

Much Is Required ^(*)

**Jesus said, “Much will be required from everyone to whom much has been given.”¹
The Maronites have been given much; hence, much will be required of them.**

(1)

First, they have been given this great mountain: Mount Lebanon, one of the most aromatic names in both the Bible and history. Its name is synonymous with glory, integrity, loftiness, grandeur, beauty, sanctity, fragrance, and the eternal “Cedars of God.”

Today, Mount Lebanon is strategically among the strongest fortresses in the Near East, not only considered in itself and by itself, but also falling under the general defensive strategy of the Middle East. No other peoples in this entire region have been blessed with a nature similar to Lebanon’s nature. If I were to consider today the significance of this region in the context of global strategies and the unique position of Mount Lebanon, which is directly oriented toward the Mediterranean Sea, it might be maybe true to assert that no other comparable mountain has been given to any peoples around the world. It is a monumental gift; forsaking it in any way is an unforgivable sin. The following questions, then, arise: Do the Lebanese and Maronites in particular merit this monumental gift? Do they value this gift in the way it should be valued?

Lebanon has been given as a gift to all Lebanese; therefore, we are all—particularly the Maronites—entrusted with preserving this mountain and ensuring it remains impregnable to others by the hands of our brethren and ours. It must be so for both our brethren and ourselves to continue existing and persevering, and remaining worthy of the moral characteristics bestowed upon this mountain through the annals of time.

“The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it” is part of a biblical verse (Is. 35:1-2) that testifies to the great glory that has been given to the Maronites—a glory that instills pride in as much as it requires one to learn the lesson of humility.

(2)

Second, the Maronites have been given Lebanon along with its people, heritage, and values. The people, values, and heritage of Lebanon cannot be separated from Mount Lebanon. This mountain has deeply shaped the people and unreservedly contributed to the formation of its heritage and values. Moreover, the coastline, given its geographical access and openness to the west, has hallmarked the people of Lebanon. Moreover, Lebanon is not unique in boasting such a coastline given the fact that Syria, Israel, Egypt, and Turkey also have coastlines; however, none of these countries can boast of

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¹ Luke 12:48

possessing Lebanon's unique mountain.

When I say that the Maronites have been given Lebanon along with its people, heritage, and values, I do not mean to say that other communities, along with their heritage and values, belong to the Maronites. What I mean is that all communities were given to one another through the simple fact of existing in one nation in which they interact. Accordingly, Lebanon, with its people, heritage, and values, has been given to the Druzes, Sunnites, Shiites, Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholics, and other communities, all of which form the Lebanese family. It was also given to the Maronites; hence their great responsibility toward others—the very same others that were also given to the Maronites. At this juncture, I distinctively give Lebanon to the Maronites, because we are talking about how much was given to them, and consequently about how much is required of them in particular.

Regarding Lebanon, which has been given to the Maronites along with its people, heritage, and values, and what is required of the Maronites, before anything else, is to passionately and responsibly preserve humanistic and existential personal freedoms, which alone can provide both the plurality of their heritage and their peaceful and ingenious interaction.

The Maronites may indulge in anything or negotiate anything except existential personal freedoms without which they would not exist; and even if their country, Lebanon, did exist, its existence would be meaningless; hence, its existence would be equivalent to its non-existence. In cases where existence and non-existence are equal, then existence would become irrelevant; however, with the existence of this freedom, which is permanent, guaranteed, and constant, and with time, the Maronites can reinstate whatever they previously forsook through self-indulgence. Alternatively, without this freedom, the Maronites will lose what they possess or what they assume they possess.

Transparent commercial interaction (I fully realize it can be misused and prejudiced, as it already has, is being and shall be prejudiced); also applies to the Maronites who are requested to appreciate, honor, and uphold the abundant and great values that have been given to them. These values include: attaining global openness (be it economic, social, intellectual, emotional), gratitude, interaction, reaction, and concession; supporting unique intellectual creativity in the Middle East; seeking, obtaining, and declaring the truth in every realm and sphere; promoting active and interactive participation in domestic affairs cumulating in a single global existential humanistic heritage; engaging in creative, adventurous, and individual initiatives; embracing a lenient plurality within the legal framework; practicing genuine and mutual respect toward others; promulgating free and secure Christianity; upholding the special values of the Maronites; respecting the unique values of others; maintaining firm roots with the land, soil, and living heritage; preserving unique Lebanese traditions and customs, whether exclusive to the Maronites or common between them and other confessions.

These values constitute an invaluable treasure, a treasure that not only enriches its own surroundings, but also enrich Arabs in humanistic terms, given that they wish to benefit from it, but also enrich the Middle East and the world. Providence asks them to uphold these values relentlessly; but who is responsive to the approach of Providence? Who is aware of this request and deems it worthless or who consciously does not care to heed it? Providence knows how to punish that person one day.

(3)

The Maronites have been given a country, which enjoys a free and pluralistic society where Christianity enjoys freedom. This is plentiful, especially in the Middle East; therefore, much is requested from them.

The Maronites are required, especially since they are the first people to value and respect freedom, not to partake in or accept anything that results in limiting Lebanon's freedom. Equally, they are required to do everything in their power to strengthen and deepen this freedom, and make it more genuine and responsible. Consequently, if a member of the Free World travels to Lebanon, he would not experience spiritual suffocation as he would experience in a country other than Lebanon; he would feel right at home. A free Lebanon is of priceless value in the general existential-humanistic design of the Middle East, and the Maronites are entrusted with this value, perhaps even more than others are.

Given that this freedom has today shrunk and weakened in Lebanon, and some parts have been absorbed into the set structure of others, the Maronites have to recover these parts and restore them back to their original areas in Lebanon. All Lebanese, whatever their confession, should assist the Maronites in this operation of liberation with the same loyalty and sacrifice that the Maronites demonstrate.

Since the Maronites understand firsthand the significance of mutual respect, they are requested to deliberate on this respect and observe it effectively in their prayers when interacting with all Lebanese confessions. The practice of this genuine respect is not a natural, personal, or mechanical thing; it is a form of perfection granted from above. The Maronites know this "above" well an "above" that has—whispered in their ears a thousand times, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" and "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

As the first free Christian community in Lebanon, they are requested to sturdily safeguard the freedom of Christianity, not only for them, but also for all other Christian denominations. Just like the Maronites, other Christians are also Christians, and it is their right to enjoy their Christianity freely in the same way as Maronites. The Maronites should constantly make efforts to ensure other Christians feel that their liberty and existentiality are truly sacred.

