

# THE BIBLE IN THE MARONITE CHURCH

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## **1- THE TRANSLATED VERSIONS USED BY MARONITES**

The Maronites have used, at least until the era we know about, the Syriac and Arabic versions of the Bible. It is agreed that, during the very first centuries of Christianity, its adepts in the Middle East were bilinguals; Greek and Syriac were the languages used.

In ancient times, the Greek language was certainly known by the monks of the monastery of Saint Maron, and we presume that they also used the Greek version of the Bible, but we do not have documents proving it; the only manuscript that reached us from the monastery's library is a Syriac one, enclosing the work of John of Apamea<sup>1</sup>.

The most widespread version used by Maronites is the Syriac one, known under the name of *Peshitta*, which we also found in their liturgical texts. Numerous Maronite manuscripts are considered

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1- Manuscript of the British Museum Add. 17169, copied in the year 580; see, Jean GRIBOMONT, « Documents sur les origines de l'Église Maronite », *Parole de l'Orient* 5 (1974) 95-132; here 103-106.

witnesses of the Peshitta, among them the manuscript of a Psalter copied in 1318 in the monastery of Qozhaya<sup>2</sup>.

The Maronite Patriarchs from 1154 until 1522 used *The Rabbula's Evangeliarion* created in 586, which was based on the Peshitta<sup>3</sup>.

Since Syriac was the liturgical language used by Maronites, the version of the Holy Scriptures adopted was the Syriac one.

However, from the XV<sup>th</sup> century and on, Arabic has become the spoken language. Since that time, the Maronite liturgical manuscript have an additional Arabic text next to the Syriac one; the same was applied on the Holy Scripture's readings. The systematic use of an approved Arabic version took place just after the publication of a printed copy of the New Testament in 1590-1703, and in 1671 of the entire Bible. The Anthony Sioniste's Arabic version of the New Testament, published in Rome by Faustus Naironus in 1703, was revised by the great Arabic poet Germanos Farhat, Bishop of Aleppo (1660-1732). This reviewed version has since been used for liturgical readings, based on the first missal's edition published in Qozhaya monastery (1816), and another review was done by Joseph Debs in 1888<sup>4</sup>.

## 2- THE MARONITES AND THE BIBLE FROM THE VII<sup>TH</sup> TO THE XVII<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The ancient Maronites authors gave to the Bible a colossal value and a place of preference in their writings and thoughts.

### 2/1 – Saint John Maron and the Bible

The *Profession of Faith* was attributed in the Maronite tradition to the first Patriarch, John Maron; it was followed by an anthology of

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2- *List of Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts* (preliminary issue, edited by Peshitta Institute, Leiden University, Leiden 1961), 9,62,68,69. See also Stephanus Evodius ASSEMANUS, *Bibliothecae Mediceae Laurentianae et Palatinae Codicum MMS. Orientalium Catalogus (Florentiae 1742)*.

3- As shown by the annotations on the manuscript's margin written by those who used it; see S. E. ASSEMANUS, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-25.

4- See Michel HAYEK, *La liturgie maronite, Histoire et textes eucharistiques*, Paris 1964, p. 94-102.

texts<sup>5</sup> taken from the Holy Scriptures, aimed at confirming the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, sustained by the *Profession of Faith*. This anthology or compilation has never been studied, whereas focusing was mainly on the patristic anthology that followed and which was apparently similar to the one circulating among the Chalcedonian authors during the VI<sup>th</sup> and VII<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>6</sup>. Michel BREYDY, the editor of the *Profession of Faith*, dated the patristic anthology from the VII<sup>th</sup>/VIII<sup>th</sup> century which not only locates the era of the *Profession of Faith* but also the anthological texts taken from the Bible that go with it.

The editor points out two divergences regarding the Peshitta, over 28 quotations, and, moreover, Jn 2,19 exists also, in the fragment of the *Expositio Fidei* of Saint Ambrose quoted by Theodoret in the *Eranistes*<sup>7</sup>.

## 2/2 – Thomas Kfartabi and the Bible

During the XII<sup>th</sup> century, the arguments presented by Thomas Kfartabi<sup>8</sup>, a notorious author writer of the *Treaty of the 10<sup>th</sup> chapters* seemed to be weaved with extracts from the Holy Bible. In it the Gospel of Mark is quoted 19 times, John 15 times, Genesis and Psalms 7 times each.

