascus, Syria. The names of the three brothers were Francis, 'Abdel-Mo'tey and Raphael. They belonged to the Maronite Church in Damascus. Their father was Ne'meh Massabki who was born in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Francis married Elizabeth Sheeha and they had eight children. He possessed material and spiritual wealth and was known for his honesty and loyalty. He distinguished himself by his charity and generosity, assisting the needy and the poor, seeking help in Lebanon and foreign countries. The three brothers were models of Christian life in secular Maronite society. He and his brothers were respected by both Christians and Moslems for their charitable honesty and uprightness. Raphael was single and 'Abdel-Mo'tey was married. The generosity of Francis was shown in his magnificent house which was always crowded with guests, visitors, European pilgrims and travellers, all of whom enjoyed the kindest and most generous hospitality. This material wealth was only a reflection of his spiritual wealth and piety. It is reported that never a day passed without him attending holy mass and never a moment passed without him reflecting on the mightiness of his God.

[12] Such was the fate of the town Deir al-Qamar, which lost 2 600 men; Jazzin and its environs, where 1 500 were slaughtered; Hassbayya, where 1 000 of the Greek Orthodox population of 6 000 were killed; Rashayya, where 800 perished. In the towns, in the district of Zahleh, 12 000 succumbed and hardly a house escaped the carnage (Jessup 174-175). Added to this, Sidonian Moslems killed some 300 refugees. The total loss of life within the span of three months and the space of a few miles, was estimated at more than 12 000 individuals. The loss of property amounted to 4 000 000 pounds (about 40 Million Rand). This was during the harvesting of the silk crops, which was vital to the Lebanese economy. The damage caused embraced both churches and monasteries. (*Further Papers Relating to the Disturbances in Lebanon & Syria.* June 1860 London). (Hitti 1957:433-441).

On 9 July 1860, Muslim fanatics in Lebanon and Syria surpassed all in their cruelty and barbarity. In the evening, at eight o'clock, the three Massabki brothers were at the Franciscan church in Damascus, kneeling before the holy altar and saying their evening prayers as usual. Radical Muslims entered the church and gave the three brothers the choice between death or acceptance of the Muslim religion, saying: "*Asslem Tasslam*" meaning 'be Moslem and be safe'.

The three brothers answered: "You may destroy our lives but you cannot destroy our faith in Christ and our souls; we are Christians. In the faith of Christ we live and in the faith of Christ we shall die." This reminds us of the same words of Jesus Christ when he said: "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell" (Matthew 10:28). The Muslims killed the three brothers before the holy altar, cruelly, and without mercy. On that same night, eight Franciscan priests and brothers were killed for their Christian faith. Their bodies were buried in the Maronite church of Damascus. "The Christian quarter was set on fire and some 10 000 of its inhabitants were put to the sword. Three brothers, of the Maronite Masabiki family, were killed by the altar of the Franciscan church where they had sought refuge" (Hitti 1957:437).[13]

6. Church of The Incorruptibles

The Maronite Church was known as a Church of martyrdom and monastic life, but now she is seem as a Church of 'saints' and a Church of 'incorruptible bodies'. This is truly a remarkable phenomenon, and is considered the result of having lived a holy life.

Following are the names and short histories of the individuals, buried under Maronite auspices, who 'did not see corruption' (their bodies did not decay):

6.1 Patriarch Youssef el-Tyan (1796-1808)

Youssef el-Tyan was born in Beirut and educated at the Maronite college in Rome. He was ordained priest in 1784 and bishop of Damascus in 1786. He became Patriarchal Vicar in 1788 and was elected Patriarch on 28 April 1796.

After his retirement from the Patriarchate, el-Tyan experienced a hermit's existence, dedicating himself to prayer, meditation, asceticism and contemplative life, helping the poor and needy, but not, however, to the exclusion of teaching and missionary activities. He died 20 February 1820, at the Patriarchal seat of Qannoubin. His body was found to be still incorrupt a hundred years after his death (Dau 1984:721-723. See also Harb 1995:114-115).

[13] On 4 May 1926, His Beatitude Patriarch Hoyek, addressed a request to the Holy See, asking that the three Massabki martyrs be proclaimed saints. Then, later, a committee was sent by Rome to make the canonical inquiry in Lebanon and Damascus, concerning the lives and heroic virtues of the three brothers and the circumstances of their martyrdom. On 7 October 1926, His Holiness Pope Pius XI beatified the three Maronites brothers and martyrs (Dau 1984:765-767). The Maronite Church celebrates their feast day on 10 July.

6.2 Blessed Ne'mt-Allah Al-Hardini (1808-1858)

Ne'mt-Allah was born at Hardine-Batroun, north Lebanon in 1808. He received his elementary education at the monastery of Hub in the Batroun district. He made his religious vows on 14 November 1830, and was ordained to the priesthood on 25 December 1833. He was appointed spiritual director of the young students and as a counsellor, three times, for his order. He was deeply impressed by the holy life of the hermits, and was reputed to have performed many miracles during his life-time, and revered as a 'saint' both before and after his death on 14 December 1858. He was beautified on 10 May 1988, by His Holiness, John Paul II.

Fr. Ne'mt-Allah was known as 'the man of prayer and sacrifices'. On 16 June 1927, the commission investigating his life and virtues, found his body still intact and incorrupt sixty-nine years after his death (Azzi 1998:150-56). Many astonishing miracles and cures were obtained through Blessed Ne'mt-Allah, and more than one hundred and eighty miracles were attributed to his intercession. Some of these miracles were cures of cancer, paralysis, blindness, deafness and, on one occasion, he was reported as having 'raised' a child from death. Many of these miracles were confirmed through Church investigation.

6.3 Saint Charbel Makhlouf (1828-1898)

St. Charbel Makhlouf was born in the highest village above sea level in northern Lebanon, called Beka'-Kafra on 8 May 1828. He entered into the novitiate of the Maronite Lebanese Order on 1 November 1853. He was ordained in Bekerke on 7 July 1875 and received permission from his superiors to live in seclusion at the hermitage of saints Peter and Paul in 'Annaya on 15 February 1875. There, at the hermitage, he spent the remaining twenty-three years of his life in the practice of severe mortification and purification.

According to one of his companions, Fr. Butros Sibrini, it was said that during Charbel's entire monastic life, his body was on earth but his mind and heart were always in heaven. Fr. Butros described him as 'the angel'. A friend of the family was sent to the hermitage to invite Fr. Charbel to the funeral of his brother who had died in his home-town. Fr. Charbel declined the invitation saying: "My brother died yesterday, but I died and left this world when I entered the monastery." When his mother came to the hermitage to see him, he abstained from seeing her, saying: "We shall see one another in heaven" (Dau 1984:772-776). He died, and was buried on Christmas Eve at 'Annaya on 24 December 1898. According to monastic custom, the body, which was not embalmed, was dressed in the full habit of the Order and was consigned to the grave without a coffin (Daher 1952:23). St. Charbel Makhlouf was moved from his tomb six times because of the appearance of viscous liquid, and an extraordinary bright light emanating from his tomb, for forty-five nights (Cruz 1977:294-299).

"Perhaps the most amazing phenomenon in the modern world is the existence of the perfectly incorrupt and life-like body of the holy Maronite monk, St. Charbel Makhlouf ..." (Zayek 1977:7-8). The body of St. Charbel was found completely free of any trace of corruption and was perfectly flexible and life-like; the sweat of liquid and blood continued to exude from his body 'supernaturally' for sixty seven years until the day of his beatification in1965. Before and after his death, about four hundred miracles were attributed to him. His monastery collected over twelve hundred reports. Some of these were cures of cancer, paralysis, blindness, deafness (including twenty Moslems), and the 'raising' from the dead of two people. St. Charbel was canonized on 9 October 1977.

6.4 Father Daniel Al-'Alam (1815-1884)

Fr. Daniel Al-'Alam was born at Hadeth al-Jubbat, North Lebanon, in 1815. He entered the Lebanese Maronite Order in 1835 and was ordained priest at the monastery of Hub, North Lebanon, in 1838. Fr. Daniel Al-'Alam died at the monastery of St. Sarkis in Qartaba in 1884.

After his death, he was found to be wearing a hair-shirt under his clothes as a symbol of his sacrifice and self denial. A brilliant light was also to be seen shining from his sepulchre for four days. His body remained incorrupt long after his death, and many miracles and cures were reputedly obtained through his intercession (Dau 1984:779-780).

6.5 Brother Estephan Ne'meh Dau (1887-1938)

Br. Estephan Ne'meh was born at Lehfed in Byblos, Lebanon in 1887. He entered the Lebanese Maronite Order at the Monastery of Kefifane in Batroun, north Lebanon in 1905. His family tried many times to persuade him to leave the monastery and return home. His answer was always: "Here I have come, and here I shall die."

Br. Estephan lived a holy life, through his discipline, charity and kindness toward the working and the needy. He died on 30 August 1938. On 29 September 1962, his body was found incorrupt. After the doctors examined the body they confirmed, in an official report and by certificate, that his body was still well-preserved and free of any deformation. Allegedly, many miracles and healings have been obtained through his intercession.[14]

7. The Maronite Church Yesterday and Today

Maroun's example of spiritual life and the establishment of his monasteries, was an admirable epoch of history. His ideals, his leadership, and his love of God were inspiring, resulting in eight hundred adherents. These monks, including the 350 Maronite martyrs, were defenders of the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 541 A.D. Saint Maroun is held in the highest esteem by Maronites because it is considered that he gave the Christian world the true word of Jesus Christ.

The first Maronite Patriarch St. John Maroun, was chosen in 685 A.D. to defend and build a strong Maronite, independent nation. From the migration of many to join the existing Maronite community in the 'glorious' mountains and deep valleys of Lebanon, resulting in their finding natural protection and a safe haven, to the coming of the Crusaders and their influence on Maronite history and Liturgy (especially concerning Papal directives and missionary activity) the Maronite nation and faith increased and prospered.

His Holiness Pope Gregory XIII, established the Maronite College in Rome in 1584. The students of the College accounted for the spreading of information to Europe relevant to Eastern Catholic spirituality as derived from Christ. Patriarch Stephen Duaihy, in 1704 was the first to attempt a comprehensive history covering all aspects of the Maronite faith and history.

[14] Sr. Claire Abi-Habib suffered for ten years from a kidney disease which doctors of good reputation in the medical profession failed to cure. She visited the sepulchre of Br. Estephan, touched his relics, and was immediately cured (Dau 1984:781-83).

The Synod of Mount Lebanon in 1736 became the prime source of the Maronite reform. Patriarch Elias Hoyek was called upon to represent his people at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, and requested the recognition of the autonomy and geographic frontiers of Lebanon.

Some time after the Second Vatican Council in 1965, a special assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Lebanon was held on 12 June 1991, to reform and renew Lebanese Catholic Church spirituality and preserve its ancient tradition and spirituality. On 19 April 1986, the present Maronite Patriarch, His Beatitude Nasrallah Peter Cardinal Sfeir was elected, by the Maronite Synod of Bishops, Patriarch of Antioch and all East. The Patriarch resides in Lebanon and shepherds the entire Maronite Church throughout the world.

Including the inhabitants of Lebanon itself, there are over ten million Maronites worldwide. In and outside Lebanon approximately 30 Maronite Dioceses exist.

South Africa falls under the Maronite diocese of Alexandria, Egypt. The First Maronite and Lebanese immigrants arrived in Durban, Cape Town and Mozambique in 1892, and congregated around their local Catholic churches. In 1905 the first Maronite priest arrived and in 1928 the first Maronite missionary priests arrived to uphold the Maronite rite and serve the Maronite community in South Africa, which numbers approximately twenty-five thousand Lebanese.[15]

Beginning with the immediate disciples of Jesus who fled Jerusalem to settle in Syria and other countries surrounding Israel because of persecution, and including the early followers of St. Maroun, the founder of the Maronite Church, there has never been a substantial period free of harassment and discrimination for the Lebanese Maronites. This situation has not been alleviated to any great extent over the last one hundred years. Many Maronites have been forced to flee Lebanon and face loneliness and exile in foreign countries. The tragic event of the 1970's war in Lebanon is a delicate and complicated subject, and at times seems incomprehensible. Having survived a twenty year war, it is fervently hoped by the Lebanese people and in particular the Maronites, that the day will dawn when Lebanon will be entirely autonomous, governed with justice and compassion.

8. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter provides a brief overview of the travels of Jesus in Lebanon, as well as the missionary work carried out by the early disciples and the Apostles of Jesus. The history of the Maronite Church, and its origins, is discussed, with an emphasis on individuals and geographical areas relevant to the evangelisation of the peoples of Antioch, Syria and to a lesser extent Lebanon, and the evolution from pagans to Maronite Christians. The martyrdom of various respected and prominent early Maronite Christians is also discussed, giving a brief synopsis of each martyr's history, the prevailing attitude of their geographical contemporaries, and their developing relationship with the Church of Rome.

[15] Presently, two Maronite churches, Our Lady of the Cedars of Lebanon and Our Lady of Lebanon, are situated in Johannesburg, and are attended by a strong Maronite community dedicated to the continuation and strengthening of their faith, tradition and history. With the Maronite churches and their faithful congregation, the South Africa Lebanese moved into the new millennium as a strong committed community and as steadfast and loyal followers of the teachings of Christ.

This chapter provides a basis for an understanding of the customs and traditions of the Maronite Church from the perspective of the historical background of its foundation, including information about the pagan religions and gods which were of relevance to it. St. Maroun and his disciples carried out their commission to witness to the truth from the standpoint of a people committed to the idea of an exile on earth, leading, through renunciation of sin, dedication to a pure way of life and an absolute devotion to Christ, to a life hereafter united with Christ in the 'heavenly' Jerusalem. Thus a pattern is established of life coming forth from death, which will be further explored in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 3

LEBANESE FUNERAL CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1. Introduction

The mystery of life, death and resurrection of the spirit in the afterlife, which can be defined as 'life... death... life' has provided a compelling fascination for humanity since the dawn of history. Burial rites have been at the heart of the mystery, in that it was believed (and to a lesser extent is still presently believed), that the manner and type of burial rite profoundly affected the soul's journey in the spiritual world after the death of the physical body. Burial rites are also implicit in the belief of a successful resurrection of the body at a certain predestined time in the future, known in Christianity as the 'end of days' or Judgement Day.

The phenomena of religion and its attendant burial rites, is a common factor in all human existence since prehistoric times. Even Neanderthal man is reputed to have placed flowers in the graves of his deceased. Religious faith has developed from an instinctive thirst and hunger for knowledge, to intellectual reasoning, and finally to receiving knowledge through divine inspiration assisting humanity in its search for happiness through faith and knowledge. It can be argued that wisdom, or knowledge correctly understood and used in the spiritual sense, is closely aligned with love. The Christian understanding is that love is the key to the attainment of truth and wisdom.

Knowledge of and interest in religious phenomenon is shown clearly in the ancient roots preceding the establishment of Christian culture, heritage and history in Lebanon. In the past Christianity has faced many challenges and crises of opinion in theological terms, but at present liberation theology, and the major problems of interpretations relevant to the pastoral, sociological, philosophical, spiritual and liturgical fields, present a challenge of unprecedented magnitude.

Teilhard de Chardin, the theological philosopher and scientist, said: "The more man knows, the closer he gets to his fellow man" (Harb 1984:13). Adding to this observation one can also say that, the more man knows, the more intimately he comes to know himself and God. Regarding this issue, all Eastern and Western rites, including all denominations, are called to renew their earliest roots according to their own traditions and customs. The Vatican II Council fathers, when discussing ecclesiastical burial, said: "The rite of the burial of the dead should evidence more clearly the paschal character of Christian death, and should correspond more closely to the circumstances and traditions found in various regions. This latter holds good also for the liturgical colour to be used" (Abbott 1967:81).

When a member of the Maronite Catholic community dies, the deceased's priest, family and friends gather to bid farewell to him. This gathering with its biblical prayers, rituals, signs and symbols, allows for a better understanding of the liturgical content and value of the ceremony. The pre-burial or 'gathering' ceremony, and the burial ceremony as it is practised generally, raises important questions about how people live today and what their thoughts about death are, such as what non-Christians think about death and its influence on Christian life? Does the Catholic Christian way of life, their Church, spiritual practice and liturgy, provide a clear example of the significance and value of Christian faith and hope?

Again, it can be asked whether the Christian liturgy and ritual implicitly demonstrate the veracity of a loving Father in heaven, hell, purgatory, final judgment and the resurrection, the beatified vision, the New Jerusalem, the second coming of Christ and, finally, Christian hope.

Turning to Lebanese society in particular, living in a relatively small area bordering the Mediterranean sea, and part of Middle Eastern culture, the different religions and philosophies between Christian and non-Christian complicate social attitudes and relationships. Each religion has its own principles, ritual, custom, and belief in death and the afterlife. Lebanese Maronite Catholic society must, in this plethora of ideas and beliefs, maintain an integrity of vision and practice. Pastoral work carried out by Maronite Religious (priests, nuns, and lay persons) should always be objective and informative, rejecting intolerance, and building a spirit of solidarity and healing in society in general.

In Christian burial, in spite of the atmosphere of grief and mourning, death is not considered as negative and does not signify the end of consciousness, but rather a new birth and incorporeal resurrection in harmony with the resurrection of Jesus, the Risen Lord, symbolised by his empty tomb. Burial and its attendant ritual and custom, also serves to provide further opportunity for the living to renew their faith and relationship with Jesus Christ.

In order to understand and discuss Christianity in Lebanon, a brief survey of reports of religious phenomenon and religious developments in Lebanon's culture, from prehistoric times until the dawn of Christianity, must first be considered, viz. from the period of Phoenician-Lebanese religion to the period of Christian-Lebanese religion. In addition the Lebanese funeral customs will be described and discussed .

2. Phoenician-Lebanese Religious Roots Before Christianity

The overview of ancient Lebanese religion, beliefs, behaviour, rites and myths, aims at pointing out the important factors which anticipated the advent of Christianity in Lebanon; recognising that the development of religious faith does not occur in a vacuum, but instead is the product of gradual comprehension and understanding. Christ said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5: 17), thus promoting the idea of continuity instead of destruction.

One of the most important features of religious thought in prehistoric Lebanon, came to light with the discovery of the prehistoric man of Antilyes in the grotto of the village of Antilyes, excavated by the American archaeologist Franklin Ewing in 1947 (Ewing 1947:186). Living some 46 600 years ago, the man of Antilyes was given a regular burial, which means according to a specific rite. Stone utensils and food were placed with the deceased. The placing of goods in the grave indicates a belief in the afterlife. The goods were most probably considered to be provision and protection for the deceased. According to the archaeologist Hewing, this convincingly argues that the prehistoric man of Antilyes grotto believed in life after death. It fairly certain that the ancient Lebanese in general maintained a belief in an afterlife (Harb 1984:15).

The French archaeologist Maurice Dunand, discovered huge oval shaped burial jars in Byblos (known today as Jbeil) dating back to the fourth millennium B.C. The dead were buried in a fetal position in oval brick jars, with utensils, arms and jewelry (Jidejian 1968:6). The oval shape of jars is a symbol that the Lebanese have used since time

immemorial to express a belief in creation and life. The oval, egg-like shape, is still used as a symbol of Easter and Christ's resurrection.