The Maronites should also respect the Christianity of others in whatever denomination Christianity falls under. In this ecumenical era filled with hope, they

should not utter a single word or think a single thought that could insinuate that only they (by this I mean the Maronites) are the owners of the entire Christian faith and that the Christianity of others is flawed or false. On the doctrinal ecumenical front, however, I do not at all believe in any contemptible reconciliation, but I believe in one truth, which we should all perceive by overtly returning to the revealed inspiration, to the genuine and authentic heritage, and to the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit. Turning to the ecumenical imploration, the Maronites should take the initiative to start an ecumenical dialogue with others. The objective should not be to judge or criticize them, but to perceive the Will of the Holy Spirit in the ultimate truth of Christ, in how to agree, cooperate and come together in obedience, faith and the genuine return to the origins.

In our day and age, it is an extremely perilous situation that in the entire Middle East Christianity is only truly free in Lebanon—free not through illusions and undue assumptions, but free in exactly the same way as it is in Europe and America. I wish we could realize the meaning of this situation. I wish we could realize what is required of us in this regard. I wish we could understand and appreciate why the finest minds in this world are bewildered simply by the very notion of our existence! The mere fact that we are aware of this condition suggests that Lebanon only involved is not in trivial matters, but also in conscientious and perilous ones. If free Christianity falls in Lebanon—and Lebanon is the last sanctuary of Christianity in the East—it will disappear not only across the Middle East, but also in Asia and Africa.

This is the most important and most dangerous responsibility!

The Maronites are primarily accountable before Divine Providence. Do they really and fully comprehend this responsibility? Do they assess its infinite peril? Do they even comprehend the significance of having been entrusted with this responsibility? Are they really prepared to present it before Providence and before history? Are they capable of bearing the burden? Until now, they have proved their ability to do so. They struggled and made sacrifices for that freedom, they are still struggling and making sacrifices today, and I have no doubt that they will continue to struggle and make sacrifices in the future.

The following three gifts are the most dignified and the most significant: a truly free society, a mutual and sincere respect in a pluralistic society, and a free Christianity akin to any European or American country. All these gifts have been given to us all and particularly to the Maronites. I say “particularly to the Maronites” for reasons impossible to present in this article.

At present, Muslims will truly realize the importance, integrity, esteem, and sanctity of those gifts and will compete with Christians to preserve them given that these gifts are the holiest, most precious, and most beautiful values Muslims possess in this country, their country—this small country with a big heart. What makes men truly more human if not the value of existential freedom? O people, call this value the “greatest” if you can!

Because the Muslims of Lebanon are Lebanese and freedom is their most precious heritage in the same way as Freedom is the heritage of Christians.

If Muslims realize and are capable of saying they are completely free in a free country where others are also free, it is the highest esteem upon which they can pride themselves. Can Muslims in any other Middle Eastern country truly, realistically, and honestly boast the same? Christians, particularly the Maronites, should persuade Muslims to accept the humility of Christ and the patience of responsible and sober minds. Yet, persuading and being persuaded can only be achieved in a genuine environment of human freedom. Therefore, we realize that freedom cannot be derived or extracted from without. Neither is it manifested in elements to which it is unfamiliar. It is the trunk and branches; it is the beginning and the end. When there is no freedom from the beginning, freedom cannot magically manifest from nothing at the end. From the beginning, you are either free in the quintessence of your existentiality—hence, every aspect of freedom in your life will burst forth from your authentic freedom—or enslaved in the quintessence of your existentiality—hence, every aspect of obscurity and slavery in your life will burst forth from your authentic slavery. Freedom is a blessing bestowed from above. Freedom cannot be obtained, it is rather bequeathed. Freedom is accepted with gratitude, it is not forcefully taken. Freedom contagiously flows in the veins of free minds.

(4)

The Maronites have been given Bkerké, the see of the Maronite Catholic Patriarchate and a unique spiritual center in the Middle East. Everybody seeks its guidance and leadership. That See is capable of uniting not only the Maronites, but also the non-Maronites. Its influence is perceived if it takes action. Its influence is even more perceivable if it does not take action, or if it rises boldly to the challenge; however, its efficiency in action depends on living at the decisive moment in history. It is simply insufficient to preserve the parish, customs, and heritage. It is insufficient to merely live and survive. Today, it is crucial that global, fateful, and strident movements should be perfectly aware and act responsibly so that they can be employed either entirely or partially for the sake of surviving and or preserving their heritage.

As for “fateful and strident movements,” these would certainly involve the developments of the Catholic Church ever since the second Vatican Council and the statements and guidance of the Pope. They, however, transcend far beyond that to reach current developments and “developed” developments within the Christian ecumenical movement and within the ecumenical movement between Christianity and other religions. It transcends the intellectual and existential trends of this age and the revolutionary ideologies invading the world today. It attempts to make sense of the meaning of these tremendously “developed” developments taking place in economics, society, politics, science, and technology.

These developments have turned all previous measurements and calculations upside

down. It transcends the current and future development of Middle Eastern and world politics, which would require from us to reconsider everything we have known and considered eternal.

By establishing an institution and backing it both financially and morally, Bkerké can support it as a tool to address all those concerns on a global level. Over time, such an institution could become a trusted place, attracting the most notable politicians and intellectual minds from Lebanon and abroad. If Bkerké takes this step, it will gain encouragement and assistance from various corners around the world.

Bkerké is extremely vital. In fact, if Lebanon happens to fall into ruins while Bkerké remains safe, sound, and strong, embracing the mission to which it has long been entrusted with an ironclad fist, it can rebuild Lebanon. But, if God forbid, Bkerké happens to be devastated, weakened, or languished, Lebanon alone cannot rescue Bkerké and help it regain its strength and rebuild itself. If Lebanon lies in ruins, it might not be able to rebuild itself if Bkerké is also in ruins. Can this example apply to any other institution in Lebanon? If Lebanon's significance is considered in the historic and global contexts, the unique See of Bkerké along with its great followers will unequivocally emerge in Lebanon and around the world.

The reasons Bkerké occupies this unique center dates back to the roots of Maronitism and the Maronites; their history and establishment in this mountain; their cohesive and unified society; and their civil and religious organization. All these elements require particular and extensive research. Bkerké is an institution whose creation was dictated by the history, nature, existential experiences, and suffering of the Maronites as well as the tragic and tumultuous suffering of Christians in the East across generations. This suffering has never ceased and may be destined to never cease.

