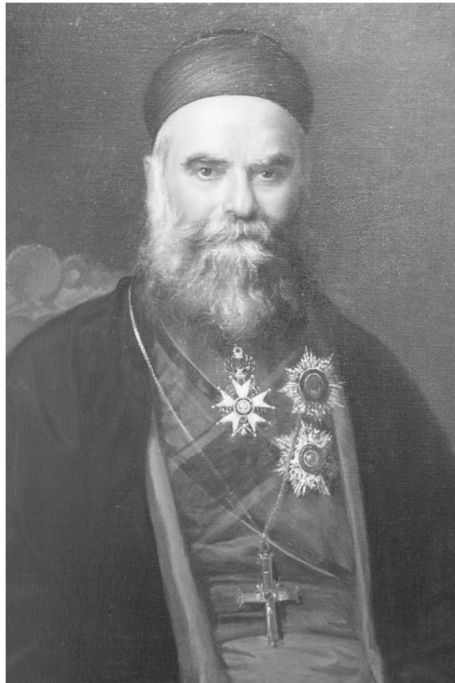


The Charisma of Patriarch Elias Howayek (1843-1931)



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Introduction

Elias Boutros Howayek (الياس بطرس الحويّك), born 1843, was elected Maronite Patriarch of Antioch from 1899 till his death in 1931.

A man of great significance in the history of an Independent Lebanon, Elias Howayek is considered one of the four founders of modern Lebanon alongside Fakhr el Din II, Bashir II and Youssef Beik Karam.

Elias Howayek's other claim to fame, is the title of Founder of the Congregation of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family. The circumstances and influences in his life contributed to the shaping of this new religious institute to meet educational, pastoral and spiritual needs of the time.

In the next few pages, the life of the Patriarch is detailed, with insights as to what makes this extraordinary individual an exemplar in the Maronite Church, a voice of truth amid political unrest, and a candidate for sainthood.

The Early Years of Elias Howayek (1843-1870)

Elias Howayek was born December 1843 in Hilta, a district of Batroun, Lebanon. He was the eldest of seven children, three boys and four girls. His mother was Gherra Tannous. His father, Tadros Abboud Howayek, had received the Sacrament of Ordination in 1850.

Born into a family of humble means, Elias was baptised on 5th January 1844 at the Church of Our Lady. This would be no coincidence, as Mary, the Mother of God, would shape much of Elias' thinking and actions over the course of his life.

His first school was under the village oak tree, as was the common practice of the time. His father encouraged and nurtured his children in academic endeavor, becoming Elias' chief educator during his early years.

Throughout his childhood, Elias developed a deep religious awareness and a growing attraction to Maronite ritual and symbolism, along with possessing an indelible experience of the Sacred

Heart. This dedication to the Sacred Heart of Jesus continued throughout his life and is given particular focus in his fourth letter to the Sisters which he titled, 'God's love in the life of a religious sister.' In it he writes on 22nd July 1921:

This same hope urges us to clarify in our annual general letter, the benefits that the faithful receive from devotion to the Sacred Heart. We proclaim the consecration of the Church and Nation to it, and we urge all our children to take this symbol as their very own.

Finally, O blessed, do your best to spread the devotion of the Heart of Jesus, especially among your students, that you may receive what the divine heart promised to those who spread its devotion, so that it will be spoken of you as Jesus said, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' (Jn 10:10).

Elias Howayek's commitment to God would find full expression in his consecrated life. His love for the Church of God was seen through his devotions and humanitarian acts, writing later on in his

consecrated life, 'Everyone who loves truth and goodness, loves the Church.'



Ordination to the Priesthood (1870-1899)

In 1851, Elias departed from Helta to the Seminary of Saint John Maroun in Kferhai to pursue his studies. Eight years later, in 1859 he was transferred to the Ghazir seminary run by the Jesuit Fathers, where he studied French, Arabic, Syriac, Latin and Greek languages, along with philosophy. In 1861, Elias joined the Solidarity of the Holy Family and was elected its president. He was sent to Rome on 10th November 1866 by Patriarch Boulos Massaad to further his studies in theology at the Propaganda University. In a letter to his parents dated 6th March 1868 Elias wrote:

Divine Providence will look after all things, all for the greater glory of the Most High. I ask that you remember me in your prayers, the son of Providence.

During this time, two events occurred that impacted on Elias' life. The first was the death of his father in 1869. The second event was his Ordination to the Priesthood at the hands of

Bishop Youssef Geagea on 5th June 1870 in Rome. The prayer of Elias on the occasion of his ordination was titled, 'I beg you my God' and reads as follows:

I beg you my God to grant me your grace, to serve you as is pleasing to you. I desire, that through your generosity and love, to enflame my heart with your love and to remove from it all deeds and attachments that displease you. I consecrate myself and all I have to your service and love, and to do with me as you will. You are my Lord and Saviour and God, and I am your servant, creation and moulded clay. Yet I dare to call myself the least of your children, and to call you my gentle and caring Father. To you be glory and thanks forever, Amen.