2.1 Phoenician-Lebanese Sacred Land and Beliefs

Lebanese religious fervour is manifested in numerous temples and sanctuaries throughout Lebanon. Archaeologists consider Lebanon as having one of the densest concentrations of temples in the world. The ancients called this land "divine," "the seat of gods," and "the mountain of God." The Roman historian Pliny (first century B.C.), told those who wished to visit Lebanon: "If you come to this land, respect its gods" (Harb n.d.:16).

Among the most ancient temples in the world is the one discovered by Dunand in Byblos (Harb n.d.:15-16). This temple dates back to the beginning of the third millennium B.C. Three rooms comprising the cellar of the temple, indicate a belief in the triad or the three gods El, Astarte and Adon. The gods were "worshipped as 'lords' of the urban settlements and not as the ancestral protectors of the tribe" (Smith 1995:839-840). The rooms are in the main courtyard where the worshippers used to gather for prayers and to practise their rituals.

The triad worshipped by the ancient Lebanese represents life or fertility in nature, animal and man, and is based on male/female duality. This duality is a prerequisite for birth and life. The male and fatherhood are related truths, and this applies to the female and motherhood as well. The father is the impregnator and the female is the impregnated. A female cannot be a mother nor can the male be a father except in relationship to a third entity, the child. The son, in Lebanese spirituality, is the progeny of the male and female and an incarnation of fertility. The father, mother and son are the three indivisible entities united in one essence called the trinity, and representative of life.

Throughout the ages the Lebanese have held sacred the principle of existence, renewal and life, and attributed to it three manifestations - the father named EL, the mother named Ashtarut or Astarte, and the son named Adon/Adonis or lord. In the Bekaa valley the Lebanese triad is clearly represented in the temple of Baalbek. Three temples existed in Baalbeck joined in one structure (the ruins are still extant) - one for the great god EL, Jupiter to the Romans, one for Astarte or Venus, the mother goddess, and one for Adon, the son god.

EL, the Phoenician-Canaanite god, goes back to the Ugaritic Semitic religion which characterized *EL* as the father and creator. This Phoenician god's name was adopted and taken over by the three Abrahamic religions. In Hebrew *EL* is called *El-ohim*, known in the Aramic-Syriac churches as *Al-loho*. Later, this became *Al-lah* in the Arabic language, as used in Islam. Today, EL is known to us in English as God (Smith 1995:1105).

The following illustrates the Phoenician, Greek and Roman pantheon as it relates to their gods and the buildings dedicated to their dead (Sarkis 1980:211-219):

PHOENICIAN		GREEK		ROMAN
EL (father)	=	Kronos	=	Saturn
Baal	=	Zeus	=	Jupiter
Reshef	=	Dionysus	=	Bacchus
Eshmoun	=	Asclepios	=	Esculape

Melkart	=	Heracles	=	Hercules
Mot (death)	=	Hades	=	Pluto
Yam	=	Poseidon	=	Neptune
Astarte	=	Aphrodite	=	Venus
Adon	=	Adonis	=	Adonis

The triad is illustrated in a triple flight of stairs and in the three doors leading to the main courtyard of the temple. The altar is made up of three sections. In the podium of the main temple, the temple of EL, there is a ridged trilithon of three stones. At present this ridged stone of the trilithon type can still be seen in this quarry. It is considered the largest construction stone in the world. Thus, the belief in the triad was an ancient Lebanese creed which facilitated the acceptance of Christianity in Lebanon. The belief in the pagan triad was easily transformed into the belief in the Christian Trinity. The transformation included the change from the worship of physical fertility to the worship of spiritual fertility, and thence to a belief in the unity of essence untarnished by a variety of deities and a materialistic outlook.

The most famous religious centre in the Lebanese mountains illustrating devotion to the triad, is Afka in the upper Byblos region. The Lebanese believe that the grotto at Afka, which in Phoenician means 'flowing water', is the seat of the high god EL, the father. The water running from the grotto forms one of the most verdant rivers in Lebanon. The Lebanese named this river after the young son god, Adon. The Lebanese built a gigantic temple over the stream and consecrated it to the mother god, Astarte. In the fourth century A.D. this temple was turned into a church consecrated to the Virgin Mary, following the spread of Christianity in the Lebanese mountains.

Worth mentioning here is that most Christian churches were built over the ruins of ancient temples as was commonly the practice wherever new churches were erected, both in Lebanon and Europe. Ernest Renan, who was commissioned by Napoleon III to make a survey of the historical sites of Phoenicia, said that there was hardly any place to be compared with Lebanon, where generation succeeded generation in praying and worshipping at the same places (Jidjian 1968:2-4).

This temple at the grotto at Afka, and the village, was converted to Christianity by Abraham Cyrrhus, the disciple of St. Maroun. When Abraham heard that paganism still existed in that particular village, he went there with some companions and converted the people to Christianity. The entire population abandoned Astarte/Venus and instead worshipped Christ. The Adonis river later became the Abraham river. This is how Christianity spread in the mountains in all Lebanon in the early beginning of the fifth century (Dau 1984:184-186). In a niche in the wall of the temple of Astarte in Afka, there is a portrait of the Virgin Mary feeding Christ. The 'mother of life' Our Lady of Afka, is honoured by all sects in the region, and is known as the Nursing Madonna or Lady Venus. Venus, former 'saint' of barren women, is one of Astarte's names. Barren women pray and give offerings to her in the hope of bearing children. It should be noted here that although the Phoenician view of Astarte (Ishtar) is based primarily on the idea of the Mother Goddess, in the Mesopotamian myth Ishtar or Inanna is the goddess of violence, war, and sex, but not of procreation (Smith 1995:711). Several shrines in Lebanon are consecrated to the Nursing Madonna, a phenomenon rarely found elsewhere. Moreover, Lebanon is one of the few countries in the Christian world to celebrate three fertility related feasts in honour of the Virgin Mary, the 'mother of life': Our Lady of Grains (15 December), Our Lady of the Harvest (15 May), and our Lady of the Vines (15 August) (Gemayel 1984:1146-1147).

The deification of fertility was a common tendency of ancient nations, and was usually accompanied by rites and festivals often related to a legend of a humanised god. In the case of the legend of Adon or the Lord, who symbolizes youth, beauty, fertility, life and resurrection, following a fight with a boar embodying Mot, god of death and sterility, Adon meets a tragic end. Astarte bewails Adon's death, carries his body to the mountain Afka and buries him there. Following his decent to hell, however, Adon rises and triumphs over death. As the Lebanese mourned the death of Adon, so they rejoiced in his return from the world of the dead. They exchanged greetings saying: "Adon has risen, verily risen" (Harb n.d.:21).

Overlooking the valley where the Adon river runs, there is a stele representing the fight between Adon and Mot, showing Astarte in a sad mood. Until today, on Easter Sunday all the Lebanese exchange greetings saying: "Al-Masseh kam ! Hakan Kam! Christ has risen! Truly risen!" (The Maronite Liturgical Year 1982:203). The legend of Adon symbolises the natural cycle and the belief in renewal and resurrection. The belief in resurrection is one of the main Lebanese creeds which has paved the way for Christ and Christianity in Lebanon. The festivals that were held are symbolised in the names given to some villages overlooking the sacred valley, and which names were related to the rites of Adon, his birth, his life, his death and resurrection. *"Yahshoush"* for example means 'tortured' or 'suffering' in Syriac, to denote Adon's suffering and death (Harb 1984:22).

From time immemorial, Lebanon has been the site of redemption, and this, seen in retrospect, is the mistaken idea that child sacrifice would promote general human welfare bestowed on man by the gods. These rites, and the pain, sorrow, and agony inherent in them were not entirely alien to Christianity; thus the Lebanese sympathized with and understood the new religion and its portrayal of suffering and pain, because they found in it an embodiment of their legends and beliefs.

3. Ritual of Death in the Mediterranean Area before Christianity

Death can be compared to a wild explosion which appears to upset the laws of nature as we experience them, and gives rise to feelings of confusion, frustration and sadness in those who witness it. Death provides the entrance to the great unknown and is often incomprehensible in its mystery. It is unavoidable and the great leveller of human beings. At death the deceased becomes a stranger to us; many tribal groups believe, unless specific death rituals are performed, that the deceased's spirit can become troublesome and even dangerous to his own family. That is why the performance of death rituals at the moment of death, serves to bring a sense of normality and peace into the situation, and also 'protects' those concerned from the effect of a 'troublesome' spirit. In Christianity, death rituals serve to bring the family and community together in a spirit of love, harmony and compassion, to pay their last respects to the dead.

3.1 The gods Tames, Adon, and the Symbols of Death and Life - the Moon and Sun

The most important and relevant rituals with respect to death and life are found in the Phoenician, Babylonian, Sumerian, Ugaritic, and Egyptian mythologies, especially in the myths and legends concerning Tamouz, Adonis, Osiris, Horus and other gods of various Mesopotamian and Egyptian inspired religions (Smith 1995:708). The poetry we find in all the rituals and customs accompanying death in general, the death of gods in particular, and the concomitant mourning of the people, point to the hope that the soul will not be annihilated at the death of the physical body, but will undergo resurrection. In this poetry

we find not only death but also the mystery of life. Prayer and ritual are designed to inspire the mourners to have confidence in the reality of the afterlife.

The most important symbols of death and life are the moon and the sun. The story of the moon tends to tragedy, as the moon undergoes waning and waxing and at times appears to 'die'. The moon can, therefore, be connected to the ebb and flow of the life of man, while the sun being constant, rises and sets without transformation. As a symbol of permanence, it was used by many ancient peoples to portray God.

3.2 Gilgamesh, Astarte, Baal Allian and Anat

One of the most important works of poetry concerning the search for eternal life and everlasting youth, is the epic of Gilgamesh, the legendary king of the Sumerian city-state Uruk. It is the story of a great man's struggle with life and the human condition. He discovers that fame is worthless when his dearest friend Enkidu dies. His search for the fountain of youth takes him to the Babylonian Noah, Utnapishtim, and eventually gains him wisdom when he accepts his humanity and attains peace of mind and soul.

The destiny of the Phoenician-Canaanite god Adon, was to die like any human being even though he was the son of the high god EL. He is thought to have been the god of fertility, incarnation, impregnation and the renewal of life, which is why 'life' itself is said to have wept upon the occasion of his death. The god Baal Allian, also the son of EL, was the god of spring, and yearly fought against the god of heat, drought and death, during which time he would be killed by 'death'. In turn, with the help of his virgin sister Anat, he succeeded in destroying death. This was believed to be an annual occurrence, after which the rains returned and life burgeoned once more during spring.

Here we experience two facets of one reality; death and life are both part of one reality of existence. Later, we again find with Jesus Christ that his death and resurrection are two facets of one reality. In all poetry about a humanised god we find an example of the human condition, the fight for survival, the pain and pleasure of existence, and the destiny and ambition to live eternally.

To quote from the Gilgamesh poem:

> Astarte went to the earth where there is no return,
> to the earth of death and darkness,
> to the earth of disaster, to the house of darkness,
> to the house where there is no return for those who enter it,
> to the road where there is no return,
> where they are deprived of light,
> where the dust is their ration, and their food the mud,
> where they can see no light but live in darkness.
> In this forest live the Hambaba whose name is fear,
> Hoowa is the machine to demolish;
> this demolishing will be a great mourning and a painful tragedy,
> while wearing the robe of mourning, with long hair,
> amidst the crying and flowing tears
> (Tabet & Mouannes 1990:10).

3.3 Annoma-Elish

The poetry of creation "Annoma-Elish," which is from the first millennium B.C. concerns the burial of the dead and its attendant rituals and elements. The elements of this poetry are amazing when one considers that, broadly speaking, one still uses the same words and the same principles when trying to comprehend death. In the poetry of creation we find the perennial desire of man to understand the inherent mystery of this universe and to explain the function and role of life and consciousness.

The widespread belief in ancient days was that the earth was the place of the living, and the underworld, physically situated in the interior of the earth, the place of no return - the place where the dead exist in gloomy shade. The dead who supposedly inhabited this underworld were, in fact, known as 'shades'. The same words and general principles are used today to describe the world of the dead.

3.4 Ugaritic Poetry

In the last part of the Ugaritic Baal poem regarding the fight between Baal and death, the reader finds himself empathising with Baal's experience of life and death. It can be said that his fight is our fight, his sufferings our sufferings, and his resurrection our resurrection. This is part of human existence, part of the misery and joy of the human condition. These death rituals are practised in order to understand and cope with loss, to assuage fear, and in the attempt to understand and cope with grief.

This is exactly the situation of the god EL and Astarte, and is also reflected in the 'death' and 'rebirth' of nature. It is the situation of every human being who finds him or herself facing an unknown destiny; either their own impending death or the death of a loved one.

> The powerful Baal died,
> the master of the earth was destroyed.
> EL descended from his throne.
> He sprinkled the dust of sorrow on his head,
> the dust of sadness on his body
> He dressed in sackcloth.
> He wounded himself with a stone.
> He wounded his cheek and his chin.
> He opened notches in his arm,
> ploughing his chest like the tiller ...
> Oh, Baal has died!
> What is going to happen to the people?
> I am going to descend, and follow Baal into the depths of the earth.
>
> This is what Astarte did when she heard about him.
> She wounded her face, arms, and breast.
> She dressed in sackcloth.
> She mourned in a loud voice.
> She drowned in her tears,
> she was drinking her tears like wine.
> She shouted in a loud voice.
> She mourned him, she buried him;
> she lay him in the depth of the earth.

Placed on the coffin, a great sacrificial emblem,
the heart of Astarte, facing Baal like the mother's heart.
She took death and pushed him away.
She crushed him with the tassels of his own robe.
She shouted and screamed in a loud voice:
'Oh death, give me back my brother'
(Tabet & Mouannes 1990:11-14).

In the liturgy, death rituals, burials and customs of the Maronite Church, the words of this poem finds a reflection, in that the reactions which occur within us at the time of sudden death and tragedy are very similar to the emotions expressed.

3.5 The Elements: Water, Cloth, Oil, Bread and Incense

As there are ritual elements used for life, there are also ritual elements used in the burial preparations after death to enable the body to maintain incorruptibility, and to enable the soul to cross safely into the afterlife during the 'battle'with death.

In the highest there was no name for heaven
and the earth was not called by that name.
It was nothing, only pure water ...and the clouds and the salty water.
All its water in one abyss ...
Then the gods were created in that water;
its life born from the water, its death born also from life.
And, when they offer to you the water of death, do not drink from it.
It's the anarchy, the anarchy surrounding the universe,
and death is the anarchy itself surrounding life.
That is why it is necessary for the departed to complete all rituals,
put on the robe of departure, and anoint his body with oil
assuring that it will safe for him to cross into battle.
And then they will offer you oil to anoint your body.
The priest, who is blameless, will anoint you with oil
(Tabet & Mouannes 1990:10).

3.6 The Ritual of Resurrection

These ancient death rituals may seem without hope and sympathy, but there exists another ritual called the ritual of return and resurrection. Here one meets again the provisional elements: bread, water and incense. The goddess Annana asks the intervention of the god Ankey, since he knows the mystery of the 'bread of life' and the 'water of life', to bring back the god Tamouz to life:

Sprinkle him with the water of life
One drop of pure water; a humble gift
but nothing more precious than it; for the traveller crossing the desert.
Wash him with pure water. Anoint him with sweet oil.
Dress him in the red robe, and let them inhale the incense.
And then it will be the resurrection of the dead [1]
(Tabet & Mouannes 1990:11).

[1] Maronites still sprinkle the coffin of the dead with holy water, and the sick and the dying are still anointed with a special healing oil. This is known as the 'sacrament of the sick'. Oil is also used to anoint in a wide variety of sacraments. This is still practiced in the Maronite rite of the Incense Prayer or *Salat Al-Bakhour*

4. Traditional Customs - Maronite Mummies (700 Years Old)

To find the origin of the Maronite mummies, it is necessary to go to the year 1283, the time of the Mamluks (military slaves, and part of Muslim military forces in medieval times) when the Maronite Church was undergoing an appalling martyrdom of its members. The eight Maronite martyrs took refuge in the 'Asi-al-Hadath grotto in the holy valley during the persecution, as mentioned above.[2]

The condition of these Maronite mummies has much to teach us about natural preservation which is a very rare phenomenon, if we compare it with the elaborate burial preparations which attended the mummification of the various Pharaohs and their families. The Maronite martyrs were simply buried without any complicated preparations. The burial procedures reveal striking parallels with funeral customs and rituals still practiced in Lebanon today. A mother was found buried with her eighteen month old child (called 'Jasmine' by her discoverers). The infant had been placed on the mother's left shoulder. This method of burial is still practiced in Lebanon, when the death of both mother and child are caused by complications in the birth process. Another interesting comparison is that the mother was found with pieces of cotton and cloth inserted in both her vaginal and anal orifices. This preparation of the deceased for viewing is still practiced at the present time. In some areas of Lebanon the cotton and cloth pieces are wrapped around a small onion and inserted in the human orifice. Another ritual manifestation is the presence of long black human hair found between the mother's toes. It probably belongs to her, as the local tradition has it that the grieving mother will pull out her hair while kissing the feet of her lost child (*Momies du Liban* 1993:40).

Also, a wooden house-key was found on the body of the child (*Momies du Liban* 1993:40). In accordance with traditional custom, at the funeral of the last surviving member of a family, the key to the deceased's house is tossed over the roof of their house, indicating that the house will be closed for ever. In this case the person died in a besieged grotto, so the key was tossed in the grave of the child. The mourners until today, and in the same circumstances, will comment on this by saying: "Pity this family, their house is closed for ever."

5. Death Rituals in Lebanon after Christianity

In Lebanon there are seventeen religious communities which have much in common but also some differences. For present purposes, only Christian funeral customs, and the Maronite rites in particular, are relevant. It is important to bear in mind that some of these customs are no longer practised in Lebanon in their entirety, but with judicial comparison of the past and present, it may be found that modern practice is a continuation of ancient practice.

5.1 At the Hour of Death

At the hour of death, Maronites and others of the Catholic faith call a priest to the dying person, in order to prepare him for a peaceful and holy death, to meet his creator, trusting in God's mercy and having fulfilled all his Christian duties. Then all relatives, neighbours

[2] See Chapter Two, section 5.3 - The Maronite Mummies.

and friends will come to his house to say goodbye to him and console and strengthen his family. With the priest near him and well wishers surrounding his bed, the "prayer of the dying" will be said. Holy water will be sprinkled around his bed and on him, while he confesses the sins he has committed during his life, and repents. Only at this stage will the priest give him absolution, i.e. the priest forgives the sins of the dying person on behalf of God.