If Providence decides that Bkerké fulfills its role, and if Bkerké responds to this will, it can prove to be the decisive factor in the destiny of Lebanon and the destiny of more than Lebanon. This decisive role requires much wisdom, determination, courage, sacrifice, and humility. The Maronites have been given Bkerké, which is a great thing. Therefore, much is requested from them and Bkerké.

(5)

The Maronites have been given an old Aramaic-Syriac heritage, which bonds them historically, culturally, and religiously with the vestiges of the great Aramaic civilization of the East.

Among its surviving communities, the Aramaic civilization comprises of the Assyrians, Syriacs, Chaldeans, Nestorians, Jacobites, and others, and is considered among the most significant civilizations in the East.

It suffices to say that Aramaic, the language of the Maronite rituals, was the language of the Jews in Palestine during the time of Jesus Christ and the language of the Christ himself. It suffices to say that Aramaic was also the lingua franca or global language of all Middle Eastern countries at the close of the eighth century AD, long

before the Greek and Latin languages and later Arabic. It suffices to say that the Gospel of Matthew, the first of the four Gospels, was originally written in Aramaic and later translated into Greek in its current form. It suffices to say that the Peshitta, which is the standard version of the Syriac Bible, today constitutes the main reference to understand and explain many texts of the Gospels. The translations of the Peshitta are currently adopted in numerous Syriac Churches, among which are the Nestorian and Monophysite Churches. It suffices to say that Ephraim and Isaac were Syriac; the first had a tremendous impact on Christianity around the world, whereas the second had an impact, at least, on Russian spirituality.

It suffices to say that the individual who claimed to have been Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite², and who might have lived in northern Syria toward the end of the fifth century AD, and despite the total mystery surrounding his identity and despite the fact that his writings were all in Greek, the influence of Neo-Platonism and Monophysitism is evident in his work. His works, which have been translated into Syriac, have been adopted by Syriac and Eastern Orthodox Christians, and later by Russian Orthodox Christians in their rituals, liturgy, and theology and in their concept of the unseen power. The scholastic influence of Pseudo-Dionysius is undeniable on Western theology and liturgy, particularly Thomas Aquinas' interpretation of his works, and on medieval German theology—the source of German philosophy since Eckhart and Leibniz.

It suffices to say that the influence of Aramaic is evident and recognized in some Books of the Old Testament, which were written before the Captivity, whereas in the Book of Esther, the Book of the Ecclesiastes and in some of the Psalms, the expressive style is frequently Aramaic. It suffices to say that some parts of the Book of Daniel and the Book of Ezra are only available, in their original form, in the Aramaic language. It suffices to say that Aramaeans developed the Aramaic writing system north of the Arabian Peninsula long before the Arabs established their own writing systems centuries later.

The Aramaic-Syriac civilization is both ancient and deep-rooted. It is recognized, sought after, respected, studied, and taught by Russian, German, French, British, and American universities. Additionally, it is the basis of a heritage that is still living (a genuine heritage is only living heritage for what is not living is certainly and simply non-existent) in living societies that exist in the Middle East and around the world.

Who is more worthy than the Maronites to respect, honor, admire, study, and perpetuate the Aramaic language? It has been given to them. It is living in their quintessence. They—not others—are primarily accountable for it, and not only to study it historically, theoretically, and with the same curiosity as Europeans and Westerners. They are accountable for it; thus, tying them both culturally and spiritually to the remaining elements of the Eastern civilization and the living diaspora around the world.

² See Ep. 17:34

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The Maronites have been given a great liturgical ritual. It was only a few years ago that I discovered the Maronite liturgy in a way that allows me to appreciate it. Except for the fact that I was born and raised in the teachings of the Holy Greek Orthodox Church, I, however, understand, relish, and bond myself with the Greek Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom and immerse myself in it more than I can relish and bond with the Maronite Liturgy. Other than that, I believe that I have begun to understand the Maronite spirituality and rite to an extent that allows me to give my opinion on them, but with reserve.

The genius of the Maronite ritual and spirituality resides in the fact that the latter are popular given that they originated from the people and were not forced on them from above. This intimate popularity distinguishes the Maronite Liturgy from the Orthodox Liturgy. The Greek Orthodox Mass is entirely celebrated with an air that glorifies the Byzantine Empire whereas the Maronite Mass is a wonderful and spontaneous incarnation of people's hearts and sentiments. Those who praise God are the faithful and patient people, and not emperors, patriarchs, or clergymen. One does not feel the presence of a Cesar-like figure or patriarch, even if this Cesar-like figure or patriarch is present. One feels himself sitting amongst widows and orphans, workers and peasants, sinners and lost souls, and humble spirits. One feels the simple and ordinary man, the one laden with worries who is in touch with the earth and nature, and who knows nothing and does not care to know anything about theology or philosophy, or the glory of the vanishing world. This ordinary man is the one whose heart and soul soar, draws Christ toward him, and receives the immaculate face of the Virgin Mary. One feels all this and despises every intellectual arrogance and every earthly glory. One bonds with this widow and that old man, with this child and that illiterate man. One even envies the widow, the old man, the child, and the illiterate for their direct and simple faith, and for being free from intellectual complexities. Devotion and faith are sufficient for them. One sheds many joyful tears upon hearing an entire congregation singing songs of praise to the Virgin Mary with piety. These hymns bridge the gaps between the rich and poor, notable and ignoble, educated and illiterate, and prince and pauper.

**“Your love, O Mary, is our greatest hope,
O Mother of the Magnified, be our mother.”**

Where is the persuasiveness in these words? Where is the philosophy and theology? Where are the intellectual arrogance and haughtiness? None of these qualities exists either in this hymn in its choir – but only in the sound of simple hearts beating, praying, and singing. It is almost as if Mary herself mysteriously and secretly conducts the symphony of words to flow from their mouths. If one observes with love how these simple and innocent faces pray, venerate, and sing praise, one would always sense that she is the exact same person of the Immaculate Conception who ascended into heaven in body and soul. She is the mother of life who is always present in her children and

intercedes on their behalf before God. Her loving son, the living Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father, is their custodian and hope, and also the custodian and hope of Lebanon. He is not only the custodian and hope of the Maronites, but also the custodian and hope of all Lebanese: Greek Orthodox, Melkite Catholic, Sunnite or Shiite, Druze or Jew, atheist or lost soul.

This is the splendor, popularity, democracy, spontaneity, and simplicity of the Maronite ritual. The ritual is free of all human embellishments and instills a sentiment in the believer, giving him the impression that he alone created and recited the ritual. During the Divine Liturgy, the entire Maronite community participates in songs of praise and hymns whereas in the Orthodox ritual, the worshiping community does not participate. The choirs (chorus) positioned to the left-hand and right-hand sides alone sing every song and hymn. This does not mean to say that this type of ritual falls short of involving exceptional opulence and splendor that originate from the classic Greek tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes.