## 2/3 – The Patriarch Douaihy and the Bible

While reading the works of the Patriarch Douaihy, we find that he quoted the Holy Scriptures in abundance. Douaihy belongs to an era (XVII<sup>th</sup> century), where Catholics, in general, had little access to the Bible. He did not leave behind him any systematic commentary of the Holy Scriptures, and did not deploy any effort to make it accessible to

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5- Jean MARON, *Exposé de la foi et autres opuscules*, edited by M. BREYDY, CSCO 497, *Scriptores Syri* 209, Lovanii 1988, pp. 55-62 (syriac text) ; translated by M. BREYDY, CSCO 498, *Scriptores Syri* 210, pp. 5-6.

6- See M. BREYDY's Introduction of the French translation of Jean Maron, *op. cit.*, CSCO 498, *Syri* 210, pp. 5-6.

7- Jean MARON, *op. cit.*, CSCO 498, *Scriptores Syri* 210, pp. 20-21, notes.

8- See C. CHARTOUNI, *Le traité des dix chapitres de Thomas Kafartabi*, « Recherches de l'Université Saint-Joseph » 7, Beyrouth 1986, p. 19 (introd. by C. CHARTOUNI), and pp. 73-77 (prologue of the treatise where are found all information we have about him).

the believer. However he used skillfully very varied biblical quotations with ability. For example, in his work, *The Tenth Candelabrum*, in the introduction to the 'Second Candelabrum', he quoted in one page: Saint Paul once, Zachariah twice, and Revelation three times. In his commentary, he quotes by referring to other biblical texts which become a sort of commentary. It is noticeable in this page that the quotations keep coming one after the other.

It is also interesting to point out that he seems to translate his own text, both, from *Vulagata* and *Peshitta*. Evidence is, on the one hand, that the versions he shows are not the one printed in the *Arabic Bible* of his time (1591 and on). On the other hand, the translation of a verse is not always similar in his work. It is important to mention that the best known *Arabic Bible* at his time was *The Biblia Arabica* in three parts (1671), a translated version of Sarkis Al-Rizzi († 1638) to which we alluded. Sometimes Douaihy quotes in Syriac or adds the Syriac quotation to the Arabic one.

The imprecision in the quotations he places is due to the fact that he either uses the accurate quotation or the one he knows by heart. In his work, the quotation is frequently followed by an interpretation; he was aware of its necessity to elucidate the Scriptures. For instance, in order to explain the Christian mystery, he gives a formulated synthesis in a scriptural language, with a flow of biblical quotations. According to him, theology must show that the teaching of the Church is in accordance with the biblical data.

It is obvious that the Bible is full of symbols; Douaihy uses them to interpret the reality of the ecclesial symbolism. Throughout his writings we encounter scriptural quotations.

If it is said that Douaihy quotes Scripture a lot, it will be good to add that he also comments and interprets them. As for example, starting from the Gospel, he shows the legitimacy of the Latin and Maronite theology concerning the Holy Spirit. He starts with a verse, passes to a second quotation, and then uses other verses<sup>9</sup>.

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9- Patriarch Stephen DOUWAYHI, *Manarat al Akdâs*, ed. R. CHARTOUNI, Beyrouth 1895-1896, vol. II, pp. 78-123.

It is noteworthy how Douaihy is sensitive to the flexibility of words which lead to variety of interpretations. He knows how to set limits to the meaning of a verse, turning down inadmissible interpretations. We notice that he goes after the literal meaning of the biblical text to move to its spiritual connotation, when the literal meaning involves it.

We should not neglect the fact that the Maronite liturgy, because of its richness in biblical quotations, affected and contributed significantly to the exegetical progress of Douaihy.

From the methodological point of view, Douaihy reaches the full meaning of a biblical text by placing it first in its immediate literary context, clarifying often the circumstance in which the verse was pronounced. He then seeks to bring together the entire gospel, using other quotations. Finally he says that his interpretation must be conforming to Christian Revelation and never contradicts the Christian mystery.