If his death is prolonged, the priest will ask the people to share with him the "prayer for the intention of the dying person." Then all kneel, surrounding his bed praying, striking their chests and their faces as a sign of respect. At that same time the priest will watch the one who is dying very carefully so that, as he breaths his last breath, he may give him final absolution, saying: "I absolve you from all your sins" making a sign of the cross three times, once before "in the name of the Father" then again before "and of the Son" and lastly before "and of the Holy Spirit." He then says: "Amen" which means "so be it." The priest will then offer his condolences to the family, saying: "Long life for you after him" or saying: "Allah Yerhamo" which means "God's mercy on him."

After this, various women will come to comfort the female members of the family of the deceased. Other women will prepare the clothes of the deceased, and hot water will be used for the cleaning and purification of the body.

5.2 Shouting of the Deceased

Customs which are pertinent to the time shortly after the moment of death, include that of the "screaming of the deceased." When the mourners hear this expression, they will shout and scream with loud voices. All the men and women run about, shouting and crying, and the family of the deceased will kiss him, while hitting themselves on their cheeks. They tear their clothes, cut their hair and place the hair on the body of the deceased, after which they apply black smoke or soot to their faces as a sign of grief. All these customs at the moment of death or shortly thereafter, are to help the mourners in honouring their loved one, and to visibly demonstrate the extent of their grief. The sorrow of the bereaved family tends to be expressed in typically Middle-Eastern manner, which is usually emotional and even hysterical. Sorrow is also expressed in this manner because of a desire to manifest openly to neighbours and others present, the depth of their emotion.

5.3 Washing of the Deceased

After the death of the deceased the family leaves the room. Then, several old and respected women will arrive to wash the body, whether male or female. Men may not wash the body of a woman. This function is reserved for females out of a sense of respect, and usually only close female relatives will wash and place the body in its coffin. A pregnant woman cannot wash the deceased since there is new life in her, and there is a superstition that contact with the dead will effect her detrimentally. There is also a belief that the spirit of the deceased may influence her, and bring shame on her and her descendants. This superstition relates to the reality that two diametrically opposite events - life and death - should not, and, indeed, cannot occur at the same time or place. The world of the living cannot meet the world of the dead.

The bereaved family will not be allowed to cook or prepare food during the mourning period, nor will they be allowed to take part in the arrangements to invite people to attend the gathering to commemorate the dead. They will also not be allowed to hand out the *"Al-*

Na'awe" or "death announcement." A male, who is not related to the immediate family, will either volunteer or be contracted to make the necessary arrangements.

The practice of these superstitions can be traced back to the thinking of the ancient inhabitants of Lebanon before Christianity. This thinking has influenced the customs and rituals practiced by the present day Christian population, although it is rare because of a more thorough education in modern times.

5.4 The Ornamentation and Exposition of the Body of the Deceased

After washing the dead person, he/she is placed on a board, and cotton is plugged in his/her ears, nose and mouth. His/her hands and feet will also be placed in the correct position. He/she will be shaved and his/her hair will be tidied and perfumed. In some cases a hair dresser attends him/her. The clothes worn at the time of death should not be given to anyone else as a gift, but should preferably be burnt completely. The belief is that the person wearing someone's 'death' clothes will be cursed. Any other clothes the deceased owned should be given to the poor and needy, or to strangers. This superstition apparently stems from the fact that the surviving family does not wish the 'death' atmosphere, which they believe is attached to the clothes, to connect itself to them, and influence their lives. It may also stem from a time of plague when, possibly, someone was contaminated by the clothes of a deceased person which had been given to them. This may later have developed into a custom specifically designed to prevent such cross-contamination.

Before burial the deceased is dressed in new clothes that have never been worn by anyone else. Many an elderly person prepares their burial suit in anticipation of death. (This is common practice among Catholic and Protestant believers, but was more prevalent in the past when it was quite common for someone to prepare their 'burial shroud' years ahead of time.)

The deceased's clothes will differ according to his age, social standing or status. In the past, a Patriarch or bishop would be dressed with the 'royal priesthood' robe, his ring on his hand, and his crown on his head. The scepter, which is a symbol of his spiritual leadership, would be placed at his side. He would then be seated on a chair, a cross in his right hand for the faithful to kiss as a sign of blessing, and to offer their respect. If the deceased was a priest similar rules to a bishop would apply. A monk and Religious would be dressed with his alb or stole and his body would be placed in an extended position. A monk and Brother would have his body extended but would be dressed in his normal monastic clothes. The custom of seating deceased high clergy on a chair is no longer practiced, but the clothing rules still apply. At the present time deceased are placed in a coffin as is the normal practice in burial. It is usual in Lebanon to bury deceased clergy under the church or in the wall of the monastery where they had lived.

At this stage, a new cover is placed on the deceased's bed and he is positioned on it facing east or the door, ready to the enter the next world, surrounded with candles and flowers especially *"habak"* or pennyroyal.

If the deceased dies young they will dress him in his best clothes and if he is male they will decorate him with flowers. Putting his weapon with him, presuming he carried one, a cigarette above his ear and a flower in his mouth, he may also be dressed in his wedding suit, while the mourners sing wedding songs and call him by the name *"ya areess"* (bridegroom). His mother and sister may dance for this, his final wedding, and offer him,

with tears and sorrow, wine, as though it were his wedding day. If the deceased was a female, she will be cosmetically adorned to appear as attractive as possible, dressed as a bride, and will wear her jewellery. This custom, for a man, was designed to illustrate his bravery and courage during life. A cigarette was placed behind his ear because it served as a decoration and a symbol of his manhood (women did not smoke), as did the weapon placed with him. For a woman, jewellery and cosmetics, served the purpose of illustrating her beauty and feminine allure.

In the case of the death of a child these customs will be abandoned and the funeral will be held privately, with only immediate family and close relatives and friends in attendance. The coffin will either be white or covered with a white cloth, as a symbol of the child's angelical and innocent life. The white coffin will be carried by the child's godfather, because he carried the child on the day of his or her baptism. Then the people will offer their sympathy to the parents with these words of condolence, saying: "Now you have a patron for you in heaven because the little one is from the bird's paradise. Blessed is he because he was saved from the misery of this world and its worries, and guaranteed for himself eternal salvation. Oh we wish that God will take us like this child and then we will be lucky like him and gain heaven. May God bless you with more children" (Khater 1985:424).

Previously, if a child died without baptism, he would not be allowed burial in consecrated ground, but would be buried in a private place because of Jesus' words to Nicodemus: "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and Spirit" (John 3: 5). This idea is no longer popular, nor is it observed as a rule, because the Church has advanced to the stage where it is realised that little children are in essence innocent, and Jesus says in Scripture that they are worthy of heaven and the greatest in the kingdom of God: "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me" (Matthew 18: 4-5). Jesus is quoted in Luke as saying: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18: 16-17).

The elderly deceased are dressed with reverence, and a cross, rosary or prayer book, placed in their hands. The head and feet are left without a covering of any type, and the body is turned to the east - the direction of the rising sun - because the rising sun is symbolic of Christ's resurrection in the early morning of Easter Sunday.

If the deceased has previously made a will this will be read at his house or at the church he attended. On occasion it will be read at the cemetery, near his body. Friends and family may give donations to a charitable organization, orphans, and to the poor. A donation is also given to the clergy.

5.5 Death Gifts and Donations

Death gifts are equal in value to the gifts given at a wedding, and the aim of these gifts is to support the family of the deceased; to preserve the dignity of the family and avoid financial embarrassment. In Lebanon the duty of reciprocation is staunchly observed. This means that when someone receives a wedding gift, that same person is obliged to reciprocate with a similar gift or its financial equivalent should the other party be in need. Friends of the family may go from house to house to collect donations to cover the expense of the burial,

and they may keep a record of all the donors so that the family can reciprocate at the later death of these donors or their families. Gifts such as sheep, rice, coffee, and sugar and other foodstuffs may be donated, while interested parties may approach the family to ascertain whether they need any particular assistance.

If the deceased has a degree or a military decoration, these may be placed on a cushion together with flowers. Two swords are placed on the right and on the left of the cushion, behind a crown of flowers. Walking behind the coffin, two local swordsmen follow the body to the church and cemetery.

If the deceased's body is unavailable because of accident or disease, his clothes, hat, weapons and all personal belongings serve as a focus in place of his body. The aim of this custom is to assist the mourners in imagining his presence and to help them mourn him.

5.6 Superstition

There also exist other superstitions, such as the belief that the 'ghost' of the departed will follow whoever steps over his dead body. It is also commonly believed that a glass of water should not be passed over the deceased as the one who then drinks it may be cursed. There is a superstition that a candle should never be lit twice because this may enable the spirit of the deceased to cling to the spirits of the mourners and they may be 'pulled with him into the burial hole'. An object should not be passed over the body of the deceased in order to hand it to a bystander because it is believed that this may enable the deceased to 'grab' the individuals concerned and pull them into the open grave. This custom relates to the belief that one object contaminates another should they touch. This has translated into a belief that the dead can 'contaminate' those who touch them.

5.7 The Announcement of Death by means of the Church Bell

After exposing the body of the deceased, his death will be announced to the community through the slow ringing of the church bell so as to ensure that each sonorous chime can be clearly heard. In Lebanese this is called *"dakit al-ḫezin"* which means "the sorrowful ringing." When the neighbours and inhabitants of the village hear the ringing of the church bells, they hasten to find out the identity of the deceased, then immediately visit his former home irrespective of the weather or the time, to pay their respects to his family. The 'sorrowful' bell will be rung several times before the actual burial - when the body is removed to the church on the shoulders of the pall bearers, or on the arrival of the deceased in his home village after having lived in a distant area. This ringing of the church bell is also used to alert the villagers in time of danger.

The procession from the house of the deceased to the church and cemetery will be arranged according to the status of each mourner. First the clergy, then the sheiks, elderly, and lastly the young people. If the deceased comes from afar, the entire village will await for his arrival at the village boundary in order to carry him on their shoulders to his house or directly to the church.

6. Poetry, Mourning, Singing and Dancing Elegies

Poems are sung with loud voices to celebrate the life and death of the deceased; the manner of recitation resembles a 'play of mourning' which extols his/her goodness and kindness while alive and also various other personal details of his life. All the mourners taking part

will shout and sing with one voice, while some individuals may compose a refrain.

Many different poems exist, such as "the announcement' poem." "the laudatory poem," "the elegy poem," and others composed especially for men, women, fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, and priests, etc. People weep and hit their own faces and sing some poetic verses to comfort the family, and express their respect for the deceased. Some families will hire a dirge singer to sing in honour of their loved one. He or she is known by the Lebanese name of *"nadabat/nadaboun"* which means "mourner." The *nadaboun* (male) sings in the courtyard of the deceased's house, in the village, or at the entrance of the relevant church. The *nadabat* (female) sits with the bereaved family, and sings with an expression of extreme pain and sorrow.

Following this, there will be dancing, flag waving, and the playing of musical instruments such as drums, harps, trumpets, lyres, flutes and cymbals. Subsequently, a 'game' will be played called in Lebanese *"al-sayef wal-teres,"* which mean "the swordsman." The swordsmen will dance and shout as if they were at war or in competition with each other. The reasoning behind this is that the great enemy, death, must be fought with enthusiasm and vigour. Dancing, with the coffin moving from shoulder to shoulder, it is an honour for men, whether extended family or friends of the bereaved family, to carry the deceased from his house to the church and thence to the cemetery. No thought is given to the weather or the distance that might have to be travelled, as it is considered commendable to pay their last respects to the deceased in this manner.

All these gestures, rituals, and methods of mourning find an echo in Ugaritic and Phoenician poems. The sentiments of these poems remind us about the awesome struggle that occurs between life and death and between darkness and light! It also reminds us of the mourning of Abraham for Sarah, and King David for his dearly loved friend Jonathan and, later, his son, Absalom.

Here follows one of the Lebanese psalms asking help from God in a time of loss:

> This is my only desire and request.
> From my Lord, from God's throne.
> I hoped that your soul was part of my ribs
> and your burial covered by my heart.
> I hoped that your soul was part of my ribs
> and the coffin, my love and excitement.
> I wish I could protect you in the depth of my heart
> (Khater 1985: 217).

6.1 The Aim of the Rituals

The aim of the rituals is to honour the deceased and speak about this great loss; to number the deceased's virtues and his forefathers and descendants; to make him an example, model, and symbol for his society and family; to remind the congregation about the shortness of this life; to unite the family and the community and mourn together; to bid the deceased a final farewell; to help the deceased cross from this world to the next; to console and comfort one another; to find some answers together for this unspeakable loss, and to please the deceased and protect the community.

Rituals serve as a continuation of spiritual tradition which unites the community and assists them to understand the concepts which form a basis for their beliefs, such as the belief in

life after death. Rituals also serve to prepare the bereaved family and community to be worthy of that life in the hereafter.

6.2 Eye-liner for the Horses

About six riders and their horses will follow the procession, carrying with them some of the deceased's personal possessions chosen with care, such as his sword and other weapons, and clothes. The poets of the village will walk behind the horsemen and some hot pepper or chili will be placed around the eyes of the horses so that the horses will 'weep' with the mourners. The procession and the 'weeping' horses form part of the general move to honour the deceased as if he were royalty, especially if he was well known and served the community; to honour his leadership qualities, and his position and role in the life of his community.

6.3 Closing the Coffin

After the Prayer of Bakhour[3] and purification the deceased is placed in the coffin. The family then comes to bid him farewell, crying out in loud voices, touching his face gently, kissing him and, with sorrowful gestures, 'talking' to him. Close relatives of the deceased will place him in the coffin feet first, as otherwise his feet may touch someone and he may 'curse' them. His shirt will be torn or cut, either on the road to or at the gate of the cemetery. There exists a superstitious belief that, if they do not tear the shirt of the deceased, he may 'curse' them, and even 'pull' some of his family with him into the grave.

At this stage some of the items in the house will be broken to symbolise the break in human relationships which occurs at death. When the pallbearers leave with the coffin, the bed of the deceased will be moved so that he cannot come back and 'sleep' on it. Generally, the position of furniture will be changed to prevent the deceased from 'recognising' anything should his spirit return to the house. Then the house will be thoroughly cleaned and sprinkled with water especially where his body was lying.

Death is peculiar in that one moment the individual is a well loved family member, and the next he becomes a stranger who carries with him the implication of danger. After death the family views his possible continued existence as a spirit, with fear. He becomes at once clean and unclean, holy and unholy, accepted and rejected, precious and worthless! This follows from the natural inclination of the human being to be afraid of the invisible and the unknown. Material society makes it very difficult for the ordinary individual to accept the validity of the invisible, and if he does accept its reality as viable he usually views it through a negative and superstitious filter of custom.

These superstitions and beliefs stem from the great mystery of death and the afterlife, which is the one condition science cannot explore with precision. Humanity as a whole is frightened when faced with the unknown, and true to our nature which wishes to understand and explain everything including the inexplicable, we invent methods of dealing with it, even when these methods fall far short of perfect.

[3] Bakhour is an Arabic word meaning the "incense prayer" and is customarily said by a priest at the house of the deceased soon after death, and at the church on the day of the burial. It is also said after 40 days and at the time of the first year anniversary of death (see Appendix: Incense Prayer).

To the Christian, only the victorious and risen Christ is able to shed some light on their understanding of death, which becomes for them the death of the body and not the soul, which is believed to be eternal. The risen Christ allows his followers, through his victory over death and sin, to attain freedom from superstition, bad habits, and rituals, which enslave the people and burden them with unnecessary customs. Many of the superstitions, customs and rituals that were extant in more ancient times are no longer practiced precisely because of this freedom from enslavement.

6.4 The Ritual of the Threshold

Before leaving the threshold of the house, the wife of the deceased, if she is pregnant, will cross over the threshold under the husband's coffin, which is lifted into the air for this purpose. This is done in order to retain the rights of ownership and division of the husband's property for the unborn child. Another reason why the wife crosses over under the coffin is to confirm in the eyes of the community that she is pregnant by her late husband, and to avoid suspicion of perfidy on her part. As the pregnant female is the primary symbol of fertility and life, it was believed in the past (and is still believed by some today), that she should not follow the body to the grave which is the epitome of finality. The female, therefore, being the symbol of life should not be present at the symbol of departure and death, the grave.

7. Title and Meaning of the Maronite Funeral Rites

The funeral rites, at an early period, used to be known as the rites of "*nouwaisseh*" originating from the Syriac word "*nawso*." This word itself derives from the Greek word "*naos*" which means 'cemetery', 'shrine', or 'mortuary chapel'. For Lebanese Maronite Christians the cemetery is not a permanent place of repose. The deceased's body is kept in the cemetery, which is regarded as a sacred place, for a temporary period only. By this is meant that at the time of the "resurrection of the dead" the deceased will 'rise' from his rest. In Syriac-Aramaic it is said: "The grave is the '*nawso*' (the shrine of the body)" (Al-Hayek 1997:1).

The rites of Christian funerals in the Maronite Church are known in Syriac by the title of "*Qoleh Mbayoneh d'Al Qabreh d'Anideh*," which means " Hymns of Consolation Sung Over the Graves of the Departed." The significance of this title is in the hymnody, which plays a central role in these rites as we find in the use of the word "*ooleh*" (hymn). The word "'*anideh*" indicates those who have departed. For them death is a departure from this world but, in departing and no longer being accessible to our senses, they are not lost or gone for ever. Since their departure is based on their faith in the constant and enduring companionship of Jesus Christ, it is believed that he accompanies them from the time of their departure from this world to their arrival in heaven. This paschal passage is based on a belief in the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life. That is why this hymnody is meant to inspire not only hope for the dead, but also hope and comfort in the living (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:7).[4]

[4] Ktobo Dqoleh Mbayoneh D'al Qabreh D'anideh (Syriac for "The Book of Funeral Rites of Faithful Departed").

Today, the Maronite Church uses the following common title for the rites of funerals conducted in the Arabic-Lebanese language, viz. *ginnazat*. It is used in two forms. In singular form, the title is "*ginnaz*," and in plural form, "*ginnazat*" (funeral rites). This familiar Lebanese term has its origin in the Syriac adjective "*gnizo*." According to *The Syriac Dictionary*, "*gnizo*" means 'hidden, closed, unknown, occult, secret, mystic'(Hbayka 1958:59). It may also indicate any invisible being, be it a jinn (powerful spirit created of fire), or even a demon, because these are all denizens of the world of spirit. However, it is constantly used of the 'hidden' God, such as in "*Gnizo Ityo*" (The Being), "*Gnizo Shmo*" (The Name), "*Gnizo Yaldo*" (The Begotten) (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:7).

The term "*gnizo*" or "*ginnaz*" reflects the same concepts found in the Syriac word "'*anideh*" and from the Greek word "*nawso*." It is indicative of what is invisible, and is enshrined in something that hides it. In fact, those who depart become as invisible and hidden as God himself, who is invisible and is somehow 'enshrined' within the name given to him.

The "Book of Ginnazat" is the book of those who, removed from this world , become hidden from the eyes of those who still live in it. They are "taken away by God's command"; they are invisible, but still present in a mysterious way!

8. Various Station of the Maronite Funeral Rite

These various stations of the funeral rites are only found in the Maronite rite. They characterise the journey of life and the accompaniment of the deceased from home, and continuing with him until burial. The stations are the pauses the bereaved and community make as they observe the rites attached to each station. These are five stations: 1) first station: at home, 2) second station: on the road to the church, 3) third station: at the church, 4) fourth station: on the road to the cemetery, 5) fifth station: at the graveside.