The Maronite rite is deeply-rooted in local Aramaic art whereas the Greek Orthodox ritual is deeply-rooted in classical Greek art. The Maronite rite suggests a rejection of and a reaction to every foreign influence. It also suggests a contented attachment to local production and the land as if letting out a cry in the face of Hellenism saying, "I don't need you, because if you invade me, I will be contaminated."

The Maronite ritual is such a cry—a cry of complete independence from any foreign cultural influence. The colossal political independence of the Maronites is embodied in their ritual. Both these independences originate from one source: the genuine self-sufficiency of the Maronites. They both meet and complement each other. This harmonious union between political and ritual independence deepens their love of freedom. Is there any other community in Lebanon, or in the entire Middle East, that was able to preserve its personal and existential liberties like the one of the Maronites? This was achieved because of their ritual and political sufficiency, which originates from an individual and original sufficiency in terms of existentiality.

The Orthodox ritual adheres to specific rational and scientific rules, whereas rational and scientific rules are almost non-existent in the Maronite ritual. The first firmly separates the role of ritual actors from the congregation, whereas the Maronite ritual is a communion between the actors and congregation, even if the role of the latter is restricted compared to that of the priest. The participating community is the choir, the chorus itself. It is both actor and congregation.

The presence of the Maronites and Orthodox in Lebanon is a complementary existence. The first originates from within the people and ties the heritage and existentiality of Lebanon with the global Aramaic-Syriac religion. The second reflects the glory of the Antioch and Constantinople Orthodoxy in terms of heritage and existentiality, and binds Lebanon to international Orthodoxy. The first aspires only to the "self," which is the Eastern Aramaic-Syriac religion, whereas the second aspires to

“foreign” Hellenism, which invaded this “self” a thousand years ago, enabling it to bring forth both culturally and spiritually at the global level. This creation would not have been possible without external fertilization. In previous centuries, France and Rome played the fertilizing role, which in turn enabled the Maronites to give in abundance.

As for the Eucharist, there is no difference between the two rituals. If a priest is properly ordained—which is the case in both Churches given that both observe strict rules—the Body and Blood of the God-man are truly, really, and substantially present for the nourishment of believers, by reason of the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Other artifacts, however different they are, will not change anything in the Eucharist, which is the quintessence of the Mass in both rituals.

The Maronites are requested to appreciate the significance of having their ritual embedded in the local popular heritage. The Maronites should preserve and conserve it for its intrinsic value and its ability to empower their eternal love of independence and freedom. They should recognize this ritual as an immense democratic power rising from the “depths” of the spirits of believers. They should invest this power in glorifying God, the Church, and Lebanon. They should recognize how Jesus and Mary have blessed the Maronites for their simplicity, sincerity, and heartily worship and devotion, which are far removed from philosophy and “philosophication.”

This is the unique and admirable diversity of a united Apostolic Church—a convivial diversity, welcoming any local cultural contribution, as long as it does not contradict the inspired faith and demanding ritual. The Church knew how to eliminate all pagan components from the Greek Orthodox and Aramaic-Syriac Maronite heritage.

(7)

The Maronites have been given these close ties with Rome. Maronitism, in addition to being receptive to the Eastern Aramaic-Syriac heritage, is receptive to the Western Roman Christian heritage whereas the Eastern Orthodox Christian heritage is completely receptive to Orthodoxy. Maronitism is non-receptive to the Eastern Orthodox Christian heritage as it is receptive to the Western Roman heritage. Given its global and cultural heritage, Rome has saved the Maronites from becoming a reclusive denomination both domestically and in the East. It is a great wealth that the limiting Eastern Syriac heritage forges ties with the limitless global Western Roman heritage.

This distinctive cultural and ritual communion between East and West has been given to the Maronites; therefore, they are entrusted with preserving it. This is the same communion that the isolated and narrow-minded people of the East are today combating and seeking to exterminate from existence. Those who accuse the Maronites of being isolated are truly the isolated ones, because they have isolated themselves in terms of not only existentiality and heritage, but also from the amalgamated civilization that flourished since Homer and Moses, which interacts from within. These truly isolated people are scheming and conniving to cajole the Maronites into abandoning their global Western-

Roman ties and join them in their Eastern isolation; hence, the aim is to turn the Maronites into heretics, and this is undeniably impossible.

The strong Maronite ties with Rome have saved them from doctrinal digressions. Whatever their doctrine was at the beginning, or whatever their doctrinal digressions, before strengthening their ties with Rome (I do not sufficiently know about their position from the One Will and One Nature of Christ, to the extent of giving an opinion), the Maronites today are safe from doctrinal oversight. They are Catholic in the true sense of the word; therefore, no doctrinal disagreement could arise between them and the Greek Orthodox, except for the authority of the Pope, which is today being very seriously considered at the highest levels between the Orthodox and Catholics.

I believe it is a great gift that the Maronites have been given these existential ties with both the East and West in cultural and doctrinal terms. It is not only a gift for them, but also a gift to all other Christians in the Levant, Lebanon in general, and a gift to all the Muslims and Jews of the Middle East. Proving the significance and peril of this gift requires a deep and detailed study, which is not the object of our article. By simply insinuating this study, curious people are already drawn to discovering more about its secrets.

As for the traditional French-Maronite ties, they can be considered as complementary or as a tributary of their ties with Rome. In fact, Catholic Rome is the stem and Latin France is the branch, followed by the world, including Germany, Russia, and America.

In ancient times, the world was tied to France even though not all people were Catholic. The French language was the world's official language, and its culture significantly influenced the world during the reign of Frederic the Great (Protestant) and Catherine the Great (Orthodox). On the other hand, the American Revolution and ensuing American laws and ideologies were to a certain extent influenced by the French ideologies of the eighteenth century AD. As such, when the global Catholic religion crossed paths with the global French culture in France, it was only natural for the Catholic Maronites to seek cultural and religious ties with it.

Today, given that the Maronites are still strongly attached to the French language and culture—an attachment they should not allow to fade—one finds them searching for a new globalization that complements that of French globalization. They might find it in American globalization, especially since Catholicism in America is effectively living and breathing, maybe more so than in France of today, in an explicit and restricted sense in view of the fact that Catholicism in America is also overburdened by an enormous political crisis.