Elias returned to Lebanon on 9th August 1870 having successfully completed his PhD in Theology. He spent some time at home taking care of his mother and younger siblings, before commencing his missionary life teaching moral theology at the Seminary of Saint John Maroun in

Kferhai in 1871. In 1872 he was sent to Bkerke, the Patriarchal residence, as private secretary to Patriarch Boulos Massaad. He was also appointed the Canon lawyer for marriage cases in 1884. The many initiatives shouldered by Elias as a young priest, highlight his character as well rounded, knowledgeable and ministerial. His quote, 'Everything... for Christ, with him and beside him', indicates a man totally given over to Christ.



From Priest to Bishop (1889-1899)

On 14th December 1889, Elias was consecrated Bishop of Arqa at the hands of Patriarch Boutros Boulos Massad (Peter Paul Massad) and was appointed Patriarchal Vicar of the Eparchy, which encompassed Bechare, Zgharta and the districts of Batroun and Jbeil.

Pastoral Activities

Having been raised in a working class family, Elias was as a Bishop, partial towards those who were unfortunate in their circumstances. He was a man of zeal and passion, of talent and moral character, a leader in touch with society and ever attentive to the needs of the people, in particular the less fortunate and vulnerable. Elias' passion for God was evident in his daily prayer:

My God I have no one but you and no other Lord but you. God, you are my strength and support, my pride and refuge, I have no other support but you and you alone are my refuge.

You are my God and Lord and without you I have no hope. I desire to love you, allow me to love you...

Elias opposed all forms of oppression, focusing his efforts on returning the migrated Lebanese back to their homeland, assisting those convicted with lengthy jail sentences, and with persistent determination he ensured justice was served.

In his constant concern for all, Elias insisted that families and communities should be governed through humanitarian and scriptural values. This deep concern for humanity saw him found the Congregation of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family. He also insisted on the importance of the upbringing of children, writing, 'Fathers and mothers constantly educate your children, for if your words are convincing, how much more do your actions compel them.'

Maronite College in Rome

Elias Howayek was instrumental in the revival of the Maronite College in Rome which was founded by Gregory XIII. Within ten years he undertook

three journeys from Lebanon to Rome at a time when travelling was an arduous ordeal. He left Lebanon for Rome on 8th May 1890. This task made great demands on his courage, perseverance and diplomacy. He met Pope Leo XIII in the Vatican three times, on 23rd July, 2nd and 10th August 1890 where he was given funds for the Maronite College. The remainder was to be collected in France. He left Rome for France, bearing a letter of recommendation from the Pope.

Bishop Elias Howayek, spent nine months in France (1890-1891), where he visited politicians, including the President of France and the Minister of Defence, along with cardinals and archbishops. He acquired in Paris a church and a center for the Maronite community. He also obtained from the French government subsidies for the education of eight Maronite students at the seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris. He visited cities, preaching in churches, mobilising friends, and persuading various societies and institutions to help in his undertaking to reopen the Maronite College in

Rome. Finally he returned to Rome with the necessary funds.¹

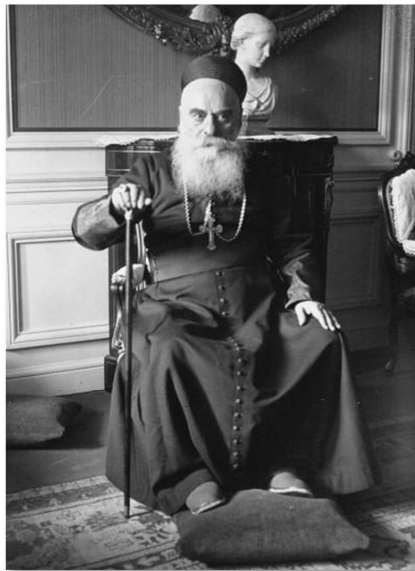
He spent two months searching for a suitable site for the new Maronite College and purchased a building in 1893. He met the Pope on 8th June, 4th August, and again on 25th August 1893, when he thanked Pope Leo XIII for his assistance in establishing the Pontifical Maronite College. On 1st January 1894 the new College was inaugurated with twelve Maronite students.

In 1894 Bishop Elias attended the Vatican by invitation from the Pope to participate in a number of meetings concerning the Middle East which were held in October. From there he visited the Maronites in Alexandria.

On 30th April 1895, Elias attended the Governing Council in Jerusalem, and purchased a place for the Maronites. He visited the Maronites in Nazareth, on his return to Lebanon.

