

# **The Synod Pastoral Theology**

## **Introduction**

1. The Maronite Patriarchal Synod is not a doctrinal synod in the familiar sense. It did not deal with dogmatic subjects that are an essential part of the Universal Church's teaching, contained in the official church documents; it rather dealt with what we could call Maronite teaching in the four files treated.

This teaching, however, is of a pastoral character; it goes back to the roots of our heritage and faith, to draw from the evangelical sources the norms that the Maronites have to follow in all courses of life they may take. These norms are not restricted only to ecclesial and religious life. Let's remember that "Joy and Hope", one of the most important documents of Vatican II, was called a pastoral document, because it included topics such as marriage, family, economy, politics and others. This means that pastoral theology implements and complements the dogmatic theology.

2. For this reason, the focus was placed on the spiritual renewal based on liturgical heritage, pastoral affiliation, and family on one hand, and on the importance of catechizing children and forming adults on the other hand.

However, any pastoral theology bears no fruits unless adopted and nurtured by renewed ecclesial structures which enable it to accompany individual and communal development to respond to emerging needs imposed by the different circumstances surrounding the life of the faithful. This compels us to divide the subject into three parts, and always according to the synodal texts:

**First: The Parish and the Parish Work.**

**Secondly: Liturgy and Christian Education.**

**Thirdly: Ecclesial Structures.**

3. It is clear that each one of these parts requires an exposé by itself as it was treated by the Maronite Synod. You will read these texts soon when they become available in English. For this reason I will limit my remarks to the major divisions and to the bond that is common to these subjects so that we have a clear idea of pastoral theology and its requirements, even if it is incomplete and brief.

## **First: The Parish and Parish Work**

### **Overview of the the Status of the Maronite Parish**

#### **First: A look into the Past**

4. The history of the parish goes back to the first generations, when the presence of a body of believers in a given place, made the bishop assign a pastor or vicar.<sup>1</sup> On the subject of the Maronite pastoral organization, we cite Dionysius Tell-Mahre the Jacobite, who said, “The Chalcedonian Church split in the 8th generation, in the year 728, into two independent Churches: Maronite and Orthodox (Roum). Followers of the Orthodox Church were inhabitants of great cities such as Antioch and Damascus, while followers of the Maronite Church were mainly from rural areas”.

Hence, our Maronite community in the motherland was mostly a rural one. Our fathers preferred living in secluded mountain areas in order to preserve their faith and beliefs, and in order to express them freely. It has become general knowledge that rural communities are distinguished by their close social relations that are strengthened by family bonds. The village, in general, is composed of one big family or from families related in intermarriages.

These rural communities were much poorer than the urban ones. It's what created the mutual need for interdependence between individuals and families and generated a sense of solidarity, participation, and unity among them, so that they could survive in spite of the difficult living conditions. The best example of this cooperation and bond is expressed in the principle of *al awna* (collaboration) to build a house or to harvest a vineyard or to help the sick, etc...

5. Often times, these social values were reflected in pastoral life: the parish church became a meeting place for villagers; in most villages, the village square was the Church's square, and religious occasions and celebrations were an opportunity for the villagers to meet (festivities, feast days of the village's patron saint, weddings, funerals, etc...). That is why we see that life around the “parish church” was one of the foundations of this society, since the church was the reference for all villagers and social life intertwined the pastoral life.

From here we notice the Maronites' interest in building churches and monasteries, where the church is often close to the houses, not only in distance but also in its modest architecture: it is the house of God and the house of all the people. But, there are two sides to every coin, and we should not just focus on the sunny side of the Maronites' spiritual and secular concerns, because this has frequently turned into a problem prompted by selfishness, favoritism, and nepotism.

6. Furthermore, the presence of monasteries and the aggregation around them created a sense of life and communion between the laity and monks, which extended to liturgical life, prayers, and general religious commitments through the liturgical calendar (canonical hours, abstinence, feast days, etc.). This gave a liturgical rhythm to daily life (every time the church or the monastery bells tolled announcing the beginning of a breviary, for example, all who could

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1. Refer to: Canon 6 of the Council of Gangre (340); Canon 28 of the Council of Laodicea (360); Canon 6 of the Council of Sardica (343-344). All became canons of the One Church in the Councils of In Trullo (691-692) and Nicea II (787).

participate would attend, and all those who were unable to attend, prayed from where they stood on their land). The liturgy with its richness, simplicity, hymns, and deep meaning, played a primary role in guiding the believer towards the spirituality of relying on Divine providence; and this was the source of public ethics, social behaviors, and the values of sacrifice and testimony.

Undoubtedly, the permanent presence of a pastor in the parish to share with the people their joys, sorrows, celebrations, and tasks, was due to the fact that the pastor was usually a member of the village: he had a house and worked on his land. The pastor's presence among his parishioners greatly influenced his pastoral work, which often revolved around liturgical rites such as administering sacraments, visiting them, and sometimes teaching Syriac and Arabic to children "under the church oak tree", with the aim of reviving liturgical ceremonies. The pastor was generally a man of higher education than his parishioners, and his religious and social status made him an important authority for the villagers-parishioners.

We find in the Maronite synods, some pastoral matters that the pastor had to abide by.