Rome tied the Maronites to the heritages of the Greek, European, Western, and global Roman through the French language and culture. This is amongst the greatest gifts that have been given to the Maronites. Imagine the Maronites without Rome, without France, without Europe, and without the West! If that were the case, they would become

a sheer memory—that is, if they even remained in existence! Rome and Paris are great gifts that have been given to the Maronites, and they should preserve them just as they preserve survival and life itself.

Rome did the Maronites an invaluable favor, and paying back for this favor is a sign of gratitude. Rome opened before them the horizons of man, history, and the world, which allowed them to access, to a greater or lesser extent, the accumulated and united global human heritage. This access reinforced their indisputable love for freedom. Only the humanistic and global person is truly a free person. Then again, there is he who contents himself with the crumbs of this existence; I mean, who is satisfied with only himself and is a slave to this self. Through this type of contentment, he misses on the pleasures of curiosity and awe, and his position from others appears as that of a frightened ignorant. The frightened ignorant is a slave to the self, a slave to his ignorance and the phantoms he imagines lurking in the eerie darkness. In existential terms, the free man knows the entire world, and because he is humanistic, he does not feel that he is a stranger in it. In terms of fear, he only fears God and the truth, which is fitting to both God and the truth. In time and space and to Rome's credit, the Maronites know the world and their fear centers only on God and the truth.

(8)

The Maronites have been given a unified, detailed, and well-defined history, which exists within itself. No other community in Lebanon, and maybe outside Lebanon, enjoys this particular feature. The recorded history of the Maronites is far and beyond those of other communities in terms of its cohesiveness, precision, details, and non-disconnected authentic historical continuation. From this, it may not be possible to record the history of any other community with the same precision and cohesiveness given that they might not possess a history as deep as the history of the Maronites. Picture the history of the Sunnites in Lebanon, or the history of the Shiites, or the history of the Druzes, or the history of the Orthodox or the history of the Melkite Catholics. Certainly, these historical accounts can be written, but do they effectively recount genuine history? Not all of these histories can be pictured with the same unity and precision, the same historical dimension and depth, and with the same continuity as the history of the Maronites.

Be that as it may, these other communities do not really have existent history books (by this I mean those found in libraries) that provide the same precision, comprehensiveness, and continuity that is found in Maronite history. When available, these other histories transport the reader from the confines of the community concerned and concentrate on its connection with the same community outside Lebanon. The history of the Maronites, on the other hand, keeps you inside Lebanon, at least from the arrival of Saint Maron and his followers to the country. What we know of the Maronites before their exodus to Lebanon is relatively negligible compared to what we know of them in Lebanon. The fact that the Maronites have one patriarch, and the fact that the patriarchal

see is in Lebanon, is in itself conclusive.

History, as far as it actually exists, by this I mean as far as it is continuous, consistent, and defined, and thus, as far as it is not adulterated, proves the presence of a definite, ever-present, and effective self. Given that the Maronites are characterized by their independent, continuous, and defined history, it proves they are undeniably this definite, specific, ever-present, effective, and effectively existing self.

Their present presence is the most important and most dangerous gift that can be given. Not anything that exists exists in vain. Anything that exists exists for a special reason and purpose, and is cloaked with special meaning and enigma. For this reason, if anything that exists is contented with merely existing and surviving, it signifies that it has not yet realized the secret of its existence and the essence of its being. Consequently, it is certainly heading toward nihility, toward non-existence.

It is neither vain nor futile, neither pointless nor useless, and it is not without reason or cause that the Maronites have existed, and that they have enjoyed this unified, continuous, and unique history for 1,500 years. Given the presence of this history, the Maronite presence, therefore, holds a secret. They have been given existence, and this is a plethora. Consequently, much is requested from them. If you admire all that has been given to them after existence, with existence, and beyond existence, one could conclude that what has been requested from them is overwhelming.

The secret of the animosity the enemies of the Maronites hold against them is that these enemies have envied the Maronites for this very existence, because these enemies want this existence only for themselves. That is not all, these enemies fear that the Maronite existence holds a secret, and without doubt, the Maronite existence does hold a secret. That is not all, they also fear that their own existence—by this I mean the enemies of the Maronites—has no meaning and holds no secret; otherwise, they might have already started probing for this secret.

Existence in itself is a strange thing, and its strangeness resides in the fact that a deep secret always lies beneath. Perhaps these envious enemies the secret of the Maronites and are worried that, having no secret are fearful of their own, they might not really exist and might be their existence an affected and ephemeral event. Those who are confident of their existence do not envy others and do not hold feelings of animosity toward those others. Those who are confident of their existence do not want to erase the existence of others. Those who are confident of their existence have their hearts wide-open to the existence of others, and even greet and are delighted and enriched by this existence.

(9)

Owing to their Syriac background, the Maronites have been given, in addition to adeptly tying themselves to the living Syriac world, the opportunity to be the closest people, morally, and culturally, to both the Arabs and Jews.

Language is the most significant phenomenon of civilizations, because it is life in its

deepest meanings; it determines the roots, origins, and heritage; it determines family lineages. When we talk of “Indo-European” languages, we directly determine the connections between the origins of both the Sanskrit and European civilizations. When we talk of “Semitic” languages, we directly determine the cultural connections between the speakers of these languages.

The Aramaic, Hebrew, and Arabic languages are interrelated; thus, they all derive from one cultural background. Jews of Palestine in the Christ's lifetime, they did not speak Hebrew but rather Aramaic. Aram in the Bible is the son of Sam³ and grandson of Nahor, brother of Abraham;⁴ therefore, Arameans are the cousins of Jews. From Isaiah (11:36), we can conclude that since the eighth century BC, Aramaic has been the lingua franca of the people of Western Asia, and the Jews had known and spoken this language. The inhabitants of this region, well before Arabic, spoke Aramaic, but Hebrew never prevailed in this region. Then, Aramaic is both a language and a civilization; both Hebrew and Arabic sprung from this gushing spring. Aramaic is the primary background that formed the background of these two languages and civilizations; however, neither Hebrew nor Arabic constitutes a background for Aramaic in the same sense. Today, the Maronites are the living and free inheritors of this background.

Given this fact, who, then, knows what the Will of Providence might be for developing the relationship between the Maronites, the Arabs, and the Jews? The fundamental and exalted relationship between the Maronites, the Arabs, and the Jews could have, in the plan of where Providence is concerned, a fateful impact on the development of this region that is inhabited by the three peoples forming three separate civilizations. We have said there lay a secret in the existence of the Maronites, and the key of this secret could be this fateful impact itself. In spite of this, only God knows this secret. Without doubt, the Maronites themselves, thus far, do not know this secret in its entirety and nobody in or outside Lebanon knows it.