¹ Maronite History Project, *Elias Howayek from Helta (1898-1931)*.
http://www.maronitehistory.org/Elias_HOWAYEK_from_Helta.

Elias Howayek undertook a third journey to Rome to inspect the running of the Maronite College. He remained there from April 1897 to January 1899. The Maronite College in Rome remained the object of his unflagging concern and he succeeded in doubling the number of its students. In 1904 the Maronite College acquired its own residence, and came under the charge of Maronite priests.



Thought goes into setting up a Religious Congregation

The pressing need for a teaching venture and a means to achieve it had long been pondered over by Elias Howayek. He was deeply convinced that the future relied on the education of young girls, as they were mothers to be and the heart of the family, which in turn was the foundation of society. As Elias notes, ‘The education of girls today, determines the future. They are mothers of priests, rulers, military officers, farmers, producers and tradesmen.’

Elias’ interest in establishing a Religious Congregation were clearly set out in his first letter bearing the title, ‘Symbols of the Congregation of the Holy Family,’ written on 14th August 1915:

God, Great and Most High, founded this dear Congregation in His providence and mercy, nurturing it and protecting it up till now, saving it from all shame and fragmentation; and God will protect and bless it till the end of time...

In truth, dear daughters, your Congregation is God's field and God's building, established through God's gentleness and mercy, to offer this country, a National Congregation to undertake the education of young girls in religion and virtues which contribute to building homes and preserving families, preventing society from disintegrating. The Most Great High erected your blessed Congregation and cared for it with gentle hands, placing it under the protection of the Holy Family and showering upon it blessings as to grow, mature and flourish, producing eternal fruits of good works.

In 1893 Elias met Sister Rosalie Nasr, who had originally joined the French Congregation of the Sisters of Nazareth, before entering the Congregation of the Holy Rosary. She had come to Kfifane to establish a mission with Sister Stéphanie Kardouche. Elias made his project known to them. Both Sisters possessed teaching experience and were ready to collaborate in a new religious experiment, feeling this was an avenue they were

called to. Upon completing the canonical procedures with the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem in charge of the Congregation of the Rosary, Elias, Rosalie and Stephanie set to work on establishing the first female Maronite Congregation.

As the necessary funds were unavailable, Elias put at Rosalie's disposal a convent in Jbeil that a benefactress Ursula Lahoud had given to the Patriarchal Church as an entailed estate. It was the first 'home' and Rosalie received its keys on 12th August 1895. On 15th August 1895, the first Foundation Mass was held, with Bishop Elias Howayek presiding. With the approval of Elias, Rosalie purchased in 1896 four cellars that needed restoration at Ebrine, in the district of Batroun. This became the cradle and motherhouse of the new Congregation. From the beginning, this house was known as the Convent of the Holy Family. By 1898, the Congregation had a school at Amsheet and another at Ebrine and on 7th July 1913, Bishop Elias consecrated the Church of the Holy Family convent at the Mother House in Ebrine. In his frequent visits to the Mother House, he would

insist, 'Intertwine your lives with that of the Holy Family of Nazareth.' The initial purpose in establishing the Congregation included:

1. Education and addressing the needs of young girls according to the times.
2. Offering pastoral care in hospitals, orphanages, aged care facilities and clinics, alongside other humanitarian services.
3. Religious Education and proclaiming the Word of God, along with parish work in collaboration with the parish priest.

Elias' purpose for the Congregation was frequently referred to in his annual pastoral letters to the Sisters. In the eleventh letter titled, 'The honour of a holy Vocation,' written 23rd July 1929, he writes to the Sisters:

Along with teaching young girls, a new opportunity was opened to your advantage, of nursing the sick also. In both situations you must not see yourself as earning an income. It is obvious that in teaching, there is nothing extraordinary, but the aim is to raise the

ordinary above nature. So you are called in this case to teach young girls about the Incarnate Word of Jesus, Saviour of the World, so he may be adored by them. Service of humanity is a way to reinvigorate religious feeling, in those who are sick, particularly those who have lost faith, or are close to losing it...

Do not forsake your vocation, whether it be in a school or hospital for you are rendering a spiritual service that requires attention, awareness and modesty in the spirit of faith, so that your position may never be disrespected either in the eyes of young girls, or the sick. This requires much care and attention to your words, actions and zeal, so that young girls will respect and love God, along with carrying the sick in faith, hope and love, so as to glorify God. Perform all works of mercy in happiness, joy and simplicity of intention and heart.