We conclude that Douaihy has a varied language, depending on his readers or interlocutors. He does not articulate the same way to Maronites and to non-Maronites. What interests him is to give his readers an access to the Holy Scriptures, giving to the church a theology deeply rooted in Scripture.

### **3- THE FIRST MARONITE EDITION OF THE BIBLE**

#### **3/1- The first edition of the Psalter appeared in Qozhaya**

Maronites have given a significant contribution to the publishing of the first printed edition of Scripture in Arabic. The Maronite monastery of Saint Antoine Qozhaya in Lebanon issued the very first book printed in the Middle East, a *Psalter* in *Karchûnî* fonts; some of these copies published in 1610 are still available; whereas the existence of a Psalter published in the same monastery in 1585 was mentioned by Evode AL-SEMAANI in his catalogue of the *Medicis Library*, Number XXX (today indexed under the name of *Florence Orientale 411*)<sup>10</sup> and by Simon AL-SEMAANI in his *Catalogue of the*

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10- S. E. ASSEMANUS, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.

*Naniënne Library*, but no copy of it is conserved. Therefore, the existence of this edition is denied, presuming that Simon AL-SEMAANI confused it with the *Psalter* of 1610. However, it was noticed that the *Psalter* of 1610 is very different from the one AL-SEMAANI described, and that therefore presumably, there was in fact a 1585 edition of the *Psalter* of which no copy is preserved. Another explanation says that there was no evidence that printing machinery existed in the monastery of Qozhaya, so the 1585 or 1610 editions were probably printed by mobile printing machinery imported from Europe, borrowed for a short time period, in order to have them published<sup>11</sup>.

### **3/2- Maronites and the first edition in Arabic of the Gospels in Rome**

A Maronite took a significant part in the first printed edition of the Gospels in Arabic. Apparently this version seemed to be taken from an Arabic manuscript after the Alexandrian review known as the *Vulgata*<sup>12</sup>. It was published in 1590, printed in 1500 copies, under the title *Sacrosancta Quatuor Iesu Christi Domini Nostri Evangelia*. In 1591, it was followed, by the publication of 3500 copies in Arabic and Latin. The Medicean typography was created in 1594 by Ferdinand of Medicis, who published this version. The Maronite Jacques Luna, whose real name was Yâ'qûb ibn Hilâl, used to work there; he was a student in the Maronite College of Rome, and founded later his own printing house, and published five books, including the *Maronite Missal*.<sup>13</sup>

### **3/3- Maronites and the Paris Polyglot Bible**

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- 11- B. AGGOULA, 'Le livre Libanais de 1585 à 1900', in *Exposition. Le livre et le Liban jusqu'à 1900*, ouvrage publié sous la direction de C. ABOUSSOUAN, Beyrouth 1982, pp. 295-319, here 297-313.
  - 12- Ignazio GUIDI, « Le traduzioni degli Evangelii in arabo e in etiopico », *Atti della Regia Accademia dei Lincei*, anno CCLXXV (1888), serie IV, classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, vol. IV, parte I, Memorie, 5-31, here 24 & 30.
  - 13- Nothing is known about him after the year 1600. See N. GEMAYEL, « Les imprimeries Libanaises de Rome », in *Exposition...*, pp. 190-192, here, p. 190.

A number of Maronite scholars collaborated in the edition of *Polyglot Bible of Paris*, printed between 1628 and 1645, and of which the Maronite Gibra'îl as-Sahyûnî was one of leading translators, and Ibrahîm al-Hâqlânî and Nasrallah Chalaq al-'Akûrî<sup>14</sup> as well.

### 3/4- Maronites and the *Biblia Arabica* of Rome

In Rome, the head commissioner for the publication of the *Biblia Arabica* by the Congregation Propaganda Fide was the Maronite Sarkis al-Rizzî, brother of the Patriarch and Bishop of Damascus. He died in Rome the year 1638, while working on the Arabic translation of the Bible that was supposed to be brought to light after his death in 1671<sup>15</sup>.

## 4- THE PSALTER IN THE MARONITE TRADITION

The Psalter deserves a place apart in the Maronite tradition, since most of biblical Maronite manuscripts are Psalters.