8.1 First Station: At Home

The rituals used by the Maronite Church, at present, provide distinct services for use during the wake: one for the laity and another for clergy. The wake service for the laity consists of the "Incense Prayer" (largely in the form of a hymn). At one time it was used only on memorials for the departed. The hymn expresses the general intention of the service, viz. it recalls the memory of all faithful departed, identified as those who "received the Body and Blood of Christ" and sleep in his hope "as they await his second coming and his promised reward" (Qurbono 1993:126-127). In this hymn, resurrection is viewed as a truly new revelation which was 'hidden' in times past. Isaac, for example, enshrouded his father, Abraham, "with tears and grief" (Genesis 24:7-11) because he was ignorant of the reality of resurrection. The hymn summarizes most of the themes which compose the funeral rite. These themes are repeated over and over. The wake service for the clergy is the First Station of their funeral rite, while the *"ginnaz"* at the church is the Second Station.

8.2 Second Station: On The Road To The Church

The coffin will be carried on the shoulders of the pallbearers if they are old, and on the palms of their hands if they are young. If the deceased is young, he will be carried in a coffin without a cover, surrounded by flowers, while the general mourners carry the cover. It is thought to be a great honour to be allowed to carry the coffin, and some individuals may compete as to who will be allowed the honour.

There is a comparison here with one of the ancient Ugaritic hymns:

> Lift him up on the palms of the hands.
> Lift him up on the shoulders.
> Dance for him in the courts,
> because Baal has died (Tabet & Mouannes 1990:23).

A Lebanese funeral often reminds the onlooker of a wedding because of the dancing, the profusion of flowers, the wedding clothes, and the deceased's mother and sisters clapping their hands while carrying the deceased's photo and singing wedding songs for him. The dancing will be circular, moving backward and forward until weariness overtakes them. This symbolises the psychological battle which occurs in the human heart when the contrast between life and death is contemplated. If the deceased should fall out of his coffin, or if the coffin lid should be detached (presuming the coffin was closed) while the mourners are dancing, it is considered a terrible curse and no one will dare to further accompany the pallbearers to the cemetery. This has very seldom been known to happen, but when it has happened the pallbearers will continue on to the cemetery, and many of the mourners will return home while others will follow at a distance in an atmosphere of silence.

During the procession on the road to the church, the congregation will sing Psalms 148, 149, 150 and 117 of the "Sunday Morning Prayer" or *"Safro"* with their intervening strophes. These psalms were introduced in a recent tradition, in conformity with the idea of accompaniment, since all the departed, clergy as well laity, are now carried in procession to the church. The procession is more often by motor car, rather than on foot as was the case in the relatively recent past. However, it is not the psalms as such which reveal the true aspect of the tradition. It is rather their intervening strophes which express the concept of hymns sung while on the road.

8.3 Third Station: At The Church

At the threshold of the church the pallbearers will ensure that the feet of the deceased enter the church first and face the altar, while his head faces the congregation and church entrance, because he is still part of that congregation. If he was a priest, his head will face the altar and his feet the congregation and church entrance. The idea here is that even in death the priest is connected to the altar and the people he served. On the altar the "Gennazat" (funeral prayer) will be conducted by the bishop, priests, deacons and altar boys.

8.3.1 Entrance into the church

At present, the entrance of the body into the church is accompanied by the singing of the concluding verse of the fourth station of the "Sunday Night Prayer" or "Lilio": "Open Your Gates, O Heavenly Jerusalem" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:47)

According to the Vatican Syriac Ms. No. 59, in the past, bishops, priests, deacons, and even monks were received at the entrance of the church with the following hymn: "I come to you, O holy church, for, since my youth, I was betrothed to you. May I be remembered within you, now and for ever. Acknowledge me, O holy Church, on your great day, for I confessed you; and when the offerings are presented, may I be remembered within you" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:9).

The ancient Ugaritic and Jewish customs included the embalming of the body with holy oil and sprinkling with holy water, once the funeral service had ended. This is, however, no longer followed in detail in the Maronite rite, although the body may at some point be sprinkled with holy water.

At present, the usual procedure once the funeral service in the church has been completed, is to carry the deceased to the cemetery or "the true house" singing various hymns, which are described in more detail in a later chapter. All the mourners, at this stage, will be together in one procession, the order of which will be firstly the cross and two candles carried by altar boys, then the pall bearers with the coffin on their shoulders, then the clergy and family, and lastly the community.

8.3.2 Service at the Church

The service at the church is commonly known as the "ginnaz" (funeral). The funeral tradition offers a wide variety of "ginnazat." Some of these services are for priests, and others are particular to men only, and still others for woman only. There are also services which apply to the day of burial, and others, which are more numerous, for the celebration of memorials of the departed.

The "Book of Ginnazat" 1926 includes the following services:

1. A funeral for a boy, a girl, a man, a woman, a monk, a nun or virgin, a priest, and a bishop.
2. A common funeral for the faithful departed, a monks, a priests, and a bishops.
3. A memorial funeral for men, women, a priest, a bishop;
4. A common funeral for the faithful departed (this seems to be of recent date, no earlier than the middle of the eighteenth century).

8.3.3 Farewell from the Church

The farewell from the church takes a more solemn form for the clergy than the laity. Bishops, priests and deacons are carried in procession around the altar, whereas laity are not. Originally, the farewell for the clergy was sung at the cemetery. The vestige of such practice is shown by the way in which the final hymn of farewell is used: "Assemble, O brothers and sisters, give me peace. Bid me farewell!" This hymn is sung inside the church for the clergy, while for the laity it is sung by the graveside, the graveside now taking the place of the home (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:10).

8.4 Fourth Station: On The Road To The Cemetery

In practice, various hymns or sections of hymns, are gathered from various sources. While these are mostly drawn from the "Divine Office" there is no way to determine their exact origin, nature or number. Tabet affirms that: "Some of the 'Hymns of the Road' are held in common with the Chaldeans and Syrians, and some of them are attributed to St. Ephrem" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:8).[5]

[5] They are conserved in the Vatican Library, Syriac Fund, Manuscript No. 92.

8.5 Fifth Station: At The Cemetery

The Lebanese call the cemetery *"al-beit al-hakeykey"* which means "the true house." Whenever they walk nearby, they may stand for a moment and make the sign of the cross for the repose of the soul of the departed. Some individuals believe that there are spirits living in the vicinity of the cemetery and they try to avoid it during the night, as that is when the spirits 'walk abroad' and have the power to hurt or curse them.

The cemetery in Lebanese has many names, such as *"makbara/madafin" or "khachakhech,"* both of which mean "the burial place." Each family has their 'own' cemetery consisting of a small building or 'house' built from rocks.[6] On the roof the sign of the cross is placed to bless and protect the deceased from the influence of evil spirits. Trees, especially the holm-oak, pine-tree and cedar, are considered symbols of reverence and eternity, and are planted in the cemetery together with flowers of various types.

On the day of the burial someone will prepare the cemetery for the burial. At the cemetery the mourners will assemble around the clergy and the family. The priest's vestment usually consists of the "jibbe" (black robe and stole) for the final farewell to the deceased. The coffin is opened and the priest sprinkles dust on the body, saying: "Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return." If the deceased's shirt has not already been cut it is done so now. At this stage, a beautiful 'conversation' in the formal context of the hymnal takes place between the deceased and the congregation. These conversational prayers will be discussed in some depth in a later chapter. The hymns sung at the grave are, with some variations, common to all the departed.[7]

The "Book of Nouwaisseh" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:11) directs that the body of the deceased is to be anointed by oil on the forehead in the form of a cross, before the burial. This anointing was accompanied by a prayer. This tradition remained in practice until the eighteenth century.

9. Condolence and Sympathy

After the priest finishes the prayers, saying: "Eternal rest grant to him, O Lord," the bereaved family will form a line so that the congregation may offer their sympathy in an easy practical way. This consists of the congregation placing their right hands on their chests, saying to the bereaved: *"Awad be-Salametkoun"* or "May God keep you safe." Firstly the clergy will offer consolatory words, then the elderly, and then the congregation as a whole, using these traditional Lebanese words: "Allah *yerhamo/yerhama"* which means "God's mercy on him/her," after which is added: "May God grant you a long life." The bereaved family answers: "May God keep you safe. May God keep you away from danger and harm."

[6] The custom among Lebanese as to dealing with the remains of the deceased is not to leave the body buried in perpetuity but, when the coffin deteriorates to the extent where the wood rots, the bones of the deceased are removed and the coffin is burned. The bones are collected together and buried in a deep hole dedicated for that purpose in the family's mausoleum. This practise is mainly carried out through lack of space for permanent burial in Lebanon.

[7] A Latin influence, introduced by the Ritual of 1752 A.D. in Rome, is evident especially in the concluding prayers, blessings, and the use of holy water.

After the condolences everybody will follow the priest to the house of the deceased to say the *"Bakhour"* (incense prayer) and console the bereaved women who may not be able to go to the cemetery. A general purification with incense, of the house, the family, and all who attended the funeral takes place during the *"Bakhour."*

Lebanese coffee will then be drunk without sugar, as a symbol of the mourners' bitterness and sadness. Candles or lamps will be lit and kept burning for a week. This is an ancient custom stemming from the belief that the soul of the deceased may return from the 'world of darkness' and, if so, he should find light to guide him, and the mourners awake. The idea being that this small kindness will prompt the 'spirit' to leave the mourners in peace.

10. Mercy Meal

Since ancient times, the Lebanese, and indeed many of the peoples of the Middle East, practiced hospitality, generously providing a banquet on the day of the funeral for all those travelling from other villages and at the same time honouring the memory of the deceased. This memorial meal is called in Lebanese *"neyahat"* (originally from the Syriac, meaning "rest," and referring to the eternal rest they requested for their deceased). During this 'mercy meal' they say: *"traham"* or "rest" and after the meal, *"Allah yerhamo/yerhama"* or "rest in peace." It is also the custom in some areas and amongst certain Lebanese, to fast for two days as a pledge of their mourning and grief. After the two days, extended family and neighbours will provide meals for some time, to allow the bereaved family time to recover from their grief and as a sign of respect.

The 'mercy meal' has become a part of the religious custom of the Lebanese, and usually consists of boiling wheat and mixing it with dry grapes, nuts and sugar. This is called *"erban"* which means "holy bread" and is taken to the church on the first Sunday after a burial. The priest then blesses it when mass is finished, and it is offered to parishioners at the door of the church entrance.

11. The Time of Mourning and Remembrance

The bereaved family and their relatives, in conformity with custom around the world among Christians, will wear black clothes as a symbol of mourning. The custom stems from the comprehension that life is lived in the sunlight and moonlight, but death results in darkness. The mourners, dressed in black, show compassion and sympathy for the dead and for the bereaved relative. The Lebanese mourn their deceased by wearing black clothes and avoiding any kind of joyful celebration or feast. All the family of the deceased will wear black and also most of their friends, the village and neighbours. Most elderly mothers will wear black for ever. Men will not shave, and women will avoid any kind of jewellery or make up and cover their heads with a black veil.

The period of mourning is broken into several sections of time that have symbolic and holy meaning, for example, the period of seven days - the number seven, being considered holy and 'perfect', thus we find there are seven angels, seven sacraments and seven days in the week. In the distant past, the family of Maronite deceased requested that masses be offered by their priest at three, seven, thirty days, and one year. Gradually the custom altered until the family requested masses nine, twelve, thirty, forty and sixty days after the initial bereavement.

Tradition assigns certain rites to the memorial days, which differ from those of the day of burial. The most observed memorial days are those of the third, ninth, and fortieth days, as well as the first anniversary of burial. Patriarch Ad-Doueihi explains the meaning of this choice (Ad-Doueihi 1704:460). The memorial service on behalf of the dead is celebrated on the third day because the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day, thus becoming the first-born and head of those who 'fall asleep'; on the fortieth day, because he ascended into heaven after forty days; on the ninth day, because it is believed that the departed become 'companions' of the nine choirs of the angels. The memorial service is also celebrated on the ninth day because the Lord sent the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, to his apostles nine days after his ascension that he might lift up their spirits and give them courage. Lastly, because it is considered that the departed share with the saints everlasting life, and as all the saints together are commemorated once each year, so the departed are 'remembered' after a full year has passed since their death. Interestingly, the *Kitab Al-Hoda* or "Book of Guidance" also mentions a thirtieth day memorial as in the Old Law "because," it says, "the people of Israel mourned Moses for thirty days" (*Kitab Al-Hoda* 1935:281) This memorial is now seldom observed, because the memorials of the New Law prevail over the Old Law.

The practice at present among Maronites is to request masses at seven days, forty days and, finally, on the anniversary of the loved one's death at one year after the burial. On the fortieth day and at one year, the family of the deceased invite relatives and friends to share with them the remembrance of the deceased by offering the 'divine sacrifice', visiting the cemetery and sharing with them the 'mercy meal'.

The bereaved family will remain in strict mourning. In the past the father, the mother and the sisters would not wash their faces or change their clothes for forty days, and then only if the relatives and neighbours insisted they do so, but this custom is rarely practised at present. The house will not be decorated on feast days, and even at Christmas all ostentation or celebration, such as the decorating of a tree, will be avoided. All occasions of celebration such as religious festivals will also be avoided, and no one will be invited to their home. Should they have guests only coffee without sugar will be offered, as a symbol of their grief. Delectable meals will not be cooked – all food being as plain as possible. Weddings and engagements will not be attended, and even such simple pleasures such as listening to a radio will be avoided. Mothers may cut and keep a lock of the deceased's hair. If the deceased was a mother, the son and daughter will treasure her rosary, and, if the deceased was a father, the children will treasure his prayer book and watch. The wife of the deceased will keep her late husband's hat or wear his ring until she marries again, should she decide to do so. As mentioned before, certain of these customs are no longer practiced because of their impracticability in the modern age.

12. Summary and Conclusion

It should be kept in mind that, although many of the preceding traditions and customs are still practised in Lebanon, there has been a gradual shift away from the overtly superstitious to customs that have some base in the reality of Maronite religious faith. A hundred years ago, one did not find this distinction, and customs that had an extremely ancient origin were still practiced by the majority of Maronites, however, at the present time, only certain of these customs remain in practice, partly because of their impractical nature. The manner of living in the modern age is such that 'time is money' and ritual and custom have been pared down to their bare essentials. With a broader and more comprehensive understanding of Christian spirituality and religious fundamentals by the believer, brought about by a

renewed interest in Scripture and encouraged by the Church, and more active community participation in the sacramental and functional life of their churches, the relevance of certain customs has altered due to the change of focus and attitude.

A careful reading and study of the burial customs described in this chapter provide an interesting and informative view into the past. Customs which have survived the passage of time in Lebanon provide, in a sense, a means of 'time-travel' and allow the reader to gain some idea of the workings of the human mind when confronted with the issue of death. Chapter three, therefore, makes available a window of opportunity to study the approach the individual and family took (and still take) when dealing with the subject of death, which, at best, tends to depress and confuse those who are forced to confront its inevitability. Similar to the Irish 'wake' the Lebanese approach to death on occasion resembles the same behaviour a wedding would naturally invoke, thus, in general, removing the dirge-like quality of funerals.

The ability and ingenuity of men and women to find ways and means of transmuting sadness, grief and despair into acceptable emotions - emotions that allow the living to proceed with their everyday lives without their collective psyche being overwhelmed with confusion - is unending. It is this determination of the human creature to survive on a spiritual level and to grasp hope, with a firmness that belies the practical situation and the plain horror of death, that allows a certain optimism and joy to filter into their lives. This chapter, therefore, must be understood in the context of humanity's desire for order even when faced with entropy, and its unique determination to produce that order against overwhelming odds.

CHAPTER 4

DEATH-LIFE IN THE MARONITE LITURGY

1. Introduction

The liturgy of the Maronite Catholic Church and its relation with the Maronite funeral rites are explored in this chapter.

The origins of the Maronite Catholic liturgy belong to the Aramaic-Syriac liturgy of the Patriarchate of Antioch, which developed at Antioch after the period of the Apostles. The early liturgy, which later led to the formation of the liturgy of the Maronite Church, was described by Saint James the Less, the first bishop of Jerusalem, and was enriched by the hymns and poetic prayers of Saint Ephrem, James of Saroug and other fathers of the Antiochene See. The liturgical language of the Maronite Church is Syriac (Aramaic), and Arabic in certain parts, and is now available in most languages (Dib 1971:207-214). Outside of Lebanon, the Maronite Church uses a combination of the language of the country where it is situated, and a mixture of Syriac and Arabic, as is the case in Lebanon. The Maronite Catholic Church is one of the few, if not the only Church, that uses Aramaic in its liturgical and holy language. Aramaic was used as the lingua franca of the common people at the time of the historical Jesus of Nazareth. Its continued use by the Maronites, for over two thousand years, proves a strong historical link to the early Church in Jerusalem, and the disciples who scattered into Lebanon and Syria when facing persecution in Israel in the first century A.D.

The Maronite Antiochene Syriac Church, its liturgy and tradition, is an integration of three schools of thought based on the following geographical centres: firstly, Antioch, which was a major center of commerce and communication in western Syria, of Greek and Syriac influence, gave to the Maronite rite its biblical and theological liturgy; secondly, Edessa, which was a prominent city where Saint Ephrem lived in ancient Mesopotamia, of Semitic culture and Syriac poetry. Both influenced the prayers and hymnody of the Maronite Church; thirdly, Mount Lebanon, which was (and is) a region in the Middle-East of Phoenician-Lebanese culture and tradition, proving a safe haven for the Maronite monastic life, worship, and tradition begun by Saint Maroun and his disciples (*Being Maronite Catholic* 1989:6-8).

The Maronite liturgy is called the "Service of the Holy Mysteries" and derives from the Syriac "Qourban" which means 'ministering at the altar'. The prayers, rituals, gestures, music, art, architecture and symbolism of the Maronite liturgy, reflects from beginning to end, the glory given to God for his loving mercy, the call of the worshipper to forgiveness, and rebirth or 'new life'.

The attitude of the Maronite worshipper is unworthiness, humility and a constant readiness for the 'Second Coming' of Jesus Christ, the Lord. This is reflected in the words of praise: "Blessed is he who has come and will come in the name of the Lord." The believer is likened to a ship opening its sails to the Holy Spirit and making its maiden voyage home to the harbor of safety. As provision for this journey, the sacraments are provided, as is shown in the words: "O Son of God, I have taken you as nourishing provision (the Eucharist). May your baptism (the Holy Spirit) within me be a saving ship for me that does not sink, and I shall cross over the place of fear in it to the abode of life" (*Devotions to Our Lady of Lebanon* 1999:26).

The Maronite liturgy is a Trinitarian liturgy which is administered through the power of the Holy Spirit, the principal minister in the liturgy. He is the beginning, the end and the perfection of all things: " Glory to the Father who for our sake sent his Son; adoration to Jesus who by his cross saved us; thanksgiving to the Spirit who begins, perfects, and completes the mystery of our salvation" (*Devotions to Our Lady of Lebanon* 1999:21).