The believer does not have faith in coincidence and fate; through faith, the believer sees Providence behind everything, beyond everything, and before everything. The believer has faith in the existence of Providence even if he completely ignores its will. He believes in Providence and waits patiently for Providence to reveal the truth. He knows that every revelation has its time and place.

Why have the Maronites preserved their Aramaic heritage? Was it preserved simply by coincidence? Is it simply the nature of things we understand through reason that made them preserve it? Is it simply their seclusion in their impregnable mountain? The believer is not satisfied with any of these explanations. He lives in the presence of something real beyond nature and the mind, something that rejects coincidences in principle and

³ Gen. 20:22

⁴ Gen. 22:20

practice. At least the believer wonders: does not Providence have a hand in this matter? If God existed and His Providence, concerning everything in existence, also existed, including beyond and above all Man and his destiny, is it not possible and even expected that the survival of the Maronites and their ancient Aramaic heritage has an eternal purpose, especially in these special times and in this special region where the Jews celebrate their heritage, life, and independent self, and where Arabs celebrate their heritage, life, and independent self, and where the two heritages and the two selves meet, challenge each other, and clash? Should not they scrutinize the moral of the story? If you add Christianity to the characteristics of the Aramaic Maronites—with Christ being who he is—and if you also add the Maronite's European and Eastern characteristics—with Europe and the West being what they are—a challenging horizon regarding the Maronites, and one that bewilders the mind now appears before you. the Maronites bewilder the mind ... and instill in the Maronite spirit, and the Lebanese spirit in general, an extreme sense of humility, defeat, and piety.

(10)

The Maronites have been given great vigor and a fertility to give. Is there any field in which they have not given? Is there any sphere of life in which they have not attained, occupied, and remained? Here is a hermit saint whose sanctity has been declared by Rome and who has been declared a saint in the apostolic Roman Catholic Church around the world. Another monk is also on the way toward beatification and sanctification.

Is there any given year in which a new Maronite church, new monastery, a new convent, a new institute, a new asylum, or a new school is not consecrated?

These monks and nuns, numbering in the hundreds, work both day and night in utter silence and consecrate themselves in a way like other; a consecration that is only valued by those who intimately comprehend it. They work in the service of intellect and morals, in the service of education and society, in the service of the miserable, lost, and needy, in the service of Christ and his Church, in the service of Lebanon—all Lebanon. The phenomenon of Lebanese religious orders is among the greatest phenomena in Lebanon and the Christian Church in general. In the course of history, it is among the deepest and most influential.

Moreover, day in and day out, these venerable bishops and prelates care for their parish with affection, assiduousness, persistence, and substantiation in their faith. As a result, one finds a uniquely strong cohesion between the Church and its people; a cohesion that can only be perceived as exceptional.

What is more, these Maronite missionaries in Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Arab countries, and in nearly all corners of the globe, work in silence and with dedication and sacrifice, and remain true to their aphorism on the importance of serving others through the living testimony of Christ.

In the past two hundred years, who other than the Maronites have contributed more to the Modern Arab Awakening in various fields? Who other than the Maronites

mastered the Arabic language and probed the depths of its genius the world over such as Amine Nakhle and Fouad Frem al-Boustani—both living in our time? Which Arabic verse even compares to the verses of Said Akl? Which Arabic encyclopedia can compare to the Da'irat al-Ma'arif [Circle of knowledge] of Al-Boustani in terms of the wealth, freedom, and audacity it employs to examine truthfully every subject in every field? Who other than the Maronites contributed in translating international classic masterpieces into the Arabic-language worldwide? Who other than the Maronites translated Thomas [Aquinas] into Arabic? Who other than the Christians of Lebanon, especially the Maronites, were able to consider translating Thomas in the Arab world? From across the Arab world, who other than the Maronites are renowned more than Gibran in international literature?

There are many painters, but Gibran, Saliba Doueihy, and Qaysar Gemayel occupied a particularly high status. There are also many musicians, but Wadih al-Safi and Fairuz are the most spectacular. Moreover, Fairuz herself is deeply indebted to the Maronites for their appreciation, support, and encouragement.

Compare the Arabic dictionary Muhit al-Muhit [Circumference of the ocean] of Master Boutros al-Boustani, which was published one hundred years ago, to any other lengthy Arabic dictionary, including Muhit al-Fairuzabadi, and judge for yourselves: which volume is more comprehensive, complete, and accurate? Who more than the Maronites contributed to the rise of modern journalism in Egypt and Lebanon? Which commentaries or editorials in the Arab world can even compare to the commentaries and editorials of some Lebanese Maronite journalists? In the commercial, industrial, and banking fields, you will find Maronites occupying the leading roles. In politics, the oldest, ordered, continuous, living, and active party in the entire Middle East is the Lebanese Kataeb (Phalangist) Party, which is forty-five years old today. As for the function of the Maronites in Lebanese politics on all fronts, individual and institution or at the political party level, they play a decisive leadership role, which everybody, including the entire world, admits.

It is almost impossible to enumerate and reckon their associations, fraternities, leagues, institutions, and circles, and charitable, scientific, societal, educational, or national fronts whether in Lebanon the motherland or overseas.

As for the Lebanese emigration phenomenon, it is certainly not limited to the Maronites, since prominent thinkers, politicians, economists, citizens, and liberal professions living abroad are not only Maronites. This being said, the Maronites abroad are among the most prominent, and the greater majority (by this I mean more than 90 percent of them) has consummate affection and love, and a strong yearning for Lebanon. The Lebanese emigration phenomenon constitutes the most striking and tragic global epic with a deep moral! So far, no author or bard of epics at the level of Homer or Dostoevsky (this emigration in particular is of vast greatness and call for this level of scribes) can contain, appreciate, and describe in words or in depth this emigration's pains, sufferings,

beauties, vigorousness, and achievements.

The Maronites' defense of Lebanon and its values in the current war is the most courageous, zealous, sacrificial, dignified, and heroic! In their death-defying defense, their vigorousness has peaked. Every latent power in them has been awakened, mobilized, and revealed in the battlefield. Without this mysterious vigor, even what would have remained in Lebanon would not have existed. Others from all confessions have efficiently helped them, and they are the first to admit this fact; however, leadership syndrome, elan, and sacrifice oftentimes restrained them. Everyone has made sacrifices, but the Maronites sacrificed more than others did. The credit first goes to the young leaders, most of whom were Maronites. Their young leadership has yet to receive the magnificent and eloquent literary praise it deserves, because this leadership is still deep in the heart of the battle between life and death, and still in its infancy, working incessantly twenty-four hours a day. This leadership is planning, struggling, daring, achieving, and facing death. History will write its victory in golden letters.