### 4/1- Maronite manuscripts of the Psalter<sup>16</sup>

They are spread over 587 years, between 1318 and 1896. They are found in several Western and Eastern libraries, mainly in the *Medicean of Florence*, *Vatican Library*, *National Library of Paris*, *Innsbruck in Austria*, *The Maronite Patriarchate Bkerke* in Lebanon, in the *Convent of our Lady of Perpetual Help*, *Byblos* in Lebanon. Other manuscripts are to be reported in Milan (Italy), Aleppo (Syria), and in other libraries. These manuscripts are divided into 2 groups, the one that uses the Syriac text (*Peshitta*) and the other, the *Karchûnî* (*The manuscript Florence 411* is the oldest *Karchûnî* text)<sup>17</sup>. The

14- N. GEMAYEL, *Al-madrasah al-marûniyah al-habbriah al-rûmaniya*, Beyrouth 1993, pp. 128-133, 166, 170.

15- Alberto VACCARI, « Una Biblia Araba per il primo gesuita venuto al Libano », *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, 10 (1925) 79-104, here 96-100.

16- Jean TABET, « Kutub al-Mazamîr fî al-taqâs al-Marûnî », AAVV, *Al-liturjiyah wa-l-kitab al-moukaddas*, Publications de l'Institut de Liturgie, USEK, n.13,1991, pp. 49-86, here 50.

17- Jean TABET, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

greatest number of these manuscripts was conducted between 1507 and 1569.

Let us recall the main<sup>18</sup>:

- ***Florence 1-12***

Goes back to the year 1318; it is the oldest referred to by researchers on Eastern (oriental) and Syriac Psalms<sup>19</sup>. Realized by Hawshab and bounded by Malek Gibra'îl from Ehden village in Lebanon. The hermit Younân al-Matrîfî, who died in 1542, used this manuscript 236 years after its achievement.

This manuscript names the Psalter the *Book of Praises*; it preceded each of the eleventh psalms by the appellation « praise » instead of « psalm » and restores the distribution of the psalms into tiny units, each consisting of 3 psalms named *choubho*, « praise ».

- ***Florence 411 (previously 30)***

It goes back to the year 1528. It is distinguished by two characteristics:

- It was copied by the bishop Gergis son of Sulaymân, bishop of Damascus and Cyprus, who also copied another manuscript about the Psalms, the *Vat Syr 98*, in 1569.
- It consists of the eleventh biblical praises in their entirety, as is the case in the *Vat Syr 98*, which makes it a unique reference for studying such praises.

- ***Vat Syr 9***

Although there are other manuscripts: *Vat Syr 460*, *Paris Syr 14*, *Vat Syr 9*, *Vat Syr 454* and the one of *Our Lady of Perpetual Help Byblos 1*, but the only one that stretches the psalms along the seven hours of prayers, the most complete and accurate, reflecting the

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18- *Ibidem*, p. 52-53.

19- *The Old Testament in Syriac*, part II, Fasc. 3, *The book of Psalms*, Leiden 1980, p. XXV.

harmony between the Maronite and the Syriac traditions, remains *the Vat Syr 9*<sup>20</sup>.

#### **4/2- Designation of the Psalter according to the Maronite tradition**

In the context of the Last Supper, Mathew and Mark talk about the *Hillel* (Ps 113-118), recited after eating the Passover according to the Jewish tradition. The expression used in this case is: They *had praised* (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26). We presume that with these two references, *reciting* the Psalter is equivalent to *praising* it, and that the Psalter is thus a collection of praises.

It is worth mentioning that the Syriac rite, which has ancient Psalteria some dating back to the early of the VII<sup>th</sup> century, employs the appellation found in Mark and Mathew: The Psalter is *a book of praise*; we find this appellation in the oldest manuscripts such as *Add. 17.100*.

The same can be observed in the totality of the Maronite tradition manuscript written on the book of Psalms, where the same formulation is found: *David's Praises*, as in: *Florence 1-12* (of the year 1318), *Bkerke 104* (1495- 1507), *Vat Syr 265* (1517), *Vat Syr 9* (1518), *Vat Syr 263* (XVII<sup>th</sup> century), and *Byblos 1* (1896). It should be noted that the scientific and critical edition of the Psalter, according to the *Peshitta*, issued in Leiden in 1980, entitles this book as well *David's Praises*.