2. General View of Death-Life in the Seven Mysteries or Sacraments

The sacraments are ways of celebrating our existence; we think of what we are and celebrate our existence. We celebrate the totality of our life and death, the totality of Christian upbringing – of the life of the Church and humankind.

The sacraments given to us by the Lord and his Church, do not merely speak of redemption, they bring it to us; the Redeemer comes to us in them. These signs and symbols were shaped very personally by our Lord himself on the night before he suffered and died. He used our human custom of eating together to manifest and bring about his unity with us: "You have united, O Lord, your divinity with our humanity, and our humanity with your divinity; your life with our mortality and our mortality with your life. You have assumed what is ours, and You have given us what is yours, for the life and salvation of our souls. To you, O Lord, be glory for ever" (*Qurbono* 1994:254).

These seven sacraments are at the very heart of Maronite Christian faith. It is believed that the divine power of the Trinitarian God resides in the baptised and confirmed Christian. The faithful are born anew by baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist, the food of eternal life..." (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:315).

The service of the seven sacraments or seven Mysteries develops four themes: 1) humanity's creation in God's image; 2) deep awareness of God's mercy toward sinful people; 3) joyful praise of the Trinity; and 4) provision for the final journey of the individual.

The tone of the service is simple and direct in the spirit of the monastic life of Saint Maroun and his disciples. The worshipper becomes involved in the unfolding human-divine drama which mysteriously takes place on a spiritual level within himself and, at the same time, takes place exteriorly, making him a sharer in the heavenly kingdom where life is 'everlasting'. The sacraments become the meeting point for the believer, with God the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The communal aspect of worship is emphasized by the fact that the community is absorbed in a continuous dialogue with their celebrant (priest) who mediates on behalf of Christ, the High Priest.

The Maronite Church and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* divide the seven sacraments or Mysteries into three groups: 1) The Initiation Mysteries; 2) The Healing Mysteries; and, 3) The Commitment Mysteries.

2.1 The Initiation Mysteries:

2.1.1 Baptism

Baptism is the source of new life in Christ from which the entire Christian life springs

forth. This sacrament, called baptism from the Greek "baptizein" meaning to 'plunge' or 'immerse'; the plunge into the water symbolises the catechumen's burial 'into' Christ's death, from which he rises up through resurrection with Jesus, as "a new creation" (2Corinthians 5:17; Galations 6:15; cf. Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).

"Baptism is also known as initiation, as it initiates a person into the priesthood of believers which is the 'body' of Christ, and to become a child of God the Father, brother of Jesus, and temple of the Holy Spirit. Baptism for the candidate becomes a spiritual womb for new life in God, and a means of sharing in the divine life. The candidate is purified and washed clean of the consequences of the sin of Adam (the first created man), and re-vested in 'the robe of glory' which is Jesus, who is considered to be the 'invisible and incorruptible robe'"*(Mysteries of Initiation-Baptism* 1978:53).

Like all the great symbols of mankind, water has a double significance, meaning both salvation and destruction. Water does not just signify life, it also signifies the deluge; along with drinking, washing and swimming, it can mean drowning – the water that "comes up to the lips". There is, therefore, also the aspect of death and burial associated with water. As Paul writes, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death..." (Romans 6:3-4). This symbolism is clearest when baptism is performed by immersion, as in the east. The 'old man', man imprisoned by egoism, licentiousness, laxity, blindness, pride and obstinacy, is given over to death. He dies and vanishes, along with Christ's death. This means primarily, the forgiveness of sin, but it also means a complete transformation of life that can be compared to the death of the ego, which is then said to be 'buried'.

To comprehend the full meaning of this, we must go back to the banks of the Jordan and then to Calvary. Christ was baptised, and he was baptised unto his death. He was consecrated at his baptism to submission, to sharing the common lot, to being a servant, and finally to obedience unto death. Hence his temptations invite him to take up the opposite attitude – to refuse to serve. Jesus twice calls his future death "a baptism" (Mark 10:38; Luke 12:50).

The Christian affirms his solidarity with Christ's way of service, humility and obedience, even if that should result in death. He accepts the baptism of life, service, suffering and finally death which is the truest baptism. He accepts it like Jesus, with Jesus and in Jesus. The fact that the Christian is redeemed through the Lord, does not mean he has been set beyond sin and sufferings. This way of suffering is described by Jesus in the words, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?" (Mark 10:38). Death is the last act of the Christian believer's service, and it sets him wholly free; this is the 'baptism with which Jesus was also baptised'. This is the 'good news' that Christ brings, that God has turned the woes of mankind into the birthpangs of new life. When the believer enters the water, it is a symbol of death; when he leaves it, it is the symbol of future resurrection and rebirth. This is why traditionally baptism was conferred on the happy night of Easter.

The significance of water attached throughout the Scriptures, from the primeval waters over which God's creative Spirit passed, through the floods of the deluge, and of the Red Sea, to the water of the Jordan river, to the water which flowed from the side of Jesus. Modern science suspects that all life on earth came out of this element "water". Modern obstetrics has shown that the human embryo is born from the amniotic fluid, and this fluid

has the same composition as sea water. This, the most motherly of the elements, has been set aside by God to be the efficacious sign of our heavenly rebirth.

> "...He sanctified this font of baptism, a salvific and fruitful womb. By Your will, Father, Son and Holy Spirit he abides in the world in three place: in a womb of flesh; in the womb of baptism; and in the dark mansions of Sheol... as the womb of our Mother Eve gave birth to mortal and corruptible children so may the womb of this baptismal font give birth to heavenly and incorruptible children. And as the Holy Spirit hovers over the waters in the work of creation, and gave birth to living creatures, may he hover over this baptismal font which is a spiritual womb. May he dwell in it and sanctify it. Instead of an earthly Adam, may it give birth to a heavenly Adam" (*Mysteries of Initiation – Baptism* 1978:33-34).

This baptism through water and the Holy Spirit, is the gateway to the Christian's spiritual journey in this life and in the next. It can be compared to 'burying' sin in water, which cleanses it, and burning it entirely away in the fire of the Holy Spirit, thus: "born of water and the Spirit" (John 3:5). Baptism comprises both death and life – the death and resurrection of Jesus are two facets of one reality. Every Christian is commanded by Jesus to 'carry their cross'; the Christian must be prepared to imitate Christ, in that they should be prepared to suffer and, if necessary, die for their faith. At the time of baptism, death and rebirth is very much an issue, as without the death of the sinful self it is impossible to enter the kingdom of God.

The apostle Paul describes how the believer, in communion with Christ, dies and is buried with him, and rises with him unto new life (Romans 6:3-4; cf. Colossians 2:12). The baptised believer has "clothed" himself "with Christ" (Galations 3:27). Through the Holy Spirit, baptism purifies, justifies, and sanctifies the Christian, assisting in his rebirth according to the imitation of Christ, which comes about through the word of God, the "imperishable seed," producing its life-giving effect (1Peter 1:23; Ephesians 5:26).

Finally, this baptism "is the indelible spiritual seal which bears within itself the fruits of salvation and eternal life through the power of the Holy Spirit, who has marked us with the seal of the Lord. For, the faithful Christian who has 'kept' the seal until the end, remaining faithful to the demands of his baptism, is able to depart this life marked with the sign of faith in the hope of resurrection" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:326-327).

2.1.2 Chrismation (Confirmation)

Confirmation (with myron oil) intensifies what the baptism begins. The myron oil symbolises the unity between the mission of Jesus and the outpouring of the Spirit. Oil is seen as a symbolic sign of abundance and joy (Deuteronomy 11:14; Psalm 23:104:15), and as a sign of healing and health, beauty and strength (Isaiah 1:6) so the life of the believer may give off "the aroma of Christ" (2Corinthians 2:15).

If baptism is the seal of Jesus within the individual, the chrismation is the seal of the Holy Spirit, and the total belonging to, and imitation of the life of Christ, and as well as the promise of divine protection in the great eschatological trial (Rev 7:2-3). This sacrament of confirmation 'clothes' the believer (soul and body) with the light of Christ; 'the cloak of salvation' covers and fills the Christian with all the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2-3; Galatians 6:22-23).

For the Christian this 'sign' is received as a mark of maturity and strengthening. Through this sacrament he fulfills the pattern of receiving the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit in this life and in eternal life. Confirmation gives to every Christian the mission of bearing witness to Christ and his Church. In the early Church, confirmation was usually celebrated along with baptism, and until the present time the Eastern Church, in particular the Maronite Church, baptises and confirms at the same time. Their belief is that it is essential to link the two sacraments with each other, because it is through these two sacraments that the believer becomes a full member of the Church and of Christ's Body.

Confirmation results in a personal 'pentecost' for the believer, just as at baptism the mystery of Christ's Passion, his death and resurrection, become the vital essence of the believer's spiritual life. In and through confirmation the Christian is able to envision the event of Pentecost as an essential reality in his personal spiritual experience; the coming of the Spirit strengthens and brings peace which provides the key to the eventual transformation of the 'old man' conforming him in Christ's image. Through confirmation the Spirit inspires the believer to fulfill his brotherly duty of love which in time broadens the extent to which the resurrection becomes real to the world as a whole. Personal redemption becomes, through the inspiration of the Spirit, a desire for the redemption of all people. The Holy Spirit 'inspires' the believer's efforts towards salvation, and encourages his hope of eternal life, by making the spiritual gifts given to him more effective and, most importantly, by turning him from selfish interests to a compassionate and loving interest in the "common good" of mankind (1Corinthians 12:4-7). During confirmation the bishop may bind the believer with the words, "You have been clothed with the living Father; you have received Christ the Son; you have put on the Holy Spirit, and have been given the hope of glory which Adam laid aside" (*Mysteries of Initiation – Confirmation* 1978:48).

2.1.3. Eucharist

Eucharist comes from the Greek: "eucharistein" and "eulogein" which means 'thanksgiving' or 'offering' (Luke 22:19; 1Corinthians 11:24; Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22). The Lord's Supper symbolises the future "wedding supper of the Lamb" (Jesus) in the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 19:9).

Baptism begins the process of divinization; chrismation perfects it, and the Eucharist fulfills it. This is the centre and focal point of Christian faith and life and the very heart of Christian unity. Christians believe that whoever eats this 'heavenly food' receives forgiveness of sins and is spiritually transformed. This process helps the initiated Christian reach the promised glory. The Eucharist (the Body and Blood of Jesus) is the viaticum for the earthly journey, and a pledge of resurrection: "...we share in the cross of Christ, 'eating' his death and 'drinking' his resurrection" (Gemayel 1984:1096).

The Eucharist is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross; a memorial of his death and resurrection. The Eucharistic celebration unites Christians with the heavenly liturgy and anticipates eternal life, when "God will be all in all" (1Corinthians 15:28). To receive the Eucharist is to receive "the words of eternal life" which is to receive the Lord himself, the Bread of Life, who came down from heaven (John 6:68).

Thus, from celebration to celebration, as they proclaim the Paschal mystery of Jesus "until he comes," the pilgrim people of God advances, "following the narrow way of the cross" (1Cor 11:26) toward the heavenly banquet, when all the elect will be seated at the table of the kingdom (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:340).

The breaking of the bread signifies the breaking of his body, resulting in death. This is made clear when Christ prays over the cup containing red wine, as the rite lays down. The separate mention of blood is in itself an indication of violent death; as we read in Matthew (26:26-28) and Mark (14:22-25), Jesus added that it will "be poured out" meaning that he would be offered as a victim in sacrifice. Thus the bread and wine were symbols of his coming death, and the reason why he had to die. The meal of bread and wine are both a symbol of thanksgiving and a symbol of sacrifice at one and the same time. The Catholic Christian believes that not only do the bread and wine serve to tell a story, but in Holy Communion are actually in a mysterious manner turned into the Body and Blood of Christ.

The simplest gestures - the giving and taking of the bread and wine - and the simplest of words: "This is my body...my blood..." (Matthew 26:26-28) focus the attention on who Jesus is and what he gives to the believer. Thy mystery is so profound that the Christian finds it difficult to comprehend, and must perforce experience it in the depths of his being, in faith, if he is to benefit from it. The meaning inherent in this Paschal Mystery includes the expectation of the Kingdom; the memory of Christ's farewell; the intimate and abiding presence of Christ; the reality of Christ's sacrificial act; the covenant between God and humanity; forgiveness of sin; thanksgiving and the sign of an efficacious creation of mutual love in the Church. But more important than the reflection and meditation of the Church on this Mystery is the obedience with which the Church is urged to fellowship with the individual member of the Body of Christ stemming from the command given by the Lord Jesus Christ: "Do this..." (Luke 22:19). Because of this 'dying' the Church has been accompanied, manifested and constituted by the Eucharist throughout the ages down to the present day. From birth to the last hour of the Christian's life Jesus' sacrifice, his death and resurrection, is a present reality in their lives until he comes again.

Finally, Christians are committed to each other as they eat and drink the Body and Blood. "The bread which we break, is it not participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, the many are one body, for we all partake of the same bread" (1Corinthians 10:16-17). Thus the assembly of many is given a bond of union all its own making it one body; by eating Christ's Body and drinking his Blood, the Christian remains in, and become still more, his Body.

This holy communion unites the Christian with Christ's death and resurrection, and makes him a sharer in the divine Body, with one another and all creation, as is stated in the Apostles Creed: "the communion of saints" and understood in the expression 'the bread of angels", and 'bread from heaven', viaticum and 'medicine of immortality'. Through holy communion Christians become a Eucharistic Church, where Lord Jesus Christ is offered as a universal sacrifice for the redemption of the living and the dead who "...have died in Christ but are not wholly purified," so that they may be able to enter into the light and peace of Christ. Understanding this, St. Ignatius of Antioch said: "Put this body anywhere! Don't trouble yourselves about it! I simply ask you to remember me at the Lord's altar wherever you are" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:346).

The mass is the sacrificial memorial of Jesus' death and resurrection, where the believer receives with absolute faith, through the holy Eucharist, intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him ... so he who eats me will live because of me" (John 6:56-57). This growth in the Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic communion, the bread for our pilgrimage until the moment of death, when it will be given to us as viaticum. Holy

communion separates us from death and sin: "... separating us from past sin and preserving us from future sin" as St. Ambrose said; and as St. Fulgentius of Ruspe said: "...it is a gift of love, dying to sin and living for God (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:352). Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist she remembers this promise, and turns her gaze "...to him who is to come". In her prayer she calls for his coming: "Marana Tha!" (Come, Lord Jesus!) (Revelation 1:4; 22:20; 1Corinthians16:22) and "May your grace come, and this world pass away!" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:354).

2.1.4 Divine Sacrifice

The "Divine Sacrifice" (mass) will be offered for the deceased on certain occasions, such as Sundays and feast days. But the mass should not take the place of the funeral service, which is specifically tailored to the needs of the funeral; the two are combined: the first section is taken from the funeral service and the second from the Divine Sacrifice. Later the family of the deceased will request mass to be offered as a memorial to the departed on the anniversaries, i.e. on the fortieth day after death, at one year, and at other times. The occasion of the anniversary serves as a reminder for the family and friends not only to remember the deceased, but also as a means of gathering them around the altar to receive the Eucharist. There are two main parts to the liturgy of the Divine Sacrifice: 1) Service of the Word, and 2) The Anaphora.

2.1.4.1 Service of the Word

The service of the word is celebrated at the "bema" or "exedra" (pulpit), a raised platform which is distinctively Maronite from the fourth century. "Bema" in Greek means 'throne' and is the symbol of the seat of Christ where he will judge the living and the dead on the 'last day' or Judgement Day (Dau 1984:253-258).

The "Hoosoyo" (Prayer of Forgiveness) is a unique feature in this service. It summarizes, recalls and presents God's salvation. The prayer focuses on the unworthiness of the faithful, and the tender mercy of God. The burning of incense symbolises forgiveness and purification offered for the living and the dead.

2.1.4.2 Anaphora

The word means 'offering' and is structured on The Anaphora of St. James of Jerusalem, and the oldest anaphora of all the churches. The anaphora is a continuous prayer during which, by the action of the Trinity, bread and wine are transformed into the 'medicine of life'. The viaticum is food for the spiritual journey and a pledge of salvation; it enables the believer to enjoy a foretaste of the happiness to come, and to make a spiritual pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God. The anaphora or the Eucharistic liturgy focuses attention on the readiness of the worshipper for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Do this in memory of me until I come again" (Luke 22:19).

There is no surer pledge or clearer sign of this great hope in the new heavens and new earth than the Eucharist. Every time this Mystery is celebrated "...the work of our redemption is carried on, and we break the one bread that provides the medicine of immortality, the antidote for death and the food that makes us live for ever in Jesus Christ" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:354).

2.2 The Healing Mysteries

While we are in this life we are subject to suffering, illness and death (2 Corinthians 5:1). Maronite Catholics believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, physician of our souls and bodies, who forgave sinners and healed suffering humanity, has willed that his Church continues, in the power of the Holy Spirit, his work of healing and salvation.

2.2.1 Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession) enables the believer to reconcile himself with God and his neighbour. The penitent who confesses his sins to the priest, who stands in the place of Christ, receives forgiveness and spiritual healing. After the confession a penance is given. This process of purification is a sign of new birth flowing from the baptism of tears; and the dying of self to sin, and living for and in communion with Christ. This is also called the Sacrament of Penance, which is necessary for true conversion and the return to God the Father's Home (heaven). It is also known as the Sacrament of Confession, as acknowledgement and praise of the holiness of God and his mercy towards sinful man.

Christians are called in this sacrament to holiness and sanctity in this life and in the next, through baptism and a 'new birth'. These 'graces' are all obtained through Jesus Christ, the forgiver of sins. "You were washed, you were sanctified; you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God" (1Corinthians 6:11). Jesus urgently calls the individual to conversion and repentance: "The time has come, ...the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news" (Mark 1:15). St. Ambrose says of the two conversions that in the Church: "there are water and tears: the water of baptism and the tears of repentance" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:358). This fundamental and radical conversion and repentance of heart is achieved through faith in the Gospel and through baptism, enabling the believer to renounce evil and gain salvation, through the forgiveness of all sins and the gift of new life (Acts2:38).

The process of conversion and repentance was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son and the merciful father in the journey back and the father's generous welcome. All the characteristics of the process of conversion: the beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of new life, pure, worthy, and joyful, which is a spiritual resurrection (Luke 15:11-24).

One special feature of this joy, the joy of Easter, is that linked to the forgiveness of sin; confession the 'second baptism' which is completed in Holy Communion, brings forgiveness to those partaking of it, thus in Paul we read: "O death, where is your sting?" (1Corinthians 15:55).

The sacrament reconciles us with God and with all creation. Sin damages and breaks fraternal communion, and the Sacrament of Reconciliation repairs or restores it. So by converting to Christ through faith and penance, the sinner passes from death to life and "...does not come into judgement" (John 5:24). For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin (1Corinthians 5:11; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 22:15).