7. The Lebanese Synod (1736) assigned an entire chapter to the parish and its servant. Furthermore, the fathers of the Synod dealt with this same issue whenever a need arose in the remaining chapters. In the third chapter, entitled "On the parish-priest, the pastor, the presbyter, the priest, the high-priest and the Episcopal priest", the fathers of the Synod list the duties of the priest towards the faithful: hearing confessions, administering Holy Communion, preaching, administering the Sacraments, and being model of charity to the poor.

This Synod also recommended that the bishop ensures that the pastor and his assistants have sufficient and fair wages, be it from endowment (*waqf*) income or from the donations of faithful (this issue was and still is controversial). The fathers stressed that the pastor should have a sufficient supply of books to enable him to fulfill his duties to his parishioners in the framework of exhortation, preaching and catechism. And the pastor had to ensure well-bound records to register baptisms, marriages and deaths. He had to secure the cleanliness of the church, the altar, and the sacred furniture; also, he had to regularly and continuously renew the sacred oils and the sacred water font and maintain the baptismal font in good condition. He had to perform all religious ceremonies such as Holy Mass, and rituals such as processions, etc...

8. The synods convened after the Lebanese synod 1736 intended basically to implement its decisions. It is worth noting that those synods clearly stated that the pastors who failed to perform their duties were not to be considered as true pastors, rather as hired hands.

One of the missionaries who visited Lebanon in the 17th century, Father Eugene Roger, left behind a description of the state of parish community. He spoke of the Maronites, their dwelling places, their church authority: the patriarch, and the bishops. He noted that the Maronites inhabited villages, and every village was served by a pastor or a monk, and that there were also permanent deacons who never received the sacrament of Priesthood. He also noted that after each funeral, the clergy, including archbishops, priests, monks and deacons, along with the men, women and children, shared a banquet as a sign of the love and the unity that bonds them together, as their entire life savings were dedicated to honoring their dead.

Finally, it is worth noting that in the villages and cities where Maronites lived with faithful of other religions, the parishes witnessed an admirable amount of participation from all inhabitants. The dialogue, before being philosophical, theological and political, was, first and

foremost, a dialogue of love, rooted in daily life. The Maronites were characterized by their capacity to openness and participation, no matter how major their differences and conflicts were.

## **Second: In the Present Time**

9. The Maronite parish has been facing a great challenge in view of the socio-economic situation affecting the demographics due to the large gap existing between rural and urban areas. Urban parishes became crowded with faithful from different communities and backgrounds while rural areas are experiencing a scarcity of believers due to their pattern of life, which stands impotent towards the development of social life.

10. The aforementioned challenge created a need for pastoral activity within the different groups in the parish the community, especially in urban settings. The faithful who usually lived the socio-religious values by “Maronite intuition” ceased to do so. They are now submerged in other values -often contradictory to biblical values- especially in this era of globalization. That is why some parishes launched initiatives that allowed them to be present among believers. So, while in the past it was customary for the faithful to turn to the parish, today, the parish priest has to turn towards them in order to get to know them and to respond to their religious needs despite all sorts of obstacles. Some parishes may be in the beginning of this path, others still are moving slowly, and others have been pioneers in doing so.

11. As for rural parishes, the traces of their past is still reflected in their present. There are still lots of confusion between social life and its values versus pastoral life and its practices: family belonging, political partisanship, etc... overshadows at times the ecclesial sense of belonging and limits pastoral work to the practice of certain sacraments. In addition, the lack of priests in those areas affects the revival process of the parish.

### **1- Belonging to a Parish**

12. If we take a closer look at the faithful, we can discern three main categories:

- Non-practicing or seasonal practicing ones: this is a relatively large category.
- Practicing routinely: we cannot determine their percentage. They are those who attend the ritualistic ceremonies by duty, habit, or popular piety.
- The committed: they are those who, out of their faith are committed to all parish activities and accompany the priest and assist him in his entire pastoral work.
- We could add a fourth category made up of those who have left their Maronite Church to join the Latin Church

It is to note that women have been much more involved in parish life than men in all our parishes worldwide.

13. Priests should work on fostering the spirit of belonging in Christ and, through him, to the parish community, which fulfills the presence of His mystical body in a specific place. Special care should be given to large parishes, so priests could serve them through personal relations and interactions, “I know my own and my own know me” (John 10:14). This way the children of the one parish will know one another, will commit to the needs of their parish to help make it a living body in the Church. In order to achieve the latter, the service of these parishes should be

conferred to a group of priests, who live together and share the various responsibilities and obligations.

The priests should work on encouraging the parishioners to participate in parish life in all its aspects, and most importantly the liturgical life without neglecting their financial participation.

14. As for the parishes that include more than one rite, as is the case in the countries of expansion, the Maronite parishioners are encouraged to attend the parish church, at least during the important feasts, in order to enhance their Maronite spirituality, get better acquainted with one another, and with the heritage transmitted to them from their fathers and forefathers and through their martyrs and saints.

It is also noteworthy to highlight the presence of consecrated men and women in the parish who play an effective role: there are some monks who serve parishes and play the role of pastors; other consecrated people perform a number of pastoral services such as giving catechism classes, taking care of first communion and youth activities; others take care of different institutions such as schools, hospitals, orphanages, etc... The positive impact of their presence and their work on the parish and the parishioners is clearly visible.