However, we should also recall that others classical appellations appear in Maronite manuscripts, such as: *The Psalms book*, *Psalms*, *David's Psalms*, *Az-Zabour*, etc.<sup>21</sup>

#### **4/3- Explanation of the Psalms**

Among manuscripts which retain the explanation of the Psalms, should be mentioned the following:

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20- See Bar-Hebraeus, *Ethicon*, edited by P. Bedjian, Syriac text, Paris 1898, pp. 48-50.

21- Jean TABET, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

- *Bkerke 102*<sup>22</sup> : The scribe mentioned that he wrote his *Karchûnê* text by referring to an old Syriac copy dating back to the year 1263. He starts by the explanation of the Psalm 77.
- *Tamiche 6*<sup>23</sup> : dates back to 1786 ; its author is a Jesuit ; the scribe is the Father Gibra'îl, an LMO monk. Its title is: *Ad-durr al manthur fî tafsîr az-zabûr*.

It should be noted that some manuscripts have an introduction and an explanation preceding each psalm; these explanations are important on several levels :

- They provide an explanation of the psalm itself.
- They highlight the two aspects, theological and spiritual.
- They may have different origins : Syriac, Arabic or Latin.
- The absence of evidence given in the published or written traditional manuscripts regarding the distribution of the psalms in the liturgical year, these modern explanations and abbreviations offer a satisfying reference and an element of a prime importance essential to discover the direct relationship between a number of psalms and the series of major feasts, such as Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost<sup>24</sup>.

#### 4/4- The Psalm 151 and the Maronite « Apocryphal Psalms »<sup>25</sup>

Sometimes, *The book of Psalms (The Psalter)* the contains, immediately after the Ps 150, one added psalm, Ps 151; it is one of constant elements attached to the *Psalter*; it is found in the following Maronite Mss: *Bkerke 104* (ff 170a-170b); *Vat Syr 265* (f 143a); *Insbruck 401* (ff 168a-168b); *Vat Syr 9* (f 142a); *Florence Orientale*

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22- Abdo KHALIFÉ and Francis BAISSARI, *Catalogue raisonné des manuscrits de la bibliothèque de la résidence patriarcale maronite*, Bkérké, Beyrouth 1973, pp. 84-85.

23- *Catalogue des manuscrits de la bibliothèque du Couvent de Notre-Dame de Tamiche*, USEK 1984-1985, pp. 8-9.

24- Jean TABET, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

25- The two editions of the Psalter, the one of Qozhaya (1610) and the one of Rome (1737) including the Ps 151.

411 (previously 30 (185a-186b); *Vat Syr 454* (ff221b-222a); *Vat Syr 98* (125b); *Vat Syr 263* (ff 150a-150b); *Jbeil 1* (p. 171).

The Psalm 151 is the first of five Syriac psalms, called *Apocryphal Psalms* to which headers were recently added.

In 1759, Assemani was the first to draw attention to this ensemble, listing it in the catalogue of the Vatican's Library, describing the *Vat Syr 183 manuscript* (X<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>26</sup>.

These five psalms find their natural explanation in the Essenian context, their original background; they belong to the psalm literature, kept in their best pattern in the Qumran Mss.

Regarding Ps 151, it does not include any Essenian theological subject, although the latter have adopted it.

It should be noted that Ps 151 is known in the Coptic rite, and it is recited on Saturday of Joy, and the Saturday of Light, after the reading of Ps 150.

From the biblical point of view, Ps 151 was created by David in regard of his prominent battle with Goliath. In fact, certain passages of 1R 16: 1-3, and 17: 40-51 tell the story of the election of David by God, his anointment, and the battle with Goliath. These passages are therefore the basis of this psalm and of its natural environment. In the *Maronite Breviary*, the Sunday night prayer, there is a clear allusion to the battle between David and Goliath<sup>27</sup>.

One deduces that, in the Maronite rite, Ps 151 is a witness to, at least, three things:

- The Maronite rite is deeply rooted in the Essenian tradition of Qumran;
- The abundant use of Ps 151 in the « psalmody » manuscripts; in fact, it is found in nine manuscripts, starting from 1495;
- Relationships that connect the Maronite rite to other Syriac and oriental rites.