2.2.2 Anointing of the Sick

Jesus as the Divine Physician, is called upon to forgive, heal and restore the sick person spiritually and physically. Illness and suffering have always been the greatest problem in human life and history. Humanity is limited and powerless before suffering, for every illness makes us glimpse our inevitable death. Christians consider Jesus Christ to be the master of life and death; he has the power to forgive and heal sins (Mark 2:5-12), and his compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: "I was sick and you visited me" (Matthew 24:36). Thus Christ continues to touch us through this sacrament, and allows himself to be touched by the sick; he makes their sufferings his own: "He took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (Matthew 8:17; cf. Isaiah 53:4).

Jesus did not heal all the sick. His healings were signs of the coming of the kingdom of God. They announced a more radical healing - the victory over sin and death through his crucifixion. By his redemptive Passion and death on the cross, Christ has given a new meaning to suffering: by uniting our suffering with his suffering, our death with his death, and his resurrection with our resurrection.

Christ makes the believer a sharer in his ministry of compassion and healing: "So they went out ... and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." And he confirms this mission after his resurrection: "In my name ... they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 6: 12-13; Mk 16:17-18). However, the apostolic Church has its own rite for the sick, attested to by St. James: "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14-15).

From ancient times the church, in both East and West, has practised the anointing of the sick with blessed oil. This is known as 'extreme unction'. Over the centuries the anointing of the sick was conferred more and more exclusively on those at the point of death by anointing them on the forehead, the eyes, the lips and hands. Today the anointing of the sick is not only for those who are at the point of death, but also for those in danger of death from sickness or old age, frailty, and just prior to a serious operation (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:375).

This Sacrament of Healing is proceeded by the Sacrament of Penance and followed by the Sacrament of the Eucharist. As the sacraments of Christ's Passion, the Eucharist should always be the last sacrament of the earthly journey, the viaticum for 'passing over' to eternal life. The effects of this sacrament is the power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen, with peace and courage, to overcome the difficulties of illness or the frailty of age, and against the temptation of the evil one (the temptation to discouragement and anguish in the face of death) (Hebrews 2:15). This is a preparation for the final journey at the point of departing this life to our heavenly homeland. The anointing of the sick completes the Christian's conformity to the death and resurrection of Christ, just as baptism began it. It completes the holy anointing that marks the whole Christian life: that of baptism which sealed the new life within, and that of confirmation which strengthens the believer for combating evil in this life, and receiving the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. This last anointing fortifies the end of our earthly life like a solid rampart for the final struggle before entering the Father's House (heaven)" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:377).

2.3 The Commitment Mysteries

The initiation and healing Mysteries lead us to the commitment Mysteries for the vocation of service, holiness and sanctity through the mission of evangelisation. They confer the graces needed for the life according to the Spirit, during this life as pilgrims on the march towards the homeland.

2.3.1 Crowning (Matrimony)

We call this sacrament the Mystery of Crowning because it is the 'crown of glory', and the 'crown of victory' over sin and death for a new life of sanctity and holiness. It symbolises the 'new creation' in parallel with the new Adam, Jesus Christ the Bridegroom of the Church. The Sacrament of Matrimony signifies the union of Christ and the Church. It gives spouses the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ loves his Church - the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life. This united family on earth is the image of God's family in heaven, and the family of the Beatitudes, the 'domestic' church.

Marriage is considered to be a true covenant of God and his people. Scripture begins with the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God, and concludes with a vision of "the wedding-feast of the Lamb" (Genesis 1:26-27, Revelation 19:7,9). Tradition and Scripture has always seen marriage as aspiring to fidelity and tenderness, and as a unique pure reflection of God's love - a love "stronger than death" (Song of Songs 8: 6). The Sacrament of Marriage and the call to virginity for the elect, comes from Christ himself. In order to please the Lord, the faithful must abide by his 'rules' set out in Scripture; to do this is to be ready to go out to meet the Bridegroom who is coming (Matthew 25: 6, 1Corinthians 7:32, Revelations 14: 4).

2.3.2 Holy Orders

This Mystery manifests a continuation of the divine priesthood of Christ in various stages: from the priesthood of Adam through the Old Testament to that of the bishops. The priesthood is the framework within which the Holy Spirit gives spiritual power to bishops, priests, and deacons to preach the gospel, to worship God the Holy Trinity, and to teach the Mysteries to God's people. Its main goal is the service at the altar, the teaching of Mysteries, and to build up the Church. This earthly priesthood is an image and reflection of the unending heavenly priesthood of Jesus Christ the High Priest; Jesus Christ entrusted his priesthood to his Apostles and the disciples who followed after them, who continue to exercise this priesthood in the Church until the end of time.

The priesthood is a 'sacred power' given by Christ himself, through the power of the Holy Spirit within his apostolic Church. This priesthood of the new covenant finds its fulfillment in Christ Jesus, the "one mediator between God and men" (1Timothy 2:5). This heavenly priesthood is a continuation of the priesthood of Christ and "the living image of God the Father" according St Ignatius of Antioch (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:384). This priesthood represents Christ. In the name of Christ and his Church, Christ continues to act and serve though his bishops and priests; Christ continues his triple mission of priest, prophet and king. This triple mission gives him the spiritual power to defend the Church with strength and prudence and as a model for his flock, to go before it mapping out the way of sanctification. By identifying himself with the Eucharist, Christ,

the Priest and Victim, the Good Shepherd and Lamb of God, guides and leads his people in this journey of life, not fearing to give his life for his flock. Thus St. Gregory of Nazianzus exclaimed: "Who then is the priest? He is the defender of truth, who stands with angels, gives glory with archangels, causes sacrifices to rise to the altar on high, shares Christ's priesthood, refashions creation, restores it in God's image, recreates it for the world, and, even greater, is divinised and divinises" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:386).

The holy priest, cure of Ars, said: "The priest continues the work of redemption on earth ... if we really understood the priest on earth, we would die not of fright but of love ... the priesthood is the love of the heart of Jesus" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995: 392).

On the following page, a diagram is shown which briefly explains the meaning attributed to, and the results accruing from the celebration of the Seven Sacraments. The celebration of the sacraments result in new life for the believer as an adopted child of God, empowerment through the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and a continual spiritual strengthening through eating and drinking the Body and Blood of Christ.

3. The Seven Mysteries / Sacraments as Provision for the Final Journey

MYSTERIES *SACRAMENTS*	SIGNS OF WHAT JESUS DOES *KEEPS GIVING*	SCRIPTURAL REFERENCE *INVISIBLE*	WHAT WE SEE, HEAR &TOUCH *VISIBLE*	FRUITS RESULTS
BAPTISM	He gives us new life as children of God.	"Unless a man is born again in water and spirit, he shall not enter heaven" (John 3:5).	Water is poured: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."	Child of God New birth New life
CONFIRMATION	He gives us his Holy Spirit so we can act as responsible Christians	The Holy Spirit will be my witness and you, too, will be my witnesses (John 15:26).	Chrism (oil): "I confirm you with the chrism of salvation."	Gifts / fruits of the Holy Spirit Eternal life
EUCHARIST (Holy Communion)	He gives us his own person: his Body and Blood as food.	"Whoever eats of my flesh and drinks of my blood has life everlasting" (John 6:53).	Bread and wine. "This is my body. This is the cup of my blood."	Eternal life Spiritual nourishment Provision
RECONCILIATION (Confession)	He gives us peace and freedom by forgiving our sins.	Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them (John 20:22).	Confession with sorrow and penitence. "I absolve you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."	Forgiveness Purification
ANOINTING / HEALING	He restores health and spiritual strength	"Is there anyone sick among you? Let him call the priests of the Church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the LORD" (James 5:14).	Oil of the sick. "By this holy anointing, may God forgive all your sins."	Healing Protection Incorruptibility
HOLY ORDERS (Priesthood)	He gives us his priestly powers for the service of his people.	"Do this is memory of me" (Luke 22:19). "As the Father sent me, I send you" (John 20:21).	Bishop places one hand on the Eucharist and one hand on the priest's head and calls upon the Spirit. Hands anointed with oil. "Grant to these Your servants the dignity of priesthood."	Service of God and His people Sanctity Perfection
CROWNING (Marriage)	He blesses the union of husband and wife with loyalty and love.	"What God has united, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:6).	"I do, Father..." Hands joined on the Bible. Blessings: rings and crowns.	Celebrating: God's creation and the heavenly Wedding Banquet

4. The Significance of the Maronite Liturgical Calendar Year

"This earthly liturgy is the image of the heavenly liturgy, which is celebrated in the Holy City of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God, Minister of the sanctuary. With all the heavenly choirs we sing a hymn of the glory to the Lord; venerating the memory of the saints, we hope for some part and fellowship with them; we eagerly await the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, until he, our life, shall appear and we too will appear with him in glory" (*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995:288). The Maronite liturgy over the period of a year, starts with the celebration of the birth of the Lord until his death and resurrection; it deals with the incarnation and redemption, the victorious Christ over death and sin, and intimates the Christian's personal death and resurrection with him.

God the Holy Trinity, the centre of the Maronite liturgy and Christian life, is said to move spirally, because the fire of the Holy Spirit inspires all creation to greater and greater degrees of perfection until the believer "become(s) perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

The Maronite liturgical calendar year has two main parts: 1) Temporal Cycle; 2) Sanctoral Cycle.[1]

4.1 Temporal Cycle

4.1.1 Sunday of the Priests

On this Sunday, Maronites remember all their deceased priests and bishops, and remember also Jesus, the Faithful Servant and Good Shepherd. The believers come together to commemorate the memory of those who were entrusted with the divine Mysteries, and who carried on the salvific work of Christ. Prayers are said that all God's priest and bishops may enter into the House of the Lord and reap the rewards of the faithful servant.

4.1.2 Sunday of the Righteous and the Just (All Saints)

The Maronites celebrate on this Sunday the Feast of the Righteous and the Just, or the Feast of all Saints in the Latin rite. All the men and women, children of the Church, who have followed the path of righteousness, are remembered. Prophets, apostles and martyrs, hermits, ascetics, male and female Religious, as well as all Christians who have lived holy lives, are also remembered. These are considered Just in God's eyes, because they have patterned their lived on Jesus Christ, the Just One.

4.1.3 Sunday of the Faithful Departed (All Souls)

The Maronite Church commemorates all the faithful Christians who have departed this life in the Faith. This feast, in the Syriac Antiochene Church, is equivalent to the Feast of all Souls in the Latin Church. Family members, friends and dear ones are remembered, as well as all those who have died with no one to pray for them. On this day, prayers are offered for the departed as a 'divine sacrifice' for their salvation, so that those who have

[1] (1) The Announcement (1st Coming), Epiphany, Great Lent, Resurrection, Pentecost, and the Victorious Cross (2nd Coming); (2) Feast of Our Lord, Feast of the Virgin Mother, and the feasts of other saints.

been nourished with Christ's Body and Blood will enter his kingdom of light. The departed are commended to the Lord, that by his cross he may lead them into the eternal 'wedding feast' and, newly arrived in God's kingdom, they may intercede before him on our behalf.

4.2 Sanctoral Cycle - Memorials & Feast of the Saints (Common Week)

The structure of the liturgical calendar serves to bring the Maronite community into a deeper relationship with the actual events that occurred in the life of Christ, and those that occurred before his birth as they related to his mission on earth. This is accomplished by encouraging the faithful to meditate and reflect on the meaning underlying the various stages that provided the framework of Christ's life, in the hope that this will result in the spiritual enrichment of the believer's life. In a certain sense, therefore, these events become examples whose spiritual content needs to be imitated by the believer. This applies to both the Temporal and the Sanctoral Cycle. To fully understand the relevance of this, requires an understanding of the Apostles' Creed and its expression, 'communion of saints', which refers to the Catholic belief that that an unbroken unity exists between the members of the Church on earth and those in heaven.

Sunday:	Memorial of the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Monday:	Memorial of the Angels
Tuesday:	a) Memorial of the Prophets, the Just, and Confessors
	b) Memorial of Bishops, Priests, Doctors, and Monks
Wednesday:	Memorial of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God
Thursday:	Memorial of the Apostles and Four Evangelists
Friday:	Memorial of the Martyrs
Saturday:	Memorial of the Faithful Departed.

5. Summary and Conclusion

The Maronite Catholic liturgy finds it source in the Aramaic-Syriac liturgy of the Patriarchate of Antioch which developed from the liturgy of Saint James the Less, the first bishop of Jerusalem. In time the liturgy was enhanced by the spirituality of the early fathers of the Antiochene See. The liturgy is founded in the concept of the Trinity, and the Holy Spirit is its principal minister as he is considered to be the beginning, the end and the perfection of all things. The main theme underlying the sacraments is that humanity, having being created in God's image, should be made aware of his mercy toward them, and of their need to respect his commands and to live lives of joyful praise as they journey home to their final destination - heaven. The sacraments and the rites involve the worshipper in imitating the life of Christ in obedience to his teachings.

At the heart of Christian sacramental worship is the Eucharist. While baptism begins the process whereby the believer grows to maturity in Christ, the Eucharist brings it to fulfillment by providing the very Body and Blood of Christ as nourishment for the believer. Even after the physical death of the believer the masses offered for him or her are still considered to be of assistance to the soul, thus it is thought that the Eucharist displays its efficacy even beyond the barrier of death. This is shown to be entirely appropriate as Scripture concludes that Christ conquered death and hell.

To conclude, this chapter provides an insight into the liturgy of Maronite Catholic Church as it relates to the sacraments and, in particular, their use and relevance in the Maronite funeral rites, as well as an overview of the significance of these sacraments and their

meaning in the spiritual life and growth of the believer. The liturgical calendar year is approached with a view to providing a short and succinct description of the procession of Sundays, their content, and the spiritual significance this has for the Maronite Christian in his personal and communal practice of religion.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

GENERAL THEOLOGICAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL VIEW OF DEATH-LIFE IN THE MARONITE RITE

1. Introduction

This study has brought to light various insight with respect to Maronite thinking relating to the mystery of death-life and the Christian's destination after death. As can be seen in the study of Maronite spirituality and liturgy, its history, rituals, and customs relevant to burial and prayers for the deceased, two questions need to be answered, namely, what is the meaning of life – why do we live? and what is the meaning of death – why do we die? This final chapter draws the threads of this discussion together so that the study of early Christian teaching, and the liturgy that developed, may be compared to present understanding and practice. During the course of this study the influence of Latinisation and its effect on Syriac theology, and the long periods of persecution by Islamic fundamentalists, had to be taken into account, in order to bring to light the 'pure' Maronite faith without allowing extraneous influences to confuse the issue.

The study of this subject is further complicated by the availability of a large amount of prayers and texts to be read and understood, and the differences found between all the original Syriac manuscripts, as well as the progress and changes undergone throughout Maronite history. In addition, to be able to comprehend Maronite theology concerning the mystery of death-life, it is necessary to understand its Syriac context, and the thinking of the Syriac fathers.

These findings must then be translated in a clear and concise manner, with particular attention to retaining the Scriptural mode of expression and remaining true to Scriptural teaching that the believer experiences a vital relationship with God in the present life, and that this relationship continues in the afterlife.

"You have united, O Lord,
Your Divinity with our humanity and our humanity with Your Divinity;
Your Life with our mortality and our mortality with Your Life.
You have assumed what is ours,
and You have given us what is Yours,
for the life and salvation of our souls.
To You, O Lord, be glory forever" (*Qurbono* – The Book of Offering 1993:254).

2. General Theological View of Death-Life in the Maronite Rite

The funeral rites are almost exclusively Christological in their content. They speak of the most striking, terrifying and ultimate human experience, death. They speak about Christ, the God-Man, who faced it in his own person and brought liberation from it in his own resurrection. He "tasted death like us and willed to lay down in the joyless Sheol" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:13).

Resurrection is at the very foundation of the funeral. It is never disputed, never doubted. It is simply accepted by all who share in the liturgical celebration of the rites: the priests, deacons, readers, the faithful, the relatives and friends, the brothers and sisters, the departed themselves and even the 'soul' and 'body'. For, it is contended that the soul and the body of the departed talk, dialogue, and are 'heard' during the rites, "Glory to the One who died in the grave and offered his Body and Blood as a pledge for the dead" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:13).

The general theological view of death-life in the Maronite rite is unconditional belief in resurrection, and is bound directly to Christ and to his teachings, but mostly to his personal experience of death. This experience is seen here under one special aspect, that is: the descent to Sheol, the nether world, the kingdom of darkness, "where there is wailing and grinding of teeth" (Matthew 24:51). The descent was not a fatalistic result of "greedy and mocking death". It was, rather, a sound affirmation of victory; but mostly, it was, on the part of Christ, a friendly, compassionate, free and saving initiative of visitation: "O Son of God, you descended to Sheol and visited the dead in their graves" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:14). Resurrection was, in fact, the outcome of such a visitation, thus causing a direct and personal relationship between Christ and those who were waiting in their graves.

For those who lived before Christ's time resurrection was grounded in the belief in the early 'promise'. given to Abraham. This promise consisted of a pledge by God that Abraham's descendents would be as numerous as the stars in the sky, and the promise that the Messiah would come from his descendents. But for the Christian departed, the seed of resurrection is already planted in their bodies and souls during their lives through all the 'means' Christ offered: grace, baptism, his saving Cross and, most of all, the provision of his eucharistic Body and Blood. Through his Body and Blood, Christ is seen as already "buried in their members as a pledge of life" protecting them from corruption (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:14). The texts describe him as reassembling the 'limbs' of the corrupted bodies - already reduced to the dust from which they came - and bringing them to a new creation, a re-creation. As the body is lowered into the grave, the priest takes a handful of dirt, sprinkles it over the body in the form of a cross, and proclaims the words that reminds us of all human beginnings: "From earth (dust) you are, and to earth you shall return." However, he does not stop here. He goes beyond and completes them with words about new beginnings, saying: "Yet, you shall be born anew (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:145).

Resurrection, thus, is the main reason for the Christological nature of these rites. And, because of it, the person of Christ himself grows in stature and takes on a new and wider dimension. Christ is not only thought of as the Son of God, the messenger of the Father or simply the Saviour. He now earns for himself the majestic and ultimate title of "King of kings and Judge of judges." Through the resurrection, his own and the promised resurrection of all believers, he is made the "Lord of all." Endlessly, tenaciously and even monotonously, the funeral texts announce that those who depart "fall asleep in the hope" of the Lord. This hope is nothing but the hope of resurrection itself.

The funeral texts present death as a new or final journey "on that road taken by all generations." They indicate a passage "from this life to life beyond," "from a passing life to an everlasting life," "from the place of darkness to the abode of light," "from the place of fear to the abode of joy," and so on. On the road "from here to there," the departed soul is understood to face all kinds of enemies blocking its way: "armies of darkness" "bands of evil spirits." They wait at 'roadblocks', and in the "aerial spheres" – "dancing in the air" – anxious to inflict a "second death" on the journeying soul. The images are powerful and

frightening, and the language is crude and primitive. But the message is quite clear: the departed soul, seized by fear, is unable to take this journey on its own (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:62). Hence the funeral rites develop the concept of 'accompaniment', another major theme in the funeral liturgy. Priests, relatives and friends can accompany the departed only as far as the grave. Beyond this point all they can do is commit the deceased to God, beseeching God to be their 'companion' on that road which is filled with danger and unpleasant surprises: "Rescue (the soul of your servant) from the second death. Assist it with your hidden power, that it may cross the dreadful passage" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:62).