Just four years into the establishment of the Congregation, a significant blow occurred on the

night of 22-23rd August 1899. A young girl, dismissed because of her inability to cope with religious life, entered the convent, made her way towards Congregational Leader Rosalie's room and fatally stabbed her. Half an hour later, Rosalie Nasr passed away. There were many who thought her death would be a fatal blow to the young Congregation, but the Founder Elias Howayek, revived the young Congregation after the distressing ordeal, reminding them that the Congregation was not a human project but one founded on Divine Providence, 'It is God who made it prosper and who will preserve it.' On 30th August 1899, one week after Rosalie's death, Elias appointed as Congregational Leader, Stéphanie Kardouche.

In 1910, Elias Howayek approved the Constitution of the Congregation of the Holy Family and throughout the years he wrote numerous letters to the Sisters with titles including:

- Themes of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family (14th August 1915).

- Maintaining the heritage of the Congregation (30th July 1916).
- Prayer (20th July 1917).
- The love of Jesus in a Sister's life (22nd July 1921).
- The virtuous life in the spirit (26th July 1922).
- The spirit of piety and worship (2nd August 1923).
- The influence of a good example (16th July 1924).
- The mystery of the growth of the Congregation (3rd August 1925).
- Observe the obligations and the Constitution (5th August 1926).
- Electing a new Congregational Leader in the Spirit of the Lord (29th July 1927).
- The honour of a holy vocation (23rd July 1929).
- The only desire (26th July 1930).
- Union with God (25th July 1931).

As Bishop and then Patriarch, Elias undertook annual canonical visits to the Congregation of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family and was referred to by the Sisters as the Man of Divine

Providence, as he continually insisted in his letters that the Sisters must put their trust in God who will provide. We read Elias' words in the twelfth letter titled, 'The only desire,' composed 26th July 1930, 'Rely on God, dear daughters, and choose the right path like Mary Magdalene.' Again in the thirteenth letter titled, 'Union with God' composed 25th July 1931, Elias Howayek writes, 'The servant that says his luck and success are all his own doing and effort, is one who rejects God's providence.'

Why would one consider the actions of Elias Howayek universally significant?

Establishing schools for underprivileged children, particularly in remote areas, in order for them to receive an education and so a means to securing a better future, is a noble act, but by no means extraordinary. Yet then again any attempt at justice and assisting the plight of the poor takes on greater importance, particularly when viewed in contemporary life with its insistence on individualism, affluence and secularism.

Actions grounded solely towards benefitting others through one's will to love, is influential, even holy. And one good deed by an individual leads to the contribution of many others as seen in the rapid growth of the Congregation founded by Elias Howayek. More significantly are the many lives and generations upon generations benefitting from the ministry provided which originated from one man's concern for underprivileged children. When endeavour is sincere in its efforts, it withstands the conflicts encountered and takes on an ever newer degree of importance as it gains wider acceptance. This we witness to, with the ever expanding ministry of the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family, pioneered by Elias Howayek.

Education of village girls soon made way for the inclusion of boys and extended to the education of students of other backgrounds and creeds. Yet Elias' vision did not stop there. He extended his energy, focus and will, to ever greater good. With the newly formed Congregation, effort was also directed to the well-being of people of all walks of life, from pre-schoolers to patients in hospitals,

and to pastoral concern of the elderly. The Congregation which was founded by Elias Howayek in 1895, has since expanded and today continues to minister throughout Lebanon, Syria, Australia and France.



From Bishop to Patriarch (1899-1931)

Patriarch Yuhanna El-Haj died on 24th December 1898 and so Bishop Elias Howayek left Rome for Lebanon on 27th December, reaching Bkerke 5th January 1899. He was elected Patriarch on 6th December 1899 and so commenced a new era for Lebanon and the Maronite Church.

In his private spiritual life as Patriarch, Elias Howayek practiced ascetical and contemplative aspects. His apartment in Bkerke was simple, consisting of three rooms, one serving as a bedroom and office, the second as a reception room, and the third as a chapel, where he would celebrate Mass early in the morning. He spent hours in daily prayer and would meditate on the New Testament, confessions of Saint Augustine, the eternal Maxims and the Imitation of Christ. He fasted every Saturday, even in times of illness. This Christ centered life was reflected in the rule of his new female Religious Congregation, with his emphasis on humility and poverty. He writes in his

ninth letter titled, 'Observe the obligations and the Constitution', on 5th August 1926:

The religious sister must be an example for the people of virtues and good works, keeping the vows, the Constitution, communal living, equality in meals, clothes and possessions, spiritual retreats, Mass attendance, meditative and vocal prayer, visiting the Holy Eucharist, Confession, receiving Holy Communion ... it is necessary that she performs these obligations, because the kingdom of heaven rewards those who work in the vineyard of the Lord.