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26- ASSEMANI, *Bibl. Apost. Vat.*, pp. 385-386.

27- *Maronite Breviary*, Beyrouth 1890, p. 48.

#### 4/5- Douaihy and the Psalter

In reading Manarat al-Akdâs of the Patriarch Douaihy, we find a faithful echo of « psalmody » manuscripts: « The ancient Fathers divided the psalms and all the songs in phetgomé, and during prayer, the first group chant a part (beyt), to be followed by another group who chants the second part (beyt) »<sup>28</sup>.

#### 4/6- The Lebanese Synod and the Psalter

For its part, the Lebanese Synod (1736) recalled that « The function of the vocalist consists in chanting the Psalms and the songs in church; for this reason he is given the Psalter at his ordination »<sup>29</sup>; and then he emphasized that the Eastern (Oriental) tradition consists in chanting the Psalms in two groups<sup>30</sup>.

#### 4/7- Biblical Hymns of Maronites

It is well known that the Eastern (Oriental) rites use the eleven biblical hymns placed at the end of the liturgical book of Psalms, nine of them are taken from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament, in the following order:

- The first hymn of Moses the prophet (Ex 15:1-2);
- The second hymn of Isaiah the prophet (Is 42:10-13; 45:8);
- The second hymn of Moses the prophet (Dt 32:1-43, sometimes divided into two parts);
- The hymn of Ann, mother of Samuel (1R 2:1-10);
- The hymn of Habaquq the prophet (Hab 3:2-19);
- The hymn of Isaiah the prophet (Is 26:9-19);
- The hymn of Jonas the prophet (Jo 2:3-10);
- The first hymn of the three young men (Da 3:26-56);
- The hymn of the Virgin Mary (Lc 1:46-55);
- The hymn of Zachariah the prophet (Lc 1:68-79).

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28- Patriarch Stephen DOUWAYHI, *op. cit.*, vol., I, p. 531.

29- *Synodus Provincialis... in Monte Libano celebrate anno 1736*, Paris III, caput II, 1, Romae 1820, pp. 189-190.

30- *Ibidem*, Paris IV, caput V, 7, p. 322.

## **5- THE BIBLE AND THE MARONITE MASS**

At present, the Maronite Mass readings are in a peculiar situation. The lectionary is limited to selected texts from the Pauline letters and the Gospels. This can already be seen in the first edition of the Missal printed in 1594. While in the first edition of the Missal there are only 20 readings from the Gospels assigned for the entire year, in the second edition the number reaches 300.

As for the readings from St. Paul, a supplement to the second edition of the Mass was printed in 1716, which included 7 readings from St. Paul, corresponding to the 7 days of the week. It was only in 1816 that a larger collection of readings for the Mass was printed in the monastery of Qozhaya, created by Germanos Farhat<sup>31</sup>.

There are, however, good reasons to assume that in the older days, the mass included also readings taken from the Old Testament. This is evident in the celebrant's address to the reader, before the reading of the gospel, with the formula: « Glory to the Lord of Paul, the prophets and the Apostles... »

### **5/1- The location of the Sacred Scriptures in the liturgical celebration**

The Sacred books, and in particular the Gospels, have a prominent place in the church. They are placed on a desk at the right side of the altar, between the central nave and the choir.

The Gospel is an object of grand veneration. It is kissed and incensed. Candles are lit before it, and it is carried in procession into the church so that the faithful are blessed by it. During the reading of the Gospel everyone stands, heads uncovered, and listening takes place with fear and veneration.

### **5/2- Continuous or selective reading**

Regarding the continuous or selective reading of the Bible in the Maronite Church, it is possible to affirm that every Sunday or feast day has its proper reading. The liturgical year, which begins with the first advent and ends with second coming, is based on the Lord's feast,

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<sup>31</sup>- See above, par. 1.

starting with His nativity until His Passion, His death, His resurrection, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the awaiting of His second coming.