## **2. Serving Urban Parishes**

15. Large pastoral conglomerations in the cities and the suburbs bring forth a different pastoral reality with different facets and fields. This reality imposes, in itself, a comprehensive pastoral plan which includes different parish groups. These parishes, which often include a large number of residents, make it difficult for the priest to establish close relations with all his parishioners, especially if they had stopped participating in liturgical celebrations at the parish church. As a good shepherd, the pastor should care for those who are away. That is why priests in urban parishes should follow a comprehensive pastoral plan drafted and implemented in cooperation with their assistants and devout laity.

The parish priest should also revive the spirit of cooperation with pastoral institutions and apostolic organizations in order to meet certain urgent needs such as fostering Maronite spirituality and its uniqueness, undertaking a census of the parishioners, visiting the parishioners, establishing bonds among them and organizing social work.

## **3. Cooperation between Parishes and Monastic Institutions**

16. The pastoral work that stems from the parish and aims at the salvation of men could be comprehensive through the cooperation of all active forces within the parish. Thus, the Synod urges parish priests and those responsible for monastic institutions to cooperate in the true spirit of ecclesial participation inciting the latter to be more sensitive to the value of parish life.

## **4. *The parish institutions and organizations***

17. The Synod singles out the following institutions:

### **a) The Pastoral Council**

18. In conformity with the stipulations of the particular law of the Maronite Church, which has established special by-laws for the pastoral council, and in the spirit of the recommendation

which calls for the need to establish pastoral councils within the parish<sup>2</sup>, the bishops of each diocese should urge each parish priest, to establish pastoral councils, in order to revive their parish life and to allow parishioners to fulfill their mission in a spirit of cooperation. This council, which is an advisory one, should include the different actors in the parish life on all levels: spiritual, educational, financial, etc. Continuity in parish work cannot be ensured except through the meeting of all pastoral actors within one council in which they work together to build an ecclesial body<sup>3</sup>.

#### **b) The *Waqf* Committee**

19. In conformity with general canon law, the bishops should work on promoting the work of the mortmain (*waqf*) committee with an ecclesial spirit that reflects the ecclesial sense of belonging of its members whereby belonging to the parish prevails over any other belonging. The Synod recommends that pastoral service be a priority on the agenda of this council in addition to different parish activities, while taking into consideration the needs of the church's building; focusing on public worship; providing a decent living for the priests and the servants of the church; and practicing charity towards the poor<sup>4</sup>.

#### **c) Ecclesiastic Associations**

20. Ecclesiastic associations or apostolic groups are a blessing of the Spirit within the parish because they welcome young men and women, each according to the gift of the Spirit. These associations are a priceless treasure since, because of their diversity, they form an element of change and renewal in our parishes, and promote the possibility of targeting a wider audience among their members. Since the different apostolic groups form a chain of living cells that help in the construction of a pastoral community, the Synod recommends this kindling spirit and encourages the growth of groups, associations and organizations in the parishes under the stewardship of priests, so as to form a place that fosters the growth of faith within the spirit of ecclesial unity.

The primary objective of such associations is to deepen human and spiritual commitment; their members are all invited to live a deep and continuous human and religious upbringing through which their love for Christ and for the Church will grow stronger and deeper<sup>5</sup>. The Synod also recommends the strengthening of pastoral, diocesan and ecclesial sense of belonging through encouraging and motivating apostolic movements to participate in the activities of the church on those multiple levels.

The Synod emphasizes the necessity of establishing living Christian associations in parishes in a world that is so often controlled by a materialistic culture, which leads to a way of life that is opposed to the life God has destined for us, and drives men to stray away from their faith. For this reason, our parishes are in dire need of a firm declaration of faith, a strong and deep Christian upbringing, and models of mature Christians, who are conscious of their baptismal identity and of their mission in the Church and the world.

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2. Refer to the *Patriarchal Journal*, issue no. 15, 1986, pp. 77-83.

3. For more details, refer to Text 5, Structures, Pastoral Council.

4. Refer to the Special Canon of the Maronite Church, Art. 5.

5. Refer to New Hope for Lebanon, 74.

21. The members of the Synod are aware of the importance of the parish mission, which is fulfilled through pastoral activities that embrace the different sectors of its society. Besides activities that target children and young men and women, there should also be special activities that welcome couples and families, and help them experience a living church at home where the parents are the first transmitters of faith to their children. Of course, we should not forget activities for handicapped and individuals with special needs. As for large associations, whose scope exceeds the limits of the parish and the diocese, they must follow a spiritual and apostolic path that benefits the universal Church; they should abide by the authority of the local church embodied in the bishop in his diocese.

In a time with an increasing number of dissenters from the Church who limit their commitments to social obligations, and in the face of hardships and trials that are befalling priests to reach this group, our parishes are in a dire need of the active and dynamic presence of associations that enjoy an apostolic spirit. Such associations gradually transform the parish into an apostolic community that evangelizes through life testimonies, love, and unity. The education and culture spread in such associations should aim to form effective individuals and prepare missionaries ready to consecrate their lives for the spread of the Good News, be it through priesthood, monastic life, or consecrated lay life.