The Patriarch was a 'Man of Divine Providence' who dedicated his life to the welfare of the Maronite Church and country. He offered encouragement and assisted the sick, orphans and needy. He defended the downtrodden, was sensitive to the needs of the people, sponsored the education of underprivileged children, sought irrigation for the land of Bkerke, and insisted on the planting of olives and blackberries in lands

owned by the Patriarchate, as a means of living a sustainable lifestyle.

Our Lady of Lebanon at Harissa

In 1904, the Patriarch agreed with the Apostolic Nuncio Carlos Duval, to raise the statue of Our Lady of Lebanon at the peak of Harissa, in remembrance of the fiftieth year since the Immaculate Conception dogma. The statue was positioned in 1907 leading to the establishment of a new centre of pilgrimage, which to this day remains one of the most striking statues in the world.

This undertaking by the Patriarch was influenced by his conviction to proclaim the Christian faith to all. Like our Lady, the Patriarch heard the Word of God in his life, differently to other people, and like our Lady, he responded in ways that placed God's will first. Not only would the statue of Mary be visible for all to see, it also symbolised the Patriarch's insistence that Christians should embody Christ's light in the world. In his seventh letter titled, 'The influence of a good example'

written 16th July 1924, Elias Howayek writes to the Sisters:

We intended, for some time, that your blessed Congregation be a city whose foundation was laid on the holy mountain, a bright lamp, sending its translucent rays from the highest reaches, to give light to all and guide them towards the right path, not only in teaching and educating young girls, but to straighten every deviation and prevent all fault, that harms the family life and social life.



Parishes, Churches and Eparchies

Patriarch Elias Howayek visited parishes, churches, monasteries and convents. He encouraged western Congregations including the Jesuit Order, Christian Brothers, Marist Brothers and Lazarists, to open educational institutions in Lebanon. The Patriarch displayed particular concern for the education of seminarians and the monastics also received an important share of his attention. His primary goals were pastoral ministry and spiritual renewal of communities, achieved through annual retreats in each parish.

The Patriarch supported the building of numerous churches across Lebanon through generous financial contributions. The establishment of these churches served the Patriarch's purpose of service to the people. He valued the history of the Maronites and the importance of a deep spirituality and committed faith, as seen in his words, 'Do not lose the treasure of our dear ancestors, nor the merits of the holy hermits, and the precious blood of the martyrs.' This love for the Maronite spirituality and heritage is further

evidenced when in 1902 Elias Howayek commenced building a summer residence at Diman and completed the work in 1903. The location was on a hill from which one could view the 'Valley of the Saints,' which allowed the Patriarch to reconnect with the spirituality of the early Maronite monks.

In 1902, Patriarch Elias Howayek delegated the Reverends Shikrallah Khoury and Boutros Shebly to visit the Maronites of Cyprus. The Patriarchal delegates spent a considerable amount of money in helping the needy Maronites and their institutions and presented the Patriarch with an exhaustive report about the situation in Cyprus from spiritual, social and material standpoints.

The Patriarch left Bkerke for Rome in 1905, passing via Jaffa in Palestine, where he blessed the foundation stone of the building of Saint Anthony's Maronite church on 22nd May. In Alexandria, Egypt, he exchanged visits with the Orthodox Coptic Patriarch. Plans were made for the creation in Egypt of a Patriarchal Vicariate to care for the spiritual, social and physical welfare of

the Maronites and for the expansion of missionary activities. Elias had drawn up these plans when he visited in 1894-1895 but they only became a reality in 1904, through his efforts as Patriarch. In 1946 Egypt became an Eparchy.

In 1920, the Patriarch sent a delegation to visit the Maronites in the United States of America, in Argentina and in other parts of the World. He took the necessary steps to create independent eparchies for the Maronites of North and South America. All the while however the Patriarch insisted that the Lebanese remain in Lebanon, as he wrote, 'Do not leave the country, as true patriotism remains in this country.'

Travels and Political dealings

As Bishop, and now as Patriarch, Elias Howayek's visits and political dealings continued to increase. The Patriarch had the Nation at heart and sought freedom and liberty for its people. He boldly stated, 'You, the politicians representing the people, cannot neglect their interests, without dishonouring the truth, and violating your loyalty.'

And again he wrote, 'If journalists are honest, they proclaim the truth and offer the Nation a great service.' Elias' emphasis on justice, truth, freedom and humanitarian deeds, would be pivotal in his role as Patriarch.

The Patriarch Elias Howayek was present in Rome to celebrate the Coronation of Pope Pius X on 9th August 1903. He headed for Istanbul and remained there from October 17th to November 2nd 1905. The Patriarch had two audiences with the Sultan in October where he succeeded in obtaining improvements in the handling of Lebanese affairs and in the administration of the country.



