



The Maronite Voice

A Publication of the Maronite Eparchies in the USA



Volume X

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Pope Francis To Bishops, Priests and All of Us

This past December, I sent a letter to the priests of the Eparchy with a Christmas gift of Pope Francis' Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the New Evangelization. I wrote this: Pope Francis serves the Church as if he were a parish priest, and the whole world were his parish! That is how much he loves the Gospel and the invitation by Jesus to follow Him. He calls people on the phone; goes out among them; overlooks their uncomfortable features; forgives those who have offended him; manages the many administrative duties he has; reaches out to those who do not believe in Christ and in the midst of everything, is relatively happy doing so! In a word, he sounds a bit like you, his brother priests!

However, the Holy Father's example is not just for priests, but for all of us. His Apostolic Exhortation, entitled

The Joy of the Gospel, is an inspiration to everyone. He calls each of us to a more radical and loving following of Christ.

Some of the Cardinals were asked why they chose him to be the next Pope. They answered, because he was so inwardly free in following Jesus and so intent on living the Gospel's challenges.

May we, all of us, the clergy, religious and laity, follow Jesus more radically, more freely and more lovingly in 2014 and always. And may we also do as our Holy Father has asked us to do: to go beyond our comfort zone to serve the poor, the imprisoned, the refugee, the needy, and to reach out to those who deserve our mercy and care. Happy New Year.

+Gregory J. Mansour
Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron

Schedule of Bishop Elias Zaidan

January 4 - 5, 2014

St. Jude Mission, West Covina, Calif.

January 10 - 12, 2014

Msgr. sharbel Maroun's 25th Anniversary to the Priesthood, Minneapolis, Minn.

January 14, 2014

Pastoral Council Meeting, St. Raymond Cathedral, St. Louis, Mo.

January 17 - 19, 2014

St. George Maronite Church, San Antonio, Tex.

January 20 - 24, 2014

Annual Clergy Retreat, Phoenix, Ariz.

January 31 - February 2, 2014

Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church, Houston, Tex.

February 7 - 9, 2014

St. Maron Church, Cleveland, Ohio

February 15 - 16, 2014

Our Lady of the Rosary Maronite Mission, Carmichael, Calif.

February 16, 2014

St. Sharbel Maronite Mission, Stockton, Calif. □

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Maronite Convention 2014

Our Lady of Victory Maronite Church

Pittsburgh, Penn.

July 2 - 6, 2014

For more information contact the NAM office at (914) 964-3070 or visit www.Namnews.org

Warren, Michigan *Prayers for the Christians in the Middle East*

On Thursday, November 21, 2013, hundreds of Christians from different denominations gathered together at the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Detroit, Michigan, to pray for Christians in the Middle East. His Excellency the Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit, presided along with priests and ministers from the Maronite, Chaldean, Melkite, Latin and Armenian Rites, including Chorbishop Alfred Badawi of St. Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church, Warren, Michigan. As the intentions were entrusted to the prayer and protection of the Holy Mother of God, Help of Christians and Queen of Peace, different choirs performed a variety of hymns in their native languages. The Choir of St. Sharbel Maronite Church was privileged to be among those asked to participate and sang a Marian hymn, *Houbouki Ya Maryam*, in Arabic with choir director Christiane Bousho.

Children's Christmas Recital

The St. Sharbel Children's Choir held a Christmas Recital on Sunday, December 15, 2013. The story of Saint Nicholas was read and Christmas carols were chanted in English, French and Arabic. Christiane Bousho led the Choir and Sandy Harb played the organ. Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, enjoyed the festivities and thanked the choir and those in attendance. □

No one, whether shepherd or wise man, can approach God here below except by kneeling before the manger at Bethlehem and adoring him hidden in the weakness of a new-born child." (Catholic Catechism, 563)

Houston, Texas Bishop's Pastoral Visit

by Alberto G. Tohmé

The community of Our Lady of the Cedars in Houston, Texas, expressed much joy, excitement, and pride in welcoming His Excellency Bishop Elias Zaidan to Houston at the end of November. In usual fashion, a banquet committee organized a banquet event at the Omni Hotel to honor Bishop Zaidan on November 23, 2013. In attendance were His Excellency Bishop Paul Marwan Tabet from the Maronite Eparchy in Montreal, Canada; Fr. Elias Sleiman, Rector at Our Lady of Mt. Lebanon - St. Peter Cathedral in Los Angeles, Calif., and new Superior of the Maronite Lebanese Missionaries in the United States; local Orthodox clergy; Roman Catholic Auxiliary Bishop George Sheltz; Auxiliary Bishop Emeritus Vincent Rizzotto; other local Roman Catholic clergy; Bishop Zaidan's brother and sister from Lebanon, Salah and Bernadette; and other local dignitaries. Fathers Milad Yaghi, Pastor, and Pierre El Khoury hosted this event. The ballroom was filled to capacity with parishioners and friends of the community.

The banquet program offered a variety of events, including a poem recital, a presentation of pastoral gifts, a touching speech by Fr. Milad and remarks by Mr. Nijad I. Fares, video presentations, and a keynote speech by Bishop Zaidan.

Mr. Joseph Rouhana recited a poem in Arabic in which he honored Bishop Zaidan for his contributions as original founder of our church community, his multiple accomplishments as a priest in the Maronite Church in the United States in the past twenty-three years, and his recent ascent into the role as Bishop. Mr. Rouhana's poem touched all attendees deeply.

Fr. Milad Yaghi delivered a passionate speech in which he discussed his fond memories of Bishop Zaidan who was his "big brother," mentor, and friend since the time they both joined the seminary in their early adolescence. In a heartfelt pitch, he thanked Bishop Zaidan for his relentless efforts to



Dr. Nicolas Nammour, Parish Council President, presents Bishop Zaidan with hand embroidered vestments.

establish our church parish in the early 1990s and for his continued support to the community since that time. In an equally touching speech, Mr. Fares thanked Bishop Zaidan for his remarkable service to the Maronite Church in the United States over the years and specifically for his support of the church community in Houston.

Bishop Zaidan was honored with several gifts, including a hand embroidered mitre from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Dow, a ring from Mr. and Mrs. Karl Morrow, a cross from Mr. Mark El Fadi on behalf of the family of the late Antonios El Fadi, and