22. Our Maronite parishes are often rich in apostolic and ecclesiastic associations and groups. The pastors should see to it that these associations are living associations whose members not only receive a religious education, but are put on a faith-filled path that will lead them to the discovery of the meaning of their baptism and to mature faith. This is done through a program based on the Word of God and its fulfillment in their lives.

In order to promote the work and role of groups, associations and organizations in the parish, it is essential that the Pastoral Council, along with the Waqf Committee, work on establishing a pastoral center for apostolic activities and for providing the proper education for the members of these groups.

### **Secondly / 1- Liturgy**

23. Liturgy is one major and profound field of the Synod pastoral theology. The Maronite liturgy captured the attention of the Maronite Synods from the 16th century until today, because it manifests the theology, the spirituality, the pastoral mission, and the preaching of the Good News, in addition to its inherent syro-antiochene patristic heritage.

The synodal text deals with the foundations, nature, and development of this liturgy through centuries and till the present day. However, the presentation will tackle only three points: the role of the liturgy in unifying the maronites, its pastoral characteristics and the liturgical reform.

#### **1- Role of the Liturgy in unifying the Maronites**

24. The present liturgical situation in the Maronite church is the result of a variety of historic ramifications and accumulations and of many intellectual, cultural and social trends that influenced the liturgical texts, rituals, and rubrics.

An active liturgical movement rose up in a variety of fields, particularly in the field of prayers and hymns. The reformers became numerous, each following their inspiration. New liturgical books were put out with a variety of rites. Some of them were old, other recent or very new. Soon the liturgical movement deteriorated into a chaotic anarchy in certain places, at certain occasions, and with certain parish priests. In addition, many promoters of reform began taking the liberty of creating new liturgical practices foreign to the Maronite tradition.

In view of this situation, liturgical reform became an urgent necessity in order to organize the text and unify the vision inside the Maronite Church, so Maronites, wherever they assemble to celebrate, will use the one liturgy that expresses their authentic identity.

25. Liturgical reform directly concerns Maronites all over the world, because the liturgy is the most important bond that links them all to the mother church and a factor of unity for the Maronites of the expansion. In today's world, and particularly in this age in which we see an awakening of ethnic consciousness, on one hand and a new world order on the other, the Maronites feel an urgent need to follow the liturgical, ecclesial and intellectual path traced by the patriarchal See in Bkerke. Thus, the liturgical commissions in the expansion will adapt the central liturgical reform to the living conditions of Maronites in their respective societies. At the same time though, they preserve the Maronite personality that manifests their identity. At this time we must recognize the great effort exerted by the eparchies of the countries of expansion for continuing to be in close communion with the mother church and for continuing to follow her directives.

It is worth noting that it was also necessary to preserve a few common prayers in syriac such as the "Kadishat aloho" and the "words of the institution"; for the external unity in expression contributes to creating a unity of heart.

## **2- Characteristics of the Maronite Liturgy**

The Maronite Liturgy has a rich theological and human dimension. It is truly a school of faith that illumines the way of the world toward the Kingdom. The following dimensions are amongst the most important ones:

### **a) The Trinitarian economy of salvation**

26. This economy manifests itself in the Maronite Eucharistic prayer. In the Anaphora the church sums up the stages of divine economy by thanking the Father for being the loving creator who wants to save Adam and the human kind after the first fall. This intervention of the Father was achieved in the fullness of time when he sent his only Son, the Word, who became man by taking a human body, through the work of the Holy Spirit, from the Virgin Mary, and accomplished everything, realizing the salvific will of the Father through His self offering on the Cross as well as in his body and blood for the life of the world. The Father achieved the divine economy by sending his Holy Spirit who descended on the disciples in the upper Room. The Church asks him to send his Spirit on the oblations, which she offers that he may perfect them all with his divine seal.

This intervention of the Father was achieved in the fullness of time when he sent his only Son, the Word, who became man by taking a human body, through the work of the Holy Spirit, from the Virgin Mary, and accomplished everything, realizing the salvific will of the Father

through His self offering on the Cross as well as in his body and blood for the life of the world. This dimension of God's salvation is found in the major liturgical rituals and prayers, and in particular in the "Baouths" of the divine office where we find prayers as such: "The Father who sent his Son to the world, the Son who accomplished salvation through his death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit who achieved and continues to achieve all the sacraments sealing them with his divine stamp"<sup>6</sup>.