The First World War

The First World War witnessed the persecution of Christians in the Middle East. Turkey had entered the war on 28th October 1914 on the side of Germany and the 1860-1864 Constitutions guaranteeing Lebanon's autonomy, were abolished by the Turkish government. On 28th November 1914, the Turkish army entered Mount Lebanon.

In 1915, the Governor General of Lebanon, the dignitary Ohannes, was replaced by Ali Munif, the second Turk ever to rule Lebanon. Lebanon was put directly under Ottoman military rule, resulting in the violation of rights of the Lebanese people, with Turkish soldiers occupying their homes and exposing them to severe winter conditions, with monasteries converted to military use.²

In October, the dignitary Jamal Pasha also known as Al Jazzar or the Butcher, appeared in Damascus as commander of the Fourth Turkish Army and proceeded to occupy Lebanon. He imposed

² Seely Beggiani, *Aspects of Maronite History (Part Eleven), The 20th Century in the Middle East*. <http://www.stmaron.org>.

military conscription on Lebanese citizens, requisitioned beasts of burden, and demanded the Lebanese provide food supply for his troops. A reign of terror commenced in Lebanon. Twenty one Muslims and Christians who were accused of sympathy with the French or Arab cause against the Ottomans, were hanged in Beirut and in Damascus on 6th May 1916. This event is commemorated in the Martyrs' Square in Beirut and on Martyrs' Day.

In the second half of 1915, the food supply and vital necessities were exhausted in the Mount Lebanon region and large swarms of locusts consumed the crops. This, in addition to the Ottomans blockage of the Lebanese and Syrian coast line, deprived the population of every means of subsistence. In 1916, with famine and starvation, and deteriorating living conditions leading to epidemics of typhoid and bubonic plague, it was estimated that 100,000 to 150,000 Lebanese lost their lives. With the Ottoman Empire collapsing, the Turks introduced worthless Turkish money into Lebanon which

worsened the economic hardship already caused by the war.³

Patriarch Elias Howayek spent his own money and that of the Patriarchal treasury, feeding and aiding the poor. The Patriarchal residence was thronged day and night with crowds coming to eat and take provisions for their families. The Patriarch sent priests to distribute food and money throughout the patriarchal vicariates and other regions of Lebanon, to alleviate the misery of the people. He wrote, 'Give to all, for the Patriarchate is a compassionate mother that sees all as her children, not differentiating between Christian and Muslim.' The famine continued during 1917 and 1918, causing the death of thousands. Elias Howayek wrote to the Sisters during this time in his third letter, written 20th July 1917 and titled, 'Prayer.' We read, 'You must offer special thanks during these days to the Most High God who has protected you with special providence from the

³ Maronite History Project. *Elias Howayek from Helta (1898-1931)*.
http://www.maronitehistory.org/Elias_HOWAYEK_from_Helta

hunger that has taken the lives of many, even among sisters.’

Faced with what he conceived was the Patriarch’s defiant stance during this time, Jamal attempted to exile the Patriarch. He requested the Patriarch to meet with him in Saoufar. The Patriarch was then at the residence of Diman, one hundred and fifty kilometres away and was seventy two years old. The Patriarch complied with the desire of the Turkish military leader, in order to avoid any vindictive measures against the people. The meeting took place on 21st July 1915. The Turkish leader criticised the Patriarch’s friendship with France. The Patriarch replied that France was a benefactor to the Maronite community and that it was fitting they should maintain relations, reminding him that France had also been the friend of Turkey. The Patriarch was fully aware that Turkey was the ruling power in Lebanon, while France provided protection and assistance. So it was necessary not to excite Turkish suspicion,

jealousy or anger, while maintaining relations with France.⁴

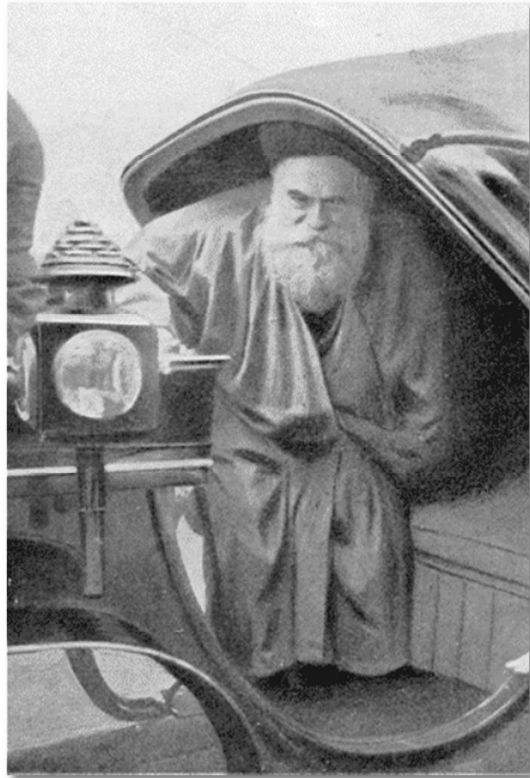
Jamal directed a second meeting on 21st July 1916 in Saoufar and a third invitation on 4th May 1917. Jamal again addressed a letter to the Patriarch, with the intention to induce him gradually outside of Lebanon, to exile him there. The Patriarch, aware of Jamal's plans, presented excuses on account of his health, and proposed meeting at the residence of the Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus in Qornet Shehwan. Finally, with the intervention of the Vatican and the Emperor of Austria, Jamal was forced to release the Patriarch.⁵