Which other small cultural group of human beings the size of the Maronite community has given in such an abundant and superior manner? The integrity of this generosity abounds on all the Lebanese, the Middle East and the world. It has hallmarked Lebanon with its character. Lebanon cannot be imagined without it. It is a source of pride and wealth for every non-Maronite Lebanese. Any matter, or work, or attempt, or scheme that would lead to kill this vigor or weaken this great generosity is a crime not only against the Maronites, but also against Lebanon in its entirety, the Middle East, and the one global humanistic civilization.

(11)

There exist those who are given and those who give. Only God gives and is simultaneously given; only God gives Himself; however, man does not give himself; he gives from the graces he has been given. He whom that gives man is God. Every human being has been given the possibility of being given and has even been given the substance for being given. Who has given the Maronites the great generosity they have given? Have they given it to themselves? The faithful does not believe that. The Maronites are faithful; therefore, it is impossible for them to brag that they have given themselves what they have been able to give. The faithful believes that the last giver is the first giver, which is God. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there can be no variation nor any turning shadow."⁵ This is what a real believer thinks. Man is in "disparity" and his entire life is "turning shadows." If such is his state, he cannot honestly claim that he has given himself. Self-giving is for God only—that is, if the idea of giving can be used for God in relationship to Himself. Only he who has been given is given to give. He who gives is always given. He who gives does so from

⁵ Is. 1:7

what he has been given.

St. Paul drew the attention of the Corinthians to an important matter; in consequence he draws our attention in general, and the attention of Maronites in particular, to the same thing, when he draws, “No one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”⁶

John the Baptist said about himself, “No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven.”⁷

Jesus himself said to Pilate, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”⁸

I know exactly that by saying man does not give himself but is given what he gives, is nonsense in modern age logic. Almost all modern philosophies oppose this statement. Almost all of them state that the universe created itself, nature itself creates everything in it, and man gives his ideas and potentials to himself; consequently, he gives them to the world. Man is self-sufficient and there is no need at all to attribute anything within him to without him, except for attributing it to nature, which, in turn, is self-sufficient.

Attributing anything to something lofty named “God” is absurd, ridiculous, and vain. I know all that, and realize that the faithful intellectual is a rare jewel (by this the author literally means this personification in terms of hard currency), it is even an absurdity. All the same, I believe in God and Christ in opposition to all materialism, immanentism, atheism, and ridiculing God and Christ. And I say, “Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have.”⁹

It is not ridiculous that the Maronites and all of us have been given:

This great, unique, and elevated mountain;

The people of Lebanon with its heritage and values;

An independent country with a free pluralistic society;

Bkerké with all that it has meant and that it means;

An ingrained Aramaic-Syriac heritage;

A liturgical ritual deep-rooted in the soil of this people;

Deep doctrinal spiritual ties with Rome and the West;

A self-existent separate and unified private history;

The Maronites are the closest people to the Jews and Arabs, in terms of origin, temperament, and heritage; and they are vigorous, fertile, and unique in giving.

These ten gifts, alone and together, constitute a wealth of values and potentials, which could be unique to the entire world. By carefully examining these gifts, one discovers the great responsibility that the Maronites have in existential terms. These ten

⁶ 1 Cor. 4:6,7

⁷ Joh. 3:27

⁸ Joh. 19:11

⁹ 2 Tim. 1:12

great gifts have not been given by the Maronites to themselves. The “Father of Light” from above has given them these gifts. It is appropriate for them not to be “arrogant” and not to “boast” as if “they had not received it.”

“A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, you will not despise.”¹⁰ If their spirit is afflicted and they are humble before the real giver, the “Father of Light”, and if they are fully and honestly grateful to Him, He can give them more than they have given so far.

Who knows what Providence is preparing for them following their sufferings, tribulations, and difficulties? If we examine, in the light of faith, the truth of every gift and the future challenges these could conceal, we would be astounded by the vast potentials that the future could hold for the Maronites and Lebanon. Moses addressed the children of Israel in the wilderness. He said to them, “Not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart . . . The Lord did not choose you and lavish his love on you because you were larger or greater than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! It was simply because the Lord loves you, and because he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the Lord rescued you with such amazing power from your slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt.”¹¹

To a certain extent, these words apply to us in Lebanon, and especially to the Maronites. Do we assess the “wilderness” we are traversing today? Do we examine our hearts (not only the Maronites, but also all of us) to verify the amount of righteousness and uprightness we possess? Do we thank the Lord (not only the Maronites, but also all of us, Christians and Maronites), for he has rescued us, lavished his love on us, and saved us from “slavery?” Do we know from what type of “slavery” he saved us? Do we appreciate the gift of personal existential freedom, which has been bestowed upon us although we do not deserve it?

The Maronites have been given much, and what is first required of them is to express deep gratitude to what the Almighty has given and invoke Him to become truly deserving of His gifts.

Our subject is “Much is Required” of the Maronites. I have no stake, and I do not recognize any stake other than truth’s sake. The truth is that Lebanon is experiencing a decisive tribulation and the Maronites are primarily responsible for this. It is difficult that Lebanon is experiencing tribulation, and Lebanon is what it is and what it should be and mean. If one key to the tribulation, even if it is not the main key, is what has been given to the Maronites and what is requested from them, then I should—if I care about Lebanon, and I care greatly, and if I am concerned with the truth, and I am concerned with the truth before and above anything else—examine this matter within the scope of

¹⁰ Ps. 50:19

¹¹ De. 9:5 , 7:7-8

absolute methodical precision.

I refuse to be held accountable on the basis of having “pompously spoken” about the Maronites, and I am not a Maronite. The motive behind this type of accountability is far removed from the motive of Lebanese concerns and the motive of truth. If a person holds me accountable—whether he is Maronite, Orthodox, or Muslim—and is truly concerned about Lebanon, it is also his duty to explore the Maronite truth. But if he wants to hold me accountable and his act is not based on real concern about the fate of Lebanon, and his motive, whatsoever, is not for the search of truth, then, his action to hold me accountable means naught. His motive is suspicious. Truth is above whatever thing. Whosoever hates to see the truth, even if troubled by it, his end will be dreadful. Salvation in all matters comes primary from facing the truth.