The texts repeat over and over again the request for companionship. All who share in the liturgical celebration join in this call: priests, relatives, friends, the community of the faithful and the departed themselves. All the 'mysteries' of salvation are also invoked for the same purpose. The hymns continually implore, "O brother, may the church, the altar, baptism, the holy mysteries and the Cross, be your companion" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:77). The priest says: "Go in peace. May the Lord be your companion." And the departed soul echoes, as it were, the same supplication: "Pray for me people of this city, that his grace may be my companion" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:145-146).

The journey is safe only because of this companionship. On the other hand, a different image enters the texts here and there. The road to be taken is no longer a paved road, nor a flight into the "aerial spheres". It is, rather, "a sea of fire" raging with flames, which has to be crossed. This 'companionship' then, loses its subjective and personalized symbolism, and is envisioned now as an objective one. The Lord and the mysteries are now understood as a "bridge" or a ship "an unsinkable ship," enabling the departed to cross over safely, "May baptism be a ship for us, that we may reach the heaven of life. May we cross over the river of fire, For we took refuge in the Cross of light" (*Devotions to Our Lady of Lebanon* 1999:26).

Still, the 'end of the road' is not yet the final end. The departed will have to face two more encounters: the Coming of the Lord and Judgment. Judgment Day is evoked with a mixture of fear and an acceptance of the need for justice, but mostly with a firm belief in the "limitless mercy" of God, and also with awareness of one's personal "debts and sins" and of a "bill to be paid" for them. It is described through the evangelical image of sheep separated to the right, and goats separated to the left of Christ. Hence the constant supplication: "Place me at your right side" (Matthew 25:31-34).

The coming of the Lord is a familiar theme in the texts. However, the 'majestic' aspect of this coming is not often stressed. It appears, on the contrary, in the context of a more intimate picture. The second coming of the Lord is one of glory announced by the sound of trumpets and accompanied by choirs of angels; however, the emphasis is on those who labored humbly on earth and lived the whole human experience. These are men and women - the just, the righteous, priests, the ordinary believers, the "wise virgins" (Matthew 25:1-13) - the Annas, Marys, Marthas, Sarahs, Rebeccas, and all the others. The coming of the Lord is for them; it is 'theirs', in a way, because it is the 'reward' that gives final meaning to their Christian choices in life.

The theological vision of the funeral texts is expressed in the language of hymns and melodies, that is to say in a poetic language. This language bases itself on religious symbolism, basic and familiar to the Christian community. It develops in a constant paraphrasing of the Scriptural texts. The funeral language does not make use of a didactic

style and form. It covers themes and images which appeal primarily to the heart, imagination, sensitivity and memory. The emphasis is simple, sometimes naïve, but always human and down to earth. The texts at times attempt intellectual speculation. On the one hand, they depart from the ambiance of the liturgical celebration; on the other, they bring forth theological and philosophical elements which belong to an ancient, if not quite obsolete, past. It seems that the prayers primarily intend to teach. The hymnic sections, while bearing precious lessons in faith, intend most of all to comfort, move and convert. Their endless repetitions may, at times, seem monotonous, especially when they are recited instead of sung. However, they serve the purpose of providing a unique and moving experience in the presence of the "awesome reality of death."

This spirituality belongs to a particular cultural milieu and expresses a certain sensitivity proper to Eastern theology, thoughts and ideas. Indeed, it dramatises the situation. But, at the same time, it manifests a deeply rooted belief in the ongoing unity and closeness of the family (living and dead), of the Church (in heaven and earth) and of human life (here and in heaven). The members of the family, whether they be fellow believers or 'blood' family, firmly believe that they will 'see' each other again.

3. General Eschatological View of Death-Life in the Maronite Rite

The last idea to be dealt with is the concept of life in another 'world', i.e. the afterlife. For the Christian, the last things embrace the resurrection from the dead and general judgment and cosmic eschatology.

Eschatology is the realization of a promise that lies in the past, is relevant to the present and certain for the future. Christians would think of it as the unity which exists between their creator and themselves. It is the 'togetherness' or unity between Jesus' life and our lives, Jesus' death and our death, Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection. In a sense it can be understood that Jesus Christ is the believer's cosmic eschatology, who unifies them all: Christ sheds light on man's path that leads into the future, into the presence of Christ. The Christian tends to say with Saint Augustine: "Christ will be our place in the next life" (Luis 1996:3).

The final destiny of humankind as an awesome 'event' relating to the coming of Christ in glory along with the "Church Triumphant," and called the "Parousia," is a major theme in the Synoptic Gospels. This term refers to the return of Christ as an unexpected event preceding the final Judgement of mankind. In some passages Christ's return is compared to the "breaking in of a thief in the night" (Luke 12:39. Matthew 24:43), lightning across the sky, the flood in the days of Noah, and the destruction of Sodom (Luke 17:23-30. Matthew 24:26-28, 37-41). The evangelist Mark corroborates this, quoting Jesus: "But that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heart, watch, for you do not know when the time will come" (Mark 13:32-33). Eschatology is the risen Christ and the risen Christ is the supreme eschaton. The believer does not only speak of 'the end' or of final things, but of a personal, face to face encounter with the Easter Christ, an encounter that will bring his or her life to its final consummation.

The Catholic Christian believes that the eschatological fruits of the Eucharist are the guarantee and assurance of eternal life, because the Body and Blood of the Lord is "buried in us" and "commixtured within us" and as well we say, "your Body and Blood commixtures within our departed." All these terms indicate the guarantee of resurrection

and eternal life. The Eucharist is, so to say, buried in the believer like fire under charcoal (Tabet 1971:5-29).

Also in the evening prayer of Saturday there is a clear message about that day: "It is awesome the day of your coming O Lord; be compassionate on the one fashioned by your hand. Because you are merciful, so have mercy on your servants, those who slept in hope. So do not let them hear: ' Go to darkness!' because your Body and holy Blood is buried in them, but make them worthy of your heavenly kingdom with all the righteous who have pleased your will..." (All-Shheemat 1982: 207).

Death-life according to Christian hope will be completed in the eternal life with God. Death is not the end, but only a transfiguration into a new life with God. This Christian hope depends on union with the life of Jesus Christ the Son of God who became man, who took the destiny of man, and in, submitting like him to death will result in resurrection in union with his resurrection. Death is in the Christian biblical tradition compared to "sleeping" (1Thessalonians 4:13-18) and connected with the belief that Christ is coming on the "last day" to awake believers. According to the Maronite rituals and funeral rites we find sleeping and resting in the soil, in the darkness of the grave, and also resting/sleeping in the hope of rising again with Christ. This is a clear definition that death, in Maronite spirituality, is understood as entering the stage of 'waiting' until the day of resurrection.

The second definition is departing and crossing from this life to the other life, or moved/transferred by the will of God from this world to the next world, where all the angels and saints live in "the place of light and rest" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:33). Death is compared to separation, because the soul separates from the body, and separation occurs in which the believer is separated from his or her earthly family and 'moved' to the heavenly family.

The Church celebrates the mystery of death-life; the mystery of her Lord "until he comes." When God will be "everything to everyone" (1 Corinthians 11:26; 15:28). Since the apostolic age the liturgy and the life of the community has been drawn toward its goal by the Spirit's 'groaning' in the Church: " Marana Tha!" meaning "the Lord is coming" or "the Lord is here" (1Corinthians 16:22). The liturgy thus shares in Jesus' desire: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you ... until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15).

In the mysteries of Christ the Church already receives the guarantee of her inheritance and shares in everlasting life, while "awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus" (Titus 2:13). The "Spirit and the Bride say: 'Come ... Lord Jesus!'" (Revelation 22:17,20).

4. Conclusion

The raison d'être of a study of this nature is to come to a better understanding of the Christian's spiritual heritage, which is like an inexhaustible treasure. This heritage is the deposit of the Christian faith. This study hopes to make from the Christian past a 'living' past, by 'going back' or studying its roots in order to enrich its present spirituality, the pastoral life of the Church, and the lives of its members. It has required a determined investigation and translation of the early fathers' teachings, and the influence of the prayers from the Aramaic-Syriac tradition, and the manner in which they affected the Church, in order to make this spiritual outlook available to the modern Christian so that he or she may

gain a better understanding of the Christian faith, and its inheritance from the belief system of the early Christians.

To understand the beliefs of those first Christians, an overview of the history and background which contributed to the formation of their understanding and approach to religion has been given The Maronite Lebanese have always found a source of pride and joy in the knowledge that Christ visited their country several times during his life on earth. Clearly, together with Palestine, Lebanon is presented as a 'home away from home' for Christ and his disciples, and quite often in Scripture no distinction is made between Lebanon and Galilee of the Nations, which properly speaking included parts of Lebanon in ancient times.

Interest in themes of a religious nature and worship of supernatural phenomenon is not limited to the period comprising the last two thousand years. Indeed, as has been shown in this study, the concept of religion and its attendant burial rites is a common factor in all human existence since history began. Neanderthal man and Homo Sapiens both evidenced a belief in the afterlife and accompanying burial formulae, as archaeological and paleontological research proves. This interest in religious phenomenon is evident in the ancient roots preceding the establishment of Christian culture, heritage and history in Lebanon. Throughout the ages the Lebanese people have held sacred the principle of existence, renewal, and life, and in pre-Christian eras attributed to it three manifestations – the father named EL, the mother names Astarte, and the son named Adon or Lord. In the Bekaa valley the Lebanese triad is represented in the temple of Baalbek. The belief in the Phoenician-Canaanite god EL is derived from the Ugaritic Semitic religion which characterised EL as the father and creator. It is, therefore, clear that the Christian belief in the Trinity is based on a very ancient source.

Tyre and Sidon were the first Lebanese cities to feel the benefit of the disciples' evangelisation, after which Christianity spread throughout the coastal cities. By the end of the first century A.D. the Church had been organised by the disciples and their followers in all regions and under one authority, Antioch. In fact it was here that the believers were first classified as Christians. It was at Antioch that Peter, the Vicar of Christ and chief of the twelve Apostles, formulated the apostolic rules and tenets which were to become the base of Catholic Christianity.

By the middle of the fifth century the politico-religious divisions between Rome and Constantinople led to the formation of a spiritual and ascetic movement in the Antiochene Church known as the monastic life. It was from this community of male and female disciples of St. Maroun, a Syrian hermit, that a new and independent church arose, namely the Maronite Church. At one stage the Christian population in Syria was numbered at seven million, however, due to continuous persecution by followers of Islam, the population at present is less than one million.

Over a period of time specifically Christian burial rites developed to 'assist' the souls of the departed in their 'journey' in the afterlife. Tradition then served to combine ancient beliefs stemming from pre-Christian times with later Christian ideas and concepts, resulting in an admixture of superstition and pure Christian teaching. The Maronite Church has, in modern times, gradually shifted away from the overtly superstitious to customs that have more of a claim to the reality of Maronite religious faith. Burial rites have always been at the heart of the mystery of life, death and resurrection of the spirit in the afterlife. This stems from the great concern that the average believer of any denomination has with the

survival or non-survival of the spirit after the death of the physical body.

The Maronite funeral ritual exposition incorporates various elements, namely the four common stations which take place variously at home, on the road, in the church, and at the cemetery; an overview of scriptural and monastic spirituality; an understanding of death not as a final end, but, rather, as the journey of 'life' from the physical and visible to the spiritual and invisible reality; the anointing of the deceased's body and the prayers of the Sacrament of the Last Rite; the accompanying of the dying with burning incense; and, finally, the sprinkling of ashes on the grave.

The theological aspects of the Maronite Funeral ritual are emphasised in the importance of the Mysteries or sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist and its connection with the resurrection. The liturgy, rituals and symbolism are an echo of the eschatological and theological dogma of Christian hope. Maronite Christian funeral rituals and rites lay claim to be the most ancient and unique to be found in Church Tradition. Ancient Christian rites turn around two components of the spiritual world: Satan and his world, and God and his Church. The Church incorporates the use of the sacraments, prayers (of both Church and individual inspired believers, saints, and angels), baptism, the Cross of Christ, Our Lady (Mary, the Mother of Christ), and the use of oil and water in order to assist the deceased in the final battle against the powers of darkness, that he or she might gain the heavenly kingdom. Maronite prayer deserves further academic and theological research and study concerning the mystery of death and its relation with the Cross, baptism and the Eucharist, as well as the manner in which the prayers of the Church set out in a succinct manner its theological beliefs, as the following example proves: "I have consumed your holy body; let not the fire consume me. My eyes have touched this body; let them see your mercy. I was not a stranger to you in this life; let me not be an outsider in the life beyond. Number me not with the goats; rather, enable me to stand with the lambs, the children at your right hand, that I may sing your glory. O Son of God, I have taken you as a viaticum for the journey. When I am hungry, I consume you, O Saviour of all people. Fire will not touch my members because the aroma of your Body and Blood emanates from me. May your baptism be a ship for me that does not sink, and I shall cross over the place of fear in it to the abode of life" (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:142).

The needs of society existing in the mode of materialistic thought in which everything ends with death, is compared with Christian spirituality in which life and death is seen through the eyes of faith, to allow a more optimistic and hopeful approach to the mystery of life. Thus, the time of mourning and grieving is understood by the Christian as a time of meditation, peace and healing, and of uniting the family of believers with the deceased.

The second Vatican Council, in the constitution on Sacred Liturgy, met the rites of Christian funerals in the universal Church with a challenge for renewal and effective participation. "The funeral rites should manifest more evidently the paschal character of Christian death; they should also respond more adequately to the situations and traditions of each region" (Abbott 1967: 162-163).

The Maronite clergy and the Church, in consultation with the community, generally make the necessary adaptations, which allow for the renewal of funeral rituals and practices according to time and circumstance. The changes that are made always seek to retain fidelity to the Maronite rite and spirituality. An unfortunate consequence of translation of the content of these rites and their concomitant spirituality, is that not all the English texts provide a proper and exact translation of the original language, Aramaic.

The faithful Maronite believer attaches great importance to the funeral rites and their implementation - whether the rites take place at home, at the church, or at the cemetery, because of the extreme emotions experienced by the family and friends of the departed and their earnest desire to do all in their power to assist the soul in 'gaining' heaven and 'attaining' everlasting peace. The prayers and rituals attached to funerals are explained in some depth to the believers in order that they may understand and take an active part in the service. The psychological insight underpinning the often lengthy funeral service is, thus, that of allowing the participant to come to terms with the emotional depth experienced because of the loss of his or her loved one.

This second Vatican Council's findings, relating to funeral rites, harmonises with the Maronite character and spirituality of Christian death, because they both hold a great wealth of liturgical, spiritual and theological content and meaning. Following in this context, with slight adjustments for modern consumption, *The Book of Funerals* according to the Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church, allows for a more unified and balanced understanding of the meaning of ancient prayers, and creates new methods of devotion. This has been achieved through a careful study of the roots of the Maronite Catholic faith, its basic precepts, and the needs intrinsic to the renewal of its liturgy.

Scripture is not expansive as concerns specific information about the soul after death. However, the New Testament revolves around the person of Jesus, and contributes to the personal eschatology of Christianity the belief that humankind's only true hope for salvation lies in him. It follows, therefore, that eternal bliss and peace depends absolutely upon the acceptance or rejection by the individual of Jesus as a personal saviour. Finally, death is the end of earthly life, like a deep sleep or 'absence' until the day of resurrection. It is believed that the entry into heaven of the righteous waits upon the general resurrection when all will be fulfilled. The righteous wait with a measure of joy and exaltation, but the sinners wait with sadness and fear. Tradition says that, through the prayers of the faithful and God's mercy, the departed who find themselves in purgatory or the 'nether world' may, through the mercy of God and the prayers of the faithful, also gain a place in the kingdom on the day of the general Judgement.

Maronite Catholic Christians view the afterlife as a beginning rather than as an end. It is a release from this 'vale of tears' into a future which shines with blinding light, the light of God himself. Life, therefore, can be said to begin with death, which is the point in eternity when the birth of the spiritual person takes place and all fear and anxiety is resolved in the peace and glory of God. As Paul says in his letter to the Romans: "...for we rejoice in our hope of sharing in the splendour of God" (Romans 5:2). This hope is the typical virtue of humanity which already possesses a substantial part of its inheritance, and which, forging confidently ahead, looks forward with eager longing to its full possession.

APPENDIX A

PAST AND PRESENT STRUCTURE OF THE GINNAZAT (FUNERALS)

The Ginnazat, in its present form, is composed of four elements:

Psalms
The Rite of Incense
Scripture Readings
Hymns

Psalms

The psalms are introduced by prayer and accompanied by intervening strophes (usually inspired by the verses of the particular psalm). The psalms themselves are often considerably abbreviated and take a subordinate place to the hymnic strophes.

The Rite of Incense

The "Rite of Incense" takes the traditional form of the *"Hoosoyo"* (Prayer of Forgiveness) which incorporates both the rite which uses incense as its main element, as well as expressing its meaning as a prayer seeking forgiveness for sin, and especially that these sins will not be taken into account at the 'Judgement'.

Scripture Readings

The Scripture readings are reduced to two: a reading from the letters of St. Paul, preceded by the *"Mazmooro"* (Psalm of the Readings), and a gospel reading which is announced by *"Fetgmo"* (Verse before the Gospel).

Hymns

Two important hymns complete the structure of the funeral service. The *"Sooghito"* (Canticle) concludes the psalmody, and the *"Bo'outo"* (Hymn of Supplication) which is sung according to the melody of St. James of Seroug, terminates the service.

The Latest Version of the Funerals Book

After many years of research, comparison, and study directed towards the renewal of the funeral rite, the Maronite Church instituted a special committee to review the matter, viz. The Patriarchal Committee for the Liturgy. A new version of the Funerals Book was produced by this committee. This new version unifies the prayers in the Maronite Church and creates a new methodology of devotion, first by going back to their roots and secondly by a renewal of the liturgy. This new version contains three services and appendices:

1. **For Men**
2. **For Women**
3. **For The Faithful Departed: Common Service**
4. **Appendices:**

4.1 Readings
4.2 At Home, or At The Hall of The Church
4.3 The Rite of Incense At Home, or At The Hall of The Church
4.4 From The House, or From The Hall of The Church to The Church
4.5 Entering The Church
4.6 From The Church to The Cemetery
4.7 At The Cemetery
4.8 The Music

Finally the committee was able after a long struggle, with the inclusion of input from many congregations in Lebanon and other countries, to put together a new version of the book which dealt with funeral services: "The Book of Funerals" according to the Antiochene Syriac Maronite Church, Bekerke 2000 (*The Book of Funerals* 2000).

All these Maronite prayers go back to Antiochene Syriac origin. This combines biblical, spiritual, poetic and musical prayers in Syriac and Arabic, and a selection of readings from the New Testament. This allows an intrinsically more valuable interpretation of Christian meditation, because it includes throughout a basic elucidation of the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as understood in the light of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-11).