### **b) Christological dimension**

27. The theological and biblical meanings of this christological –"messianic" dimension are manifested through two main events in Jesus' public life and mission: his baptism at the hand of John which inaugurated his mission of announcing the Good News, and the event of his death on the Cross his glorious resurrection from the dead. Baptism in the Maronite rite put together the two events, reflecting the theological concept of the Syro-Antiochene rite that stresses the salvific economy of the Son-Word, his incarnation, baptism and salvific mission, then his passion and death on the Cross and resurrection from the dead<sup>7</sup>. Thus, the baptism of the Lord Jesus became the symbol of the baptism of every believer who lives through baptism in Christ, carrying out his mission to the world, as a king witnessing the love of the Father, a prophet announcing the resurrection, and a priest participating in his priesthood. The faithful, through baptism, experiences a new birth and shares in death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **c) Eschatological Dimension**

28. The theology of the Maronite liturgy is marked by an accent on the end of times and future life, which are manifested in most celebrations. We find these ideas in liturgical texts, in particular in the rich texts related to the Blessed Sacrament – the Body of the Lord, for the resurrection and the new life. The texts of the Maronite funeral liturgy contain dimensions of a life of hope considered as a steadfast foundation of our Christian faith. In this context we can understand the Maronite liturgy of Holy Saturday, the theology of the descent to sheol, the waiting for the dawn of the resurrection and the expectation of the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom, "Maran Eta" who will appear in his second coming to the "ones with straight hearts". The celebration of the liturgy, with all its symbolism reflects the heavenly liturgy of the divine Lamb. Thus, the terrestrial liturgy is a foretaste of the liturgy of heaven. The liturgy is a celebration of the resurrection of the Lord, and the joy of the Church, born of the womb of the baptismal font and consequently a simultaneous feast celebration of heaven and earth<sup>8</sup>.

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6. Bouyer. L. "The Different forms of Eucharistic Prayer and their Genealogy" SP 8 TU 93 (1996); 156-170; Lanne, E. "Liturgies eucharistiques en Orient et en Occident 1er et 4eme siècles", DS(, 884-899; C. Giraud, *Eucaristia per la Chiesa, prospettive teologiche sull' eucharistia a partire della: Lex Orandi*, (ALDISIONA 22) Brescia, Rome 1989 à partir de la page 452; The "Baouth" of midday for Thursday of the Maronite Office, ed. Kaslik, 1982, p. 254; Y. Soueif, "God the Father in the liturgy", series of lectures, 26, Kaslik, Lebanon, 2000; "The Holy Spirit in the Liturgy", Kaslik, Lebanon, Lectures series; 25, Kaslik, Lebanon 1999.

7. Beit Gazo (12-13) trans. From Syriac into Arabic by John Tabet, publications of the Liturgical Institute of the University of the Holy Spirit, Kaslik, Lebanon. Series of Maronite Liturgical Sources 6 vol. (2000-2004), vol. 3; A. Mouhanna, "Catechetical Education in the Maronite Church", OCA 212, Rome 1980 (in French).

8. "The Christian Funerals" a series of lectures, 11 Kaslik, Lebanon, 1990; Corbone, "The Liturgy as a Source"; Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Vatican II Council, A. Flannery, p. 1-282.

#### **d) Marian Dimension**

29. The Maronite liturgy is marian “par excellence”. The Marian theology is evident in the oldest liturgical texts. They stress on the fact that through Mary, “Mother of God”, God’s plan of salvation can be best understood. This plan devotes an important and multifaceted place for the Virgin Mary present in many images and symbols; the Virgin Mother is often presented as the new Eve, through whom salvation was achieved. She is “The Virgin Mother”, announced by the prophets from whom will be born, the “Savior”, “Emmanuel”, who will redeem the human being.

#### **e) Biblical Theology**

30. The Maronite liturgy is rooted in the scriptures, both old and new testaments. It is often difficult to distinguish the biblical text from the liturgical one. There is no liturgy without the scriptures. The liturgical celebration is the best place “for reading the word of God” and announcing “The Good News”. The theology of the Maronite liturgy is basically biblical. The Bible plays a pivotal role in it. The liturgy prays with the Bible, thinks with it, meditates on it, explains it, and distributes it to the faithful, making it the source of inspiration, of its symbolism and prayer, in prose or poetry.

31. Consequently, the Maronite community is considered to be a biblical community.

#### **f) Monastic Dimension**

32. The disciples of St. Maron gathered around their ascetic father and considered him intercessor. Around the monastery of St. Maron and many other Maronite monasteries in Syria, they lived a liturgy rooted in the Syro-Antiochene rite. This monastic milieu left its stamp on the Maronites, especially in the prayers of the canonical hours<sup>9</sup>, where communities, churches and monasteries are remembered, in prayers, supplications and hymns, and in the continuous reading of the old and new Testaments. The monastic character is also evident in the permanent call for repentance, detachment, asceticism and mortification. On account of this characteristic, the Maronites were often described as a monastic community because they use the prayers of the monks, and like them they participate in all liturgical rituals.

#### **g) Human Dimension**

33. The Maronite liturgy reflects a spirituality proper to the human being in his life experiences in the various conditions of his life of faith. It embodies this spirituality in a dynamic and ascendant prayer towards the Father who accepts it and is pleased with the sacrifice of the Son offered by believing men through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Maronite liturgy is characterized by its human and anthropological dimensions. These characteristics can be found in texts, symbols, and even in the architecture of the Maronites church building. The harmony between the praying community and the external surroundings reflects a unity of thinking and a spirituality in which the human and social values interact in all their dimensions and conditions. The liturgical texts reflect the various life experiences of the Maronite church; she has experienced suffering, persecution, war, and forced immigration, but also the joys of communion, solidarity, unity, forgiveness, and the meaning of

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9. J. Tabet, “The Maronite Divine Office”, Kaslik, Liban, 1972 (in French); R. Thaft, “The Canonical Hours, in the East and the West”, Belgium, 1991, 67-126 (in French)

resurrection, the liberation of the people, and the victory of the saints of this church<sup>10</sup>. In addition, the popular character marks this liturgy; it is simple and profound at the same time: easy Syriac music, simple structures and rituals, and depth in theological meaning; it reserves a space for the participation of the people in the prayers and hymns during the celebration of the Eucharist and outside it.