There are absolutely no exceptions to this rule. Certainly, I might have overstated here, might have been negligent there, or did not strike the goal elsewhere. Certainly, I might have misplaced things here or there, or might have viewed facts far removed from their real context. I would, therefore, be grateful for any correction based on truth and clear vision; however, I will not accept anything based on hatred, jealousy, rancor, or envy.

Whosoever considers my presentation incomplete, incorrect, or distorted, let him correct me on the basis of truth. Whosoever is discontented with my presentation, because he hates or envies the Maronites or expresses feelings of rancor toward them, or wishes them and Lebanon ill (he will surely not admit any of these motives), or if he is a Maronite and has overlooked the many gifts that have been given to the Maronites to please others and win this or that position, or obtain financial, political, moral, or any other gain, then I will consider his position neither decent nor honest, and I will not dwell on it a single moment. We are addressing one of the most important matters, which can only be treated appropriately with complete seriousness, total impartiality, and a full respect for the truth and the painful and crucial suffering.

The major crime resides in exploiting everything, including, and above all else, the undeniable truth, and in subjugating everything exploited to politics and personal interests. Lebanon is traversing a crisis of existence or non-existence, and the Maronites constitute a fundamental element in this crisis, if not the fundamental element; this is the truth. Consider this truth, O people, respect it, delve into it, study it, and learn from it. Truth is above politics, and politics is unsatisfied with using the truth to serve its ends. Politics that does not invest itself in the service of truth is preposterous and futile. Time and truth will mock it, and history will humiliate it.

All this does not mean to say that the non-Maronites do not share in what has been given to the Maronites or do not enjoy their individual and personal truth. My topic, however, addresses the Maronites and “the much given and much required of them;” therefore, my analysis is limited to only the Maronites. The Maronites occupy a special and high position in Lebanon and among Christians of the East. Limiting the focus of the

subject on them and scrutinizing this subject from all perceivable sides is probably one of the simplest methodical foundations for such a critical and perilous topic.

How easy it is to philosophize about the Maronites! Who does not philosophize about the Maronites today? Is there anyone among the enemies of Lebanon and its freedoms and values who does not act with hostility toward the Maronites or seek to dishonor and divide them? This is an honor for the Maronites. It is irrefutable proof of their significant political and social position and weight. Despite all adversaries, they stand their ground, defying and resisting like a mountain that even the strongest winds cannot shake!

It could also all be so easy to analyze what they have been given; however, our attempt in this article, despite its limitations and inadequacies, is purely a simple and credible analysis. It is unimportant to analyze and philosophize about the Maronites, but it is also important that other non-Maronite Lebanese citizens ask themselves: do we impartially, unequivocally, and without prejudice truly appreciate what the Maronites have been given? Disregarding what has been given to the Maronites, what have we been given ourselves? How can we offer or utilize what has been given to us? How can we support the Maronites in what they have been given and how can we fuse what has been given to us with what has been given to them for the sake of truth, man, higher values, and Lebanon?

Critical analysis, whether it is directed toward others or toward the self, would become a sort of illness. I know some people who spend their entire day criticizing, analyzing, annihilating, and destroying; however, they do not have a single practical plan to put forward. They take pleasure in destroying, but cannot fathom the pleasure of building. They seclude themselves away from resourceful mass currents. They emigrated from their homeland not only physically, but also mentally. They participated in coursing this destiny, which they have ultimately realized and for which they will be eventually held accountable. It is important that we recognize the positive side of things and we should be positive ourselves. It is important that we refrain from negative thought.

It is incredibly easy to reveal the shortcomings of the Maronites, which they themselves profligately reveal on a daily basis. Sometimes I pity them, for they are destroying themselves, and I endeavor to reveal their positive side, achievements, and great potential. They gratefully welcome every critique that is positively aimed at them. The great leaders and intellectuals of the Maronites recognize their exact weaknesses; nevertheless, they remain sure of themselves, their capacities, and potentials as regards Lebanon and its great values. This is their supreme grandeur.

At every instant, particularly the present and decisive critical instant, any feeling of bigotry, hatred, envy, rancor, retribution, or reclusion is not expedient to the existent and solemn situation. We should all join hands in a spirit of true love to support the Maronites and effectively become a part of them. We should help them carry their cross and bear with them their pains, sufferings and agonies. Matters vacillating in the hand of fate are

so dangerous that any bigotry and selfishness is a deadly sin. History will not have mercy on selfish bigots.

I summarize “Much Is Required through the following:

1. Accepting what has been given to them with utmost modesty, fear, and tremor. The last right stance is: “Not to us, O Lord, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness¹².”
2. Expressing gratitude to the bountiful giver, effusing gratitude for giving without asking;
3. Giving each of the ten talents the value it deserves, meditating on its splendor with total humility, fear, and piety, and discovering all challenges involved in each talent;
4. Taking very good care of each of these talents and pledging to develop them to the utmost;
5. Ascertaining that the existence and survival of the Maronites is of great meaning and deep mystery; probing this mystery with passionate yearning;
6. Ascertaining that this mystery is not limited to Lebanon only, but stretches farther and deeper;
7. Having total faith (a) in the responsible humanistic, individual, and existential liberty as being the holiest thing in existence; (b) that this liberty sums up and embodies the essence of the ten gifts given to the Maronites; (c) that Lebanon is entrusted with these talents forever, not only for itself but also for the entire Levant; (d) and if we lose these talents, the Maronites will lose, and Lebanon will lose with them all the talents they have been given, and the mystery of their survival will fade away, consequently every reason for the existence of Lebanon will fade away. When the reason of existence fades away, existence will then become extinct.

Meditating with fear, tremor, and trust in God, on the parable of the good and faithful slave and the evil and lazy slave¹³; The good slave did not only keep his talents but rather doubled them. The lazy slave, however, was afraid and buried his talent in the ground. Thus far, the Maronites have been faithful with the talents they have been given, and they have doubled them. I have no doubt that the master who has given them the talents, if he decides to hold them accountable today, he would say to them what he said to the good servant: “Well done, good and faithful slave! You have been faithful with a few things. I will put you in charge of many things. Enter into the joy of your master.”

I sincerely pray that the day will not come, and I am certain that the day will not come, when the master one day says what he said to the evil and lazy slave: “Take the talent from him and give it to the (others). For the one who has will be given more, and he will have more than enough. But the one who does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him.”

¹² Ps. 115:1

¹³ Mat. 25:14-30

Rabieh, Lebanon, August 25, 1980

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