The advent of the Lord is the highest event and is central to everything else. For this reason, every Sunday is a diminutive event that brings us closer to the great one, and therefore, every Sunday has its proper evangelical event (*note from Johnny: I do not know what is meant by "evangelical event"*) and its own reading from the Gospels.

The oldest Maronite manuscripts reflect such repartition and the *Rabboula's Evangeliarion* (586) where there are selected readings.

## 6 - MARONITE MODERN BIBLICAL LITERATURE

The XX<sup>th</sup> Century witnessed a flowering in biblical interpretation, especially after the publication of the document *Dei Verbum* (1965). In fact, literature on the Bible increased in number in the Maronite Church, as well as literature in the pastoral and didactic fields<sup>32</sup>.

### 6/1 - Translations

- *Œucumenical translation*.
- *The New Testament*, translation made by Fr. Georges Fakhoury, 1953.
- *New Testament*, new translation of the Jesuit's fathers, in 1969, and *Old Testament*, in 1980.

*The New Testament according to the Peshitta*, translated by Fr. Youssef Aoun in 1982. In his introduction, the author says that this translation differs from the others, « because the Greek text was put aside for the reason that it is sometimes ambiguous, and the Syriac text was adopted instead because of its precision, clarity and accuracy ».

*Evangelion, The New Testament*, published by the Department of Theology, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik : *The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles*, in 1987; *The Epistles and the Apocalypse*, in 1992.

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<sup>32</sup>- Cf. *Al-Masarrah*, no. 807 (1994) 64-81.

The translators are : Abbot Pierre Azzi, Fr. Youhanna Koumayr, Fr. Youhanna Khawand, Fr. Assad Jawhar and Fr. Roufaïl Matar. This translation comes with footnotes that explain in a selective manner what the translators judged good to be adopted.

## 6/2 - The interpretation of the Bible

- *Résumé de l'histoire Sainte*, excerpts from Latin to Arabic by Mikhail son of Francis Al-Massabki the maronite. It includes 209 paragraphs, republished in 1963.
- *Le livre de l'histoire Sainte*, by Mikhail Abdallah Gibril Al-Chababi, the 4<sup>th</sup> of April 1898. This book is presented in a Q&A form around *The New and the Old Testaments*.
- *Résumé de l'histoire Sainte*, excerpts from the Catechism of his Holy Father, Pope Pie X, translated by the Abbot Ephrem Hounayn Al-Dîranî, printed in 1908 in Beirut.
- *Le livre de la concordance entre la science et le livre de la Genèse*, by Rachid Ephendi Al-Khoury Al-Chartouni, dictated to him from French to Arabic by Fr. De Coupier, a Jesuit, in Beirut, in 1891.
- *Kashf an-niqâb 'an haqîqat al-kitâb* (the revelation of the Bible's truth). A critical and historical commentary on sacred books, or an introduction to the Bible, by Br. Elias Tabet, Jounieh in 1933-1934.
- *Taëfat al-gîl fî tafsîr al-anâjîl*, collected by Fr. Youssef Al-Dibs (a Lebanese Maronite) from Cornelios Al-Houjari's explanation, Jean Madonatos and Jacques Tirini (sj), translated from Latin into Arabic, printed in Beirut, in 1868.
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- Paul Feghali, Collection *Lectio Divina*.
- Paul Feghali, Collection *Biblical posts (Mahattat kitabiyah)*.
- Paul Feghali, Collection *A la marge de la Bible*.
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- Journal *Biblia*, published by Louis Khalifé at Couvent Notre-Dame des Secours, then at USEK).
- Revue *Biblia*, published by Ayoub Chahwan at USEK.
- Collection *Bibliyat*, published by Louis Khalifé then by Ayoub Chahwan at the Couvent of Notre Dame des Secours, then at USEK.

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#### **6/6- Biblical publications at Maronite Universities**

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- Antonine University, Baabda
- Sagesse University, Beirut

#### **CONCLUSION**

This overview shows how the Maronite Church has granted an interest to the Scriptures, and that its liturgy is deeply rooted in them. Maronites are legendary in the translation of the Scriptures to Arabic and other languages. Over the last decades, there has been a blossoming in terms of biblical interpretation and exegesis with a considerable and a growing number of specialized in Bible.

A promising future in the biblical activities awaits us.

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