### **h) Theology of repentance**

34. The theology of repentance is evident in many liturgical texts. Most of them express their relation with the reality of the Cross, the passion of Lord and his death. We find in these same texts the dimension of fasting and mortification and a link to repentance. This could be caused by the direct monastic experience and by the ascetic character that marked the Syrian Fathers and the Maronite people. The theology of penance is expressed in a tangible way in the rite of incense offering, in the gestures of adoration (bowing – “Mtanieh”) to express repentance for the sins committed and complete submission to God’s mercy.

The repentant state of the faithful becomes the way that leads to the joy of resurrection, the hope of a new life, and to giving thanks to God for his love and his abundant gifts bestowed on mankind<sup>11</sup>.

### **1-Liturgical reform**

#### **a) Principles**

35. The ecclesial authority is the sole competent agent for every liturgical renewal through the patriarchal commission for liturgical matters. Reform is usually conducted based on thorough research and study. It presents the work to the synod of bishops, headed by the patriarch, for approval according to canon law. The most important renewal principles are the following:

- a- the point of departure of any renewal must be the authentic Syro-Antiochene maronite liturgy whose identity must be kept pure from any foreign element in contradiction with this identity and that may change its features.
- b- The development of new liturgical forms must follow the principle of "organic development", which means returning to the origins and causing reform based on theological and biblical constants within the framework of the ecclesial tradition.
- c- Make liturgical practices pastoral and popular rich in gestures, symbols, and prayers that help people have a dynamic participation in the liturgical life
- d- The liturgical cycle should be at the center of any liturgical reform because it is focused on the mystery of Christ to whom all sacraments and church rituals are bound.
- e- Conduct liturgical reforms according to the needs of the times in order to suit the expectations of the various communities of faithful, provided that the general liturgical sequence remains authentic to the heritage.
- f- The use of a liturgical language marked by its easy style, clarity of meaning, depth of theological and biblical spirituality that helps the community to enter into the dynamic of prayer.

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10. Beit Gazo (12-13), Series of the Maronite Liturgical Sources in 4 Vol. 2000 to 2004, Vol. 2.

11. Beit Gazo, loc. cit ; Maronite Liturgical Sources, loc. cit.

### **b) Patriarchal Commission in charge of the reform**

36. The objective of this commission is to make liturgy a means of preaching, a school of faith, and an instrument of sanctification. For this purpose, it conducts research and studies to allow it to reform church rites, rituals, devotions, and general worshiping practices.

### **c) Role of the Bishops**

37. The organizing task of liturgical rites in the life of the church which are dependent on the authority of the church is practically realized through the actions of the bishop and his role in the diocese. For the bishop is the major and first priest for his flock. The spiritual life of the faithful flows from him and is tied to him, because he is the guardian, who strengthens, and directs liturgical life in its entirety in the diocese.

The role of bishops consists of promoting liturgical life and ordering it according to the norms proper to the Maronite church and her tradition. They are not free to act according to their opinion in this field, but their action in this domain is based on the proper heritage of the Maronite church, realizing in this way the communion with their brother bishops. They are to be united with their clergy feeding in them a liturgical conscience to help the faithful become resolute in their understanding of the doctrine of the faith, while celebrating that faith in liturgical practices. They are to establish liturgical commissions that will stay in communication with the patriarchal commission endeavoring to support the liturgical work in each eparchy.

In order to promote liturgical life in the eparchy, the bishop is to exert effort to encourage the continuous liturgical education of his priests through seminars, sessions, and lectures dealing with liturgical matters rooted in the authentic church heritage of the Maronites<sup>12</sup>. The bishop is to lead his flock to fertile pastoral pastures by applying the liturgical rules of the Maronite church and its continuous directives about growth and progress.

### **d) Liturgical Formation for the Priests**

38. Through the reform of the liturgy, the Maronite Church wishes to enable the faithful to participate effectively and with understanding in liturgical celebrations, because they are the principal source of true Christian spirit and of a firm theological doctrine. For this reason, the Church asks the bishops to exert the necessary effort to provide for continuing liturgical, pastoral, theological, and spiritual education for their priests.

### **For the Faithful**

39. The Maronite liturgy is not far from the real life of the faithful. It reflects their life experience in their prayers, in their life choices and spiritual needs in times of persecution, of suffering, as well as in times of joy. In this context, the liturgy becomes like a mirror that reflects the faith of the Church God Trinity, and in the incarnation of the only Son, perfect God true and true Man. It was a liturgy that joined together the celebration of divine economy and the life of a free and sincere human experience.

For this reason the pastors are asked to strive with zeal, patience, and sincerity to provide a liturgical education for the faithful, so they acquire the necessary understandings that enable them to participate effectively in the ceremonies.

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12. Ibid., 14-16.