In 1918, the British army entered Damascus and the Turkish and German forces fled from Lebanon and Syria. Jamal was dismissed from his office. Due to the political acumen of the Patriarch, Lebanon achieved freedom from Turkish oppression. The Patriarch's concern for his country enabled him to oppose any foreign

⁴ Maronite History Project. *Elias Howayek from Helta (1898-1931)*.
http://www.maronitehistory.org/Elias_HOWAYEK_from_Helta

⁵ Maronite History Project. *Elias Howayek from Helta (1898-1931)*.
http://www.maronitehistory.org/Elias_HOWAYEK_from_Helta.

oppression and he boldly proclaimed, 'Peace of the Nation is only achieved through serving public interest.'



The Peace Congress in Versailles (1919)

In 1918 there was an Arabian led force headed by Prince Faisal. Because of promises made by the British, to his father, the Grand Sharif of Mecca, Prince Faisal believed that with victory over the Ottomans, he would rule over the territory of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

After leading his troops into Damascus, Prince Faisal sent a group of approximately 100 commandoes to Beirut where they raised the Hejaz (Arabian) flag on 5th October 1918. This action alarmed the French and on 8th October 1918, General Allenby, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, entered Beirut and took charge of the situation. He had the flag taken down and forced the commandoes to withdraw.⁶

At the General Syrian Congress in 1919, King Faisal called for an independent Greater Syria which would include Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine and the Arabian Peninsula. He went on to accept the Balfour Declaration on 3rd January

⁶ Seely Beggiani, *Aspects of Maronite History (Part Eleven). The 20th Century in the Middle East.* <http://www.stmaron.org>.

1919, with Dr Chaim Weizmann, President of the World Zionist Organisation, which was called the Faisal-Weizmann Agreement. Patriarch Elias Howayek was concerned by these and other moves against Lebanese independence.

Following from these events, the Administrative Council of Mount Lebanon, which represented all Lebanese sects during the Mutasarrifiat System, met on 1st December 1918, where they decided to send a delegation to the United Nations Peace Conference held in Paris on 18th January 1919.

The delegation of seven members was headed by Daoud Ammoun. He presented the requests of the Administrative Council before the conference on 13th February 1919, requesting Lebanon's Independence. When there was no evident outcome of this appeal, Patriarch Elias Howayek headed the second Lebanese delegation to the Peace Conference. On 15th July 1919, the Patriarch left Lebanon. He was 76 years old at the time.⁷ On his way to the Conference, he wrote, 'I do not

⁷ Antoine Khoury Harb, *The Maronites and The State of Great Lebanon (1920)*.<http://www.10452lccc.com>

comprehend relying on politics but rather on God and this rosary.’

At Paris, the Patriarch and his delegation were hosted by the French government. He met with many political notables, including the French President Raymond Poincare, and the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau. On 27th October 1919, he presented to the Peace Conference a lengthy memorandum which demonstrated the right of Lebanon to independence and the ability to exercise national sovereignty. He also requested the full restoration of Lebanon’s natural and historical borders including the regions usurped by Turkey.⁸

In demanding the formation of Greater Lebanon as a separate Christian entity, Patriarch Elias Howayek used the Phoenician idea to demonstrate the non-Arab ethnicity of the Lebanese. In arguing that modern Lebanese were descendants of ancient Phoenicians, he was addressing Western

⁸ Antoine Khoury Harb, *The Maronites and The State of Great Lebanon (1920)*. <http://www.10452lccc.com>

ears. For Western delegates at the Peace Conference, Phoenicia was a familiar and well-liked note, which the Patriarch understood and exploited. The Maronite Church provided the foundation for a separate non-Arab ancestry.⁹

On 10th November 1919 the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau wrote to the Patriarch confirming France's approval of the demands submitted and concluded, 'with the help and support of France... the Lebanese are assured of preserving their traditions, of developing their political and administrative institutions, of reclaiming completely their country, and of seeing their children educated in their proper schools for public service in Lebanon... France will give the greatest consideration that in determining the boundaries of Lebanon, it is necessary to include the 'Mountain', the territories of the plain, and access to the sea, as indispensable to its

⁹ Asher Kaufman, 'Phoenicians: The formation of an identity in Lebanon in 1920' in *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol 37, No. 1, Jan 2001: 179-180.

prosperity'.¹⁰ Upon his return to Lebanon, Patriarch Elias Howayek was received as a victor.

