

The History of the Maronite Church

In the first quarter of the 5th century AD , a monk and priest died , he was of the Kourosh region , between Aleppo and Antiochus (North of the current Syria), a region that was administratively known in the roman- Byzantine era as the “ first Syria”; he was aramean native, Syriac speaking , and his name was Maroun.

The bishop of Kourosh, Theodorits, in his book “The pure creatures of God” wrote about Maroun: “Maroun’s activities were not limited to the hermit’s regular works, but he added to it from his wisdom that he could get from the complete wisdom. So fever was to calm down in the light of his blessing, and he defeated the demons, and cured diseases of all kinds sing one treatment that was his prayer...”

Saint Maroun did not establish a church nor a congregation, and he did not leave any theological or philosophical works, but all he did was to live for the Christ in a unique way, so many monks and nuns became his disciples following his new approach ...

Saint Maroun died in 423, the year Theodorits became bishop in Kourosh, and his disciples, the monks and the hermits had to wait for the quarter or the third of a century after the death of their spiritual master to gather up and organize themselves in a convent on the Assi river in Syria, that will be called the Saint Maroun Convent.

Theodorits the Kourosh , after his ideas have won in the synod of Chalcedony, in 453 , he could set up a convent for those hermit- monks , the disciples of Saint Maroun, the adherents of the synod of Chalcedony and his thinking and theological line , i.e. the rules of the unifying church.

The convent was constructed in 452 upon the order of the Byzantine emperor Merckianos, Soon it became the strong fortress of the Orthodox- catholic doctrine according to the Chalcedonic definition in the first Syria region. This convent was not just a place for prayer and work only, but was also a doctrine fortress and a beginning of a mission” as said the archbishop Boulos Naaman.

In fact, Theodorits the Kourosh considers that the real Maronite movement is a spiritual hermitage movement, an institution that liberates the mind, from which lights were shed on history, which the latter dubbed, while talking about Saint Maroun and his disciples: “The philosophy of the naked life in the air”.

Some documents related to that period of time, i.e. the beginning of the Maronite Church, indicates the existence of a relation between the monks of Saint Maroun in the convent on Assi river in Syria and the Archbishop of Rome (the Pope), and the correspondence between the two parties are there to support this hypothesis, such as the letter seen by the Pope Leon to the bishop Theodorits in April 452 , and then another letter addressed by the Monks of Saint Maroun convent to the Pope Hermizda , after the massacre that took place near the Chirz village in 517 , where 350 Maronite monks were victims of t he slaughter .

And it seems that the communication between Rome and the Maronite is not new, and if was intermittent, however it had never ceased across History due to the political and geographical reasons... and this relation has probably avoided the stagnation and the

introversion of the Maronites and allowed them later on to be more open to the spiritual, theological and civilization development in the west.

The convent of Saint Maroun grew larger and developed to become responsible for several other convents that derived from it in the Korosh region and many believers were gathering around it and believed in its mission and the rightfulness of its doctrine, so this convent has turned into a Church that assured the continuity of the apostolic communication in Antiochus, when the patriarchal Chair became empty after the city fell in the hands of the Arabs. So the Monks and bishops of the Saint Maroun convent met their obligations and elected a Patriarch, and it was John Maroun (Yuhanna Maroun).

What is sure and confirmed, is that the main objective behind the formation and crystallization of the first Maronite Community was freedom. The Maronite doctrine has fought since its beginning, seeking and striving for freedom, sovereignty, while preserving its patrimony, its destiny and its values, as said Dr. Charles Malek (one of the members who set up the Human Rights Chart emanating by the United Nations in 1948) .therefore, when life means became insufficient, after the Arabi- Islamic invasion (In the ninth century), and they were deprived from their freedom, and their financial and spiritual stability, they could no longer stay on the political and military quakes line , in the fertile northern region of Syria, i.e. the demarcation line between the conflicting major forces at that time, the Byzantines and the Arabs , in addition to the old- new conflict with the non-Chalcedonic Syrians (The Jacobists).

The Maronites have chosen traveling and moving in order to survive and continue; they preferred to live in austerity yet free in the Lebanese tough and hard mountains instead of having an easy going relaxed life in the fertile plains of the northern Syrian region, where they are in constant conflict and where they are menaced of losing their freedom and religious, cultural and political identity. In that they have lived a unique experience in history, it is an evangelical deep experience: "if they persecuted you in this city, go to another ..." (Mathew 10/ 23).

They followed the old traveling paths, i.e. the Assi River path, until they reached its source in Hermel (Lebanon). From there, they climbed the Lebanese mountain from the Cedars region (Jebbet Becharri) and from the Akoura region (Jebbet Al Mnaitra) where the cavalry of the Arab invader could not reach them. They settled gradually the valleys and mountains of in Jebbet Becharri and Jebbet Al Mnaitra, and quickly the new comers intermingled with those who preceded them and the original preachers, and all together they constituted one nation, one community, named the Maronite.