40. Since the liturgy is a communal celebration, each of the participants is to fulfill his role according to the requirements of each liturgical occasion. Hence, it's imperative that the people participate dynamically in liturgical events instead of being mere observants.

The choir for instance, should not replace the people; it should enable them to participate better in chanting the Lord's praises. Often times though, choir directors do not distinguish between serving the rituals and being a performing religious chorus; the latter focus on the artistic aspect to be admired by the audience, whereas the church choir is a liturgical servant who is supposed to disappear in order to help the community have a deeper participation.

The synodal text also deals with the liturgical rites, the sacraments, ecclesiastic art, and with the liturgical year, because these rituals contain symbols and spiritual treasures, that help the faithful to sanctify themselves. These subjects bring to the fore front many pastoral aspects that demand the attention of the priests and of the faithful in order to correct every distortion, avoid everything that disfigures the liturgy and carry out all the modifications without touching the essence of these rites. Thus, the Maronite Church will find herself one and unified by her liturgy, even if she expresses it in different languages according to the countries in which she lives and the cultures she interacts with.

## **Secondly/ 2- Christian Education**

41. Every aspect of Christian education is a part of pastoral work. This education begins at home and continues at school. This was the principal objective of establishing schools according to the Lebanese Synod of 1736; it is also the objective of continuing education for adults in the parish.

The patriarchal synod has devoted an entire text in which it deals with the pastoral aspect of this education.

In the past, the Lebanese Synod imposed an obligation on the priests to catechize the faithful on Sundays and feast days using the Roman Catechism, that was published after the Tridentine Council held in 1566. This obligation was also imposed on parents and school teachers.

42. From past experience we derive the following constants:

- a. Safeguarding faith and living it in true communion with those entrusted of serving the Maronite Church. "The Church of the living God is the pillar and foundation of faith" (1 Timothy 3:15)
- b. Benefit from the teachings of the Church Fathers especially the Syriac ones. While reading their works at the liturgy, the Church enriches itself with their teachings, guidance, and encouragement. For this reason the liturgy becomes the primary source of faith without overlooking the importance of family prayers.
- c. The Bible and the Ecclesial Tradition remain the main sources of truth and true Christian living. Prayers and liturgical readings heard and memorized by the faithful, came from these two sources. As the Bible is more available today, the Maronites should allow it to

become “a lantern, guiding their steps, and a light illumining them the way,” through constant reading of, and meditation upon its holy texts.

- d. Before book printing and widespread utilization, bishops, priests, and monks were engaged in teaching the faithful the evangelical virtues proclaiming the Word and living it.
  - e. The relationship between the Maronites and other Christians has always been peaceful and loving, built on cooperation especially in times of trial. Nowadays, this relationship has developed to the extent that they need to have mutual openness and a continuous search for complete unity with Christ.
  - f. Since the beginnings, the Maronites have considered their coexistence with Muslims an act of Providence. The Maronites bear witness to Jesus and His Love among them, and they work together to build societies and nations. Maronites seek equality in rights and duties, appreciate the values that are common to both religions.
  - g. The saints of the Maronite Church constitute a living teaching for all Maronites; they are a fifth gospel written in their language and sung in their tunes. They call upon the teachers and students: “Follow our example as we have followed the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).
43. Education however has to respond the needs of today’s human being in his new conditions, while remaining faithful to the true heritage. Hence, the following considerations are to be observed:
- a. Continuous religious education for adults should stress on the diversity of our world. Those entrusted with religious education must inquire about the problems and sufferings of adults within their environment.
  - b. Christian education has to take into account the different fields to which the faithful belong and address their needs in specific manners, i.e. physicians are different than engineers, factory workers, and so on.
  - c. Apostolic and religious movements should provide Christian formation for all their members.
  - d. While asserting the importance of developing a textbook for adult education, the media could be very useful in spreading Christian thinking and values.
  - e. Universal and local Church documents must be published so that every adult can live according to the teachings of the Church.
  - f. Cooperation between the various Churches is a necessity. This cooperation will help create an ecumenical spirit and an adequate ecumenical religious education program.
44. We must not forget an important truth of our Maronite reality: the Maronite Church has become a Church of international expansion. She is dedicated to educating its followers in the spirit of dialogue and understanding in order to safeguard their identity. Our Church is standing at a turning point of its life, with many opportunities and graces, yet also with many risks and challenges.

45. The text mentions the places where this education ought to be given, stressing on the important role of the parish as a privileged place for such an education.

### **Thirdly: The Ecclesial Structures**

46. How did the Maronite Church organize, and continue to organize herself, in the wide pastoral field? What is required of her today? To answer this question, we shall cite a few facts, principles, and proposals taken from the fifth text of the Synod which deals with the topic of structures and their renewal.

#### **1- The Patriarchate**

47. The Lebanese Synod (1736) introduced a -then- necessary reform in the structure of the Maronite Patriarchate, in response to the pastoral needs of that time. It established dioceses with canonical status, each headed by a bishop endowed with legitimate jurisdiction and compelled, within the patriarchal territory, to reside in his diocese. Before that, they used to live with the patriarch, who would delegate them to shepherd the people. The new structure weakened, in a way, the centralized power of the Patriarch while it continued to deal with him as head and shepherd of the Maronite Church.