Prime Minister Clemenceau offered Prince Faisal a compromise wherein he would rule over Syria, but not Lebanon. However, this agreement was voted down by the Syrian General Congress in January of 1920. Subsequently, the Second General Syrian Congress in March 1920, declared an independent Greater Syria which encompassed Lebanon and Palestine, with King Faisal as constitutional monarch.

On 27th May 1920 the French Commander in Beirut, General Gouraud was ordered to take the field against Faisal and on 26th July, King Faisal was removed from Syria.

On 1st September 1920, General Gouraud, surrounded by Patriarch Elias Howayek on his right and Mufti Mustafa Naja on his left, announced the creation of the 'State of Great

¹⁰ Seely Beggiani, *Aspects of Maronite History (Part Eleven). The 20th Century in the Middle East.* <http://www.stmaron.org>.

Lebanon.' Lebanon was restored to its historical and geographical boundaries.

On 24th July 1922, the League of Nations approved the French mandate over Syria and Lebanon. On 23rd May 1926, Lebanon was declared a Republic. Much of this can be attributed to the Patriarch's strong patriotic views and his claim, 'I am the Maronite Patriarch, my Rite is Lebanese, and I am for all Lebanese.'



His final years and death

Renowned for his generosity, Patriarch Elias Howayek stated during his life, 'It makes no difference to me whether I am granted a long or brief life ... I accept all this from God's hands, which is my lot, and I seek nothing more.'

The archbishop Boulos Akl, at the request of Congregational Leader Josephine Howayek, asked the Patriarch to write a will requesting he be buried in the convent of the Holy Family. The Patriarch responded, 'Dead and curious? Let them bury me wherever they want'. Yet, while he was still alive, the Patriarch often expressed how he felt at home at the Mother House in Ebrine.

The Patriarch left this world on Christmas eve, 24th December 1931, in Bkerke, possessing no money, but owing Reverend Boulos Tohme the sum of three pounds. His biography was published after his death, and given the title, 'Man of Divine Providence.' He became known as the man of sincerity, courage, who was truthful in word, faithful to his promises, merciful by nature, and a wise leader possessing high ethical principles.

After his death and burial at Bkerke, the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family requested permission to have his body moved to the Mother House at Ebrine. Josephine Howayek, the Congregational Leader at the time, undertook this initiative.

The Patriarch Antoine Arida, agreed to remove the remains from the cemetery at the Patriarchal See in Bkerke. This took place on 12th May 1936. The Archbishop Abdallah Khoury, the Archbishop Boulos Akl and the Archbishop Elias Chedid, were present on 11th May 1936 when the tomb that held the corpse of Patriarch Elias Howayek, was opened. They found the corpse totally preserved. The sacerdotal clothes on the corpse were not decayed but covered with dust. The face was still recognisable and covered with skin and with the beard and moustache that distinguished him when alive. The hands were still covered with skin and the fingers intact and the abdomen was found to be firm, rigid and not decomposed. The incorrupt body was moved the next day to the Mother House and has since remained there, attracting numerous pilgrims over the years.

Conclusion

The Maronite Patriarch Elias Howayek was active in the social, political and religious spheres, exerting influence on the events of his time. He led the people of Lebanon during one of the most decisive eras.

Patriarch Elias Howayek stood against the oppressive authority of Jamal Pasha and the Turks and later against King Faisal and the united Arab Kingdom. The Patriarch obtained unanimity among the Maronites and other Lebanese communities. At the Peace Congress of Versailles he voiced the demand for an Independent Lebanon, and was a major player in the formation of Greater Lebanon in 1920.

The Patriarch became known for his Patriotism with his two famous statements. The first was, 'Lebanon is one Lebanese community' and his second famous phrase was, 'I am for all Lebanese.' Patriarch Elias Howayek published his apostolic letter in 1931 titled, 'The Love of Homeland,' a reflection of his patriotism.

His pastoral concern, spiritual zeal, and ministerial activities, drew the admiration of the people. His humanitarian sensibilities led to the establishment of the Maronite Religious Congregation, the Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family, who continue to honour his charisma, through the numerous ministries to young and old, Christian and Muslim.

From humble beginnings, Elias Howayek grew in God's Spirit, serving his country and people, determined to execute justice, peace and freedom for all. His tireless efforts led many to believe he was God's true and faithful servant.

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