Guidelines for the Service

The *"ginnaz"* opens, as do all the liturgical services of the Maronite Church, with the Doxology, and concludes with a prayer (sung or recited by a priest), and the Lord's Prayer. The general outline of the present form of the funeral service is as follows:

Doxology
Opening Prayer
Psalmody (51,130, 112, 63, 16)
Sooghito (Canticle)
Hoosoyo (Prayer of Forgivness) (Proemion, Sedro, Qolo, Etro) (other prayers)
Mazmooro (Psalm of the Readings)
Reading the Epistles of St. Paul
Fetgmo (Verse before the Gospel)
Gospel
Bo'outo (Supplication)
Sprinkling Water on the Coffin (new in the service)
Qadeeshat Aloho ("Trisagion" or "Praise to the Trinity" which changed with each season)
Eternal Rest... (new in the service)
Prayers: The Lord's Prayer; The Hail Mary; The Glory Be... .
Concluding Prayer
Before the Funeral

While the coffin is still at the house or at the hall of the church, the people will offer their sympathies to the family. At this time, prayers, meditation, hymns, and readings will take place with the specific intent to assist the 'faithful' to gain the maximum benefit of a Christian atmosphere and to gain a better comprehension of the meaning of Christian hope.

The Participation of the People

In this new approach to the funeral rites, the congregation is given the chance to participate as was the case in more ancient times, when the people flocked around the pulpit in three roles; the celebrant and priests, the deacon, and the congregation.

APPENDIX B

MEANING OF LITURGICAL SYMBOLS

Element:	*Meaning:*
Bread:	Life; giving; sharing; a symbol of body.
Wine:	Joy; happiness; spirit / soul; symbol of blood.
Water:	Death / life; purification; cleansing.
Oil:	Protection; power; healing; covenant.
Fire:	Holy Spirit: divinity; purification.
Incense:	Praise; worship; forgiveness; purification; to please God.
Offering:	The work of our hands; the sweat of our brow; fruit of the earth
Clothes:	God's majesty; royalty; divinity; perfection; worthiness.
The Cross:	Jesus; salvation; sacrifice.
Chalice:	Covenant; salvation.
Flower:	Purity; chastity; honour; majesty; love.
Palms / Olives:	Glory; rejoicing,; victory; worship.
Rings:	Eternity; no beginning / no end; pledge of loyalty; betrothal; trust; commitment; unity; covenant / alliance.
Crowns:	Sanctity / holiness; royalty; authority; new creation; new kingdom; victory; fruitfulness.
Salt:	To preserve; flavour; protection from harm; spiritual/material wealth.
Boat:	The promised kingdom of God; the Church; Our Lady; protection and safety
Fish:	Mankind; the community celebrating the Eucharist.
Fisherman:	Jesus as the Navigator; to lead His people to safe harbour; the priest.
Net:	The Church, which unites the people of God.
The Earth Globe:	Cosmic salvation; God's gift to us; the human heart.
The Little Church:	Our community; the parish; heavenly Jerusalem.
Dough and Mustard Seed:	Faith, growth, life, maturity.
Bible:	The Kingdom of God; God's family; our family.
Alpha & Omega:	Jesus Christ, the first and the last; letter of the Greek alphabet (Rev 1:8).
Black Ribbon:	Symbol of death and sin which binds us to evil (Satan).
Ash:	Symbol of death and destruction usually associated with burnt villages or cities.
Water:	Symbol of life and death: Noah and the flood = death / or water gives life e.g. rain.
Candles:	Symbol of light and fire: light = Jesus, the Light of the world; Fire = Holy Spirit which purifies our souls and burns away our imperfections.
Flag:	Symbol of our country; Christians as good citizens; loyalty and faithfulness.
Gestures:	a) Sitting: Listening, waiting, resting, rejoicing b) Kneeling: Repentance, conversion, humility c) Standing: Welcoming, celebrating, resurrection and ascension. d) Bowing head: Sign of respect and reverence e) Extending hands: Creation, willingness, openness, welcome, forgiveness, healing and poverty.

APPENDIX C

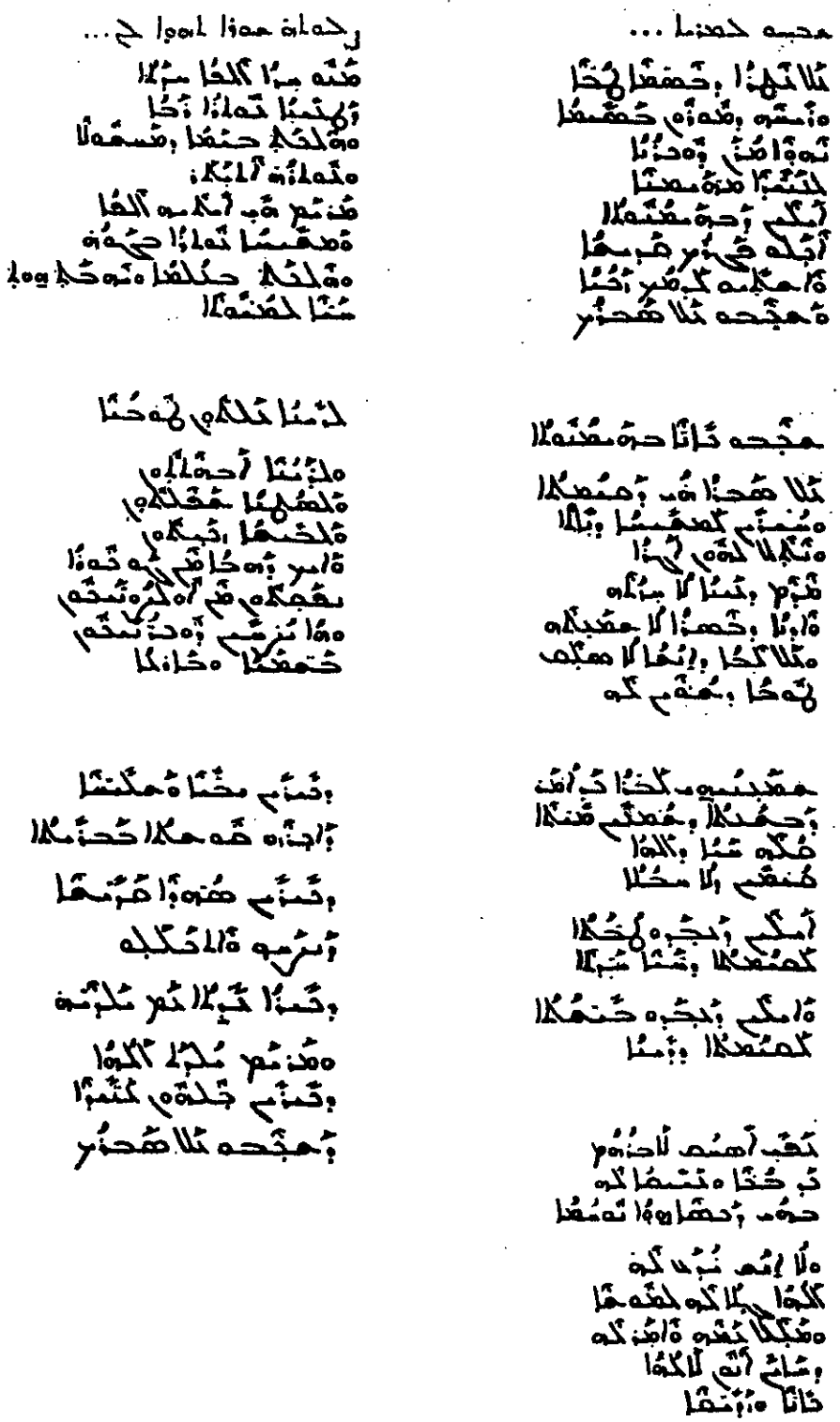
INCENSE PRAYER / SALAT AL-BAKHOUR

INCENSE PRAYER	SALAT ALBAKHOUR
1. Myrrh and incense let us take and a sweet remembrance, make of souls who sleep with the faith that they will arise. Who with Your true body, Lord, have received Your blood adored; Impart to these faithful souls the heavenly prize.	Chabah el moryo kulkhun 'ameh 'al 'etro dbesmeh tobeh wriheh dmoroon basimo nehweh moran dukhruno l'anideh mhaymneh Aylen dabhaymonuto ekhal fagrokh qadicho wechti ladmokh zakoyo wachkheb 'al sabrokh.
2. Righteous souls the faith have kept, with the hope of rising sleep, expecting Your great reward in Heaven above which has not been seen or heard, not man has it occurred what God prepared for those who yearn for his love.	Chkheb kineh bhaymonuto 'al sabro hoy daqyomto whoyrin lamchiho dniteh wnetel-lhun argo Medem d'ayno lo hzoteh wedno dbesro lo chma'teh w'al lebo dnocho lo sleq tubo dchowen leh.
3. To Your judgment, Lord, arise those unjust before Your eyes, receiving the punishment that sin made their due; but the good shall hear Your voice, and in rising shall rejoice, receiving a spotless crown and life ever new.	Chma'noy labro kad omr dabcho'to dchom'in miteh Qoleh hayo daloho quoymin dlo hbolo Aylen da'bad toboto laqyomto dhhayeh hadteh Waylen da'bad bichoto laqyomto ddino.
4. Abraham expired and slept, and with sorrow Issac wept, because that the dead should rise was shrouded and dim; But to Moses God appeared, saying those who are revered for justice and holiness, though dead, live in Him.	'Afi ishoq labrohom kaad bokheh w' ayiiqo leh bhoy dakseh wo nuhomo wlo noch yoda'leh Aloho glo leh lmucheh wmalel'ameh wemar leh dhayiin enun laloho kineh wzadiqeh.
5. See the treasure ship with ease, sailing over stormy seas; The treasures within her gowns; her treasure is Christ. This ship is the "Full of Grace" through her Jesus joined our race to give true life to dead, her prayer has sufficed.	"Sluto . shuro tehwe lan dam barakhto wbarekhto wbarekh mor:"+**Manu hzo elfo hdato dat'ino'utro** rabo whelkat byamo dmahchuleh w'utro etyatar Maryam hi iteh elfo wamchiho utro bgawo Whelkat b'olmo wyehbat wot hayeh lmoyuteh.
6. Blessed martyrs, tied like gold, for the holy faith we hold, resisting the threats of kings before whom you stood, you have earned by your great worth, praise in heaven and on earth; the false you destroyed with truth, and evil with good.	Ldino'alton tuboneh waldayoneh abhettun Walsotono chafeltun walbicho zkhaytunWakh dahbo men gaw kuro nfaqtun men ulsonaykun Who noshin dukhronaykun bachmayo wbar'o.
7. We remember those who preached, all around the world they reached, apostles and prophets of the greatest renown; we remember those who died, beaten, burned and crucified. On earth they have won our praise, in heaven a crown.	"Nyoho l'anide mhayemneh wlokh mo shubho wbarekh mor:"+ **Dkhirin nbiyyeh wachliheh** dakhrez quchto babrito dkhirin sohdeh qadicheh dansah wetkalal Dkhiro 'ito'am yaldeh wmaryam yoldat aloho dkhirin khulhun 'anideh dachkheb 'al sabrokh.

8. Give rest Son of God in Your Kingdom on high, with the saints and the just to the faithful departed. O Christ from tombs You have called forth the dead; please received our request for the faithful departed.	For: Man **(L'abdokh)** Woman **(Lamtokh)**: anih baynot kineh, bar aloho bmalkut rawmo alo mechtaryo'am qadichayk.
9. O Jesus, You prayed that death's chalice might pass; show Your mercy to us and the faithful departed. O Lord, may the prayers of Your Mother and saints, win forgiveness for us and the faithful departed.	Bro dabqoleh qoymin miteh, men qabrayhun Chma' bo'utan whaso **l'abdokh (lamtokh) Dafrach menan (dferchat menan).**
10. We remember now the Church, fount of all for which men search, and Mary our Mother and the Mother of God; We remember all our dead; by Your precepts they are led; they died in hope, O Lord, please spare them Your rod.*	Mchiho dsali dne'bar meneh koso dmawto a'bar menan koso dmawto wrahem e'layn Awrreb moran dukhron emokh wadadichayk baslawothun haso lan mor wal'anidayn.
P: Eternal rest grant to him/her O Lord. **C: And let perpetual light shine on him/her.**	Alrahata da eemat 'atehe/'ateha ya Rab. **Wanourouka al-abade falyoude' laho/laha.**
P: May he/she rest in peace. **C: With God's mercy and peace. Amen.**	Faltastareh nasouho/nafsoha besalamah. **Berahmatel Lah wasalama. Amen.**
P: Peace be with you. **C: And also with you.**	Asslamu lejame'ikum **Wama'a rooheeka.**
P/C: Our Father ...Hail Mary ... Glory be...	**Al-Abana ... wassalam ... wal-majd ....**

* This prayer does not form part of the Mass, but has been inserted for the use in the **"Gennazat"**: Funeral and for the faithful departed.

INCENSE PRAYER / SALAT AL-BAKHOUR [1]



[1] These words are sung in the Syriac Aramaic language, which is the closest dialect to the language Christ used, for use at home during the wake service, and at church during the funeral service (Ginnazat). It is inserted after the mass, after funerals, for the 40 Day Anniversary, 1 Year Anniversary, and during the Temporal Cycle on the Sundays of the Deceased Priests, the Righteous and the Just (All Saints), and the Faithful Departed (All Souls) (*Book of Ginnazat* 1988:153).

APPENDIX D

COMMUNION HYMNS FOR THE FAITHFUL DEPARTED, SUNG DURING MASS [1]

Our Lord said: "I am the Bread of Life.
Whoever eats me in faith inherits life."

This is the cup
which our Lord prepared on the Cross
Come forth, O mortals and drink from it
for the forgiveness of sins.

The Church proclaims:
"Come, O brothers and sisters,
take the Body of the Son,
drink his Blood in faith
and sing of his glory."

The Church proclaims:
"Holy, holy, holy are you,
O Lord; blessed is he who
gives me his Body and Blood
for my salvation."

Alleluia! Alleluia!
To Christ be glory, for he gives us his living
Body and Blood for our salvation.

May this offering intercede for us
on the day of judgement,
when we stand
before God's awesome Throne.

Alleluia! Alleluia!
To Christ be glory,
for from his cup the Church
and her children drink, and sing his praise.

O merciful Lord, accept this offering
from your worshipers.
In your kindness, grant pardon to
the faithful departed.

Behold the oblation has been offered
and souls have been redeemed.
May it give rest to the departed
for whom it is offered.

May this oblation,
offered by the living for the dead,
obtain pardon for their souls
and forgiveness for their failings.

May the Lord, who called Eliazar
and the widow's son to life,
sprinkle the dew of his mercy
upon the faithful departed.

With Abraham and Isaac
and with the faithful Jacob,
celebrate, O Lord, the memory
of those for whom it is offered.

O heavenly King,
accept the offering of your servants,
and celebrate their memory
in your heavenly Jerusalem.

In the Jerusalem above,
and in the Church on earth as well,
may it be an honorable memory
at your altar in heaven.

O Lamb of God, O Shepherd who died for his flock:
in your kindness, grant rest to the faithful departed.

My soul longs for your Body,
yet I am afraid to come close,
for I tremble because of my sins.
In your kindness, O Lord, grant me pardon.

May your Body and Blood that we have partaken
be for us the way, the bridge,
and the safe passage from darkness to light.

May the heavenly beings find joy
and mortals good hope,
because of the offering of the living
for their dead (Qurbono 1994:126-128).

[1] A traditional Maronite Aramaic Syriac Hymnal sung for the faithful departed.

APPENDIX E [1]

SINCE I FEED

Since I feed upon your flesh,
I shall not feed the fire,
but my eyes which look for mercy
see what they desire.
Your sacraments have been dear to me;
how dear, O Lord, will your presence be;
make me not up on your left
a wicked goat to graze,
but forever on your right
a lamb to sing your praise.

Perfect food along life's way,
the Son of God I find.
When I hunger to receive you,
Saviour of mankind,
your flesh and blood with their perfume bless'd,
drown evil flames burning in my breast;
I, baptised, am plunged in you
and not in the abyss,
dwelling in the source of life,
the font of perfect bliss.

FOR THE DECEASED

Our departed, through their faith,
have hoped that they should rise;
let these souls who saw by faith
behold you with their eyes.
Console them, Lord, Son of God most high;
reveal yourself ever standing nigh;
save them from the fire unquenched
and grant them, through your grace,
power to see the light that shines
resplendent in your face (Labaky 1982:106).

[1] A traditional Maronite Aramaic Syriac Hymnal sung for the faithful departed.

APPENDIX E [2]

I HAVE CONSUMED YOU / I HAVE TAKEN YOU

I have consumed Your Holy Body; let not the fire consume me. My eyes have touched this Body; let them see Your mercy I was not a stranger to You O Lord in this life; let me not be an outsider in the life beyond. Number me not with the goats; rather, enable me to stand with the lambs, the children at Your right hand, that I may sing Your praise.	ܐܟܠܢܢ ܦܓܪܟ ܩܕܝܫܐ ܢܘܪܐ ܠܐ ܢܐܟܠܢܝ . ܥܝܢܝܢ ܡܫܡܫܢ ܒܗܕܐ ܢܚܘܢ ܗܘܢ ܚܢܢܟ ܠܐ ܢܟܪܝܐ ܗܘܝܢ ܠܟ ܡܪܝ ܒܗܕܐ ܚܝܐ ܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܚܘܨܝܐ ܒܚܝܐ ܕܥܬܝܕ . ܠܐ ܬܡܢܐ ܠܝ ܥܡ ܥܢܬܐ . ܠܐ ܬܩܝܡ ܠܝ ܥܡ ܐܝܠܐ ܐܠܐ ܩܝܡܢܝ ܥܡ ܥܘܠܝܐ ܕܝܡܝܢܟ ܕܐܬܝ ܠܝ ܕܐܫܒܚ ܫܒܚܬܟ .
I have taken You as a viaticum for the road, O Son of God. When I am hungry, I consume You, O Saviour of all people. Fire will not touch the members of my body as the aroma of Your Body and Blood emanates from me. May your baptism be a ship for me that does not sink, and I shall cross over the place of fear in it to the abode of life.	ܐܬܘܬܝ ܠܐܪܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܪ ܐܠܗܐ . ܟܕ ܐܬܐܒ ܐܢܐ ܐܟܠ ܠܟ ܦܪܘܩܐ ܕܟܠܗ ܥܡܐ . ܢܘܪܐ ܠܐ ܢܡܫ ܠܐܒܪܝ ܕܦܓܪܝ ܐܝܟ ܪܝܚܐ ܕܦܓܪܟ ܘܕܡܟ ܕܢܦܩ ܡܢܝ . ܢܗܘܐ ܡܥܡܕܬܟ ܠܝ ܕܠܐ ܢܬܒܥ ܘܐܥܒܪ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܕܕܚܠܬܐ ܒܗ ܠܒܝܬ ܚܝܐ .

[2] *Book of Ginnazat* 1988:142

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