48. It is essential to stress on the importance of atriarchal centralization and the unity of the Maronite patriarchate in the East and West, on one hand, as it is also important to consolidate the episcopal synodality beautifully represented in the synod of bishops. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing us today is the fact that the majority of Maronites reside outside the patriarchal territory. This is a relatively new reality compared with the situation at the eve of the Lebanese Synod of 1736. Today the Maronites have expanded all over the world and have bishops in many countries. The Maronite Church is called to increase her awareness of this worldwide expansion, seriously and profoundly study it, taking into consideration all the new data in all its aspects: geographic, demographic, cultural, and ecclesial. For that same reason, she is also invited to develop a better organization which ensure proper and continuous communion and communication with the Maronite Patriarchate.

49. An ontological communion binds the dioceses to the Patriarchal See. No matter how far a diocese is, it is impossible for her to develop independently from the Patriarchal See. Consequently, it is necessary to strengthen the ecclesial bonds with the Patriarchate based on a profound feeling of belonging to the Church which guarantees the preservation of the Maronite Church's identity.

50. As sacrament of communion, the Church is specially revealed in synodal work because it is the synodal structure that creates a permanent awareness of the communal reality of the Church. Our bishops have always safeguarded this communion by gathering around their Head and Father, the Patriarch, bearing with him the burden of the responsibility over all Maronites.

Synodality in our Maronite Church is a spiritual reality involving the Patriarch as Head and Father. The Patriarch exercises his authority, according to the Law, by himself, with the permanent synod or with the general synod. Hence, the Maronite patriarchal synod urges that the following actions be taken:

- a- Activating the work of the synod of bishops by reviving its legislative role and developing its operational methodology

- b- Collaborating in human and material resources:
- brotherly help, coordination and consultation (priests exchange, liturgical experiences, etc
  - Intensify the spirituality of communal life on all levels, and giving priority to this communion among bishops.
  - Common planning based on profound and accurate studies of the reality of parishes, and the commitment to act on the most important and most urgent matters.

Hence, the patriarchal synod has decided to establish a patriarchal office for this purpose, within the general secretariat of the patriarchate, charged with coordinating the exchange of experiences and meeting a few common diocesan needs.

- c- Establishing more dioceses where and when needed for better pastoral ministry

- d- Fostering regular encounters for the bishops of the Expansion:

- with each other, by grouping them according to region or to language, like the meeting of the diocese of North America, or meeting of Anglophone or Spanish speaking dioceses, with the possibility of holding a periodic convention in one of the countries of Expansion, or a meeting of bishops during the bishops' annual retreat in Lebanon.
- with local authorities, by joining the local Councils of bishops of the countries of Expansion and collaborating with them on all matters.

## 2- The Diocese

51. The Code of Canon Law of the Eastern Churches, in effect since 1991, organizes the diocese into a complete institutional structure, defines the rights and obligations of the bishop, and formulates the framework of the cooperation between bishop, priests, and laity for the service of God's people.

The institutional structure is composed of persons and councils defined by the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches and internally regulated by the Maronite Particular Law. These persons and councils assist the bishop in the governance of the diocese (c. 243 par. 1), help him perform pastoral and apostolic activities, to organize the ministry of teaching, sanctifying, and governing, and to administer finances and exercise judicial functions.

52. The Councils are: the presbyteral council, the diocesan college of consultants, the diocesan pastoral council.

The persons who surround the bishop, and the structures he establishes, reveals the importance of planning and participation to express the mystery of the Church, where the work is collegial and involves clergy, religious men and women, and laity. Each one of them contributes to the task according to the gifts bestowed on him by the Spirit in order to build the Church and realize her mission.

### **3- The Parish**

53. In the first part; we dealt with the topic of the parish so there is no need to repeat what we have said earlier, But we should remind you of its importance and of the institutional work in the parish, because the parish is the basic cell of the Church where many talents and gifts are waiting to be exploited for the good of the entire body.

### **Conclusion**

54. Pastoral work is the heart of the Church's life. The shepherd, a patriarch, a bishop, or a priest cannot separate his life from the parish, nor can he succeed in his work, unless it is based on his calling as a pastor whose model is Christ (John 10), and whose work, aims to provide the parish with needed spiritual nourishment, new structures, good organization, and channeling capacities. The wise pastor is the one who clings to the constants of the faith and heritage without neglecting to develop modern means that enable him to best fulfill his mission.

55. The pastor should not forget his affiliation to the priestly body. This requires that the pastor works with his brothers in love and harmony.

56. The pastor's work, however, will be completed by the work of his assistants (priests, deacons, subdeacons, laymen).

57. Once we gain this ecclesial and pastoral feeling, we then look for means to nourish the spirit of communion among us, no matter where we are. The twinning between dioceses, parishes, and institutions, and the exchange of experiences taking in consideration the unique particularities of each society, could be one of those useful means. Why not use electronic communication for this purpose? Anyhow, there is a project to connect all the Maronite dioceses and later parishes in order to strengthen ecclesial bonds and to spread the various experiences.

58. I repeat again, the return to the details of the texts cited above with few of their passages, should remain the principal and indispensable source for our thinking and pastoral work.

Thank You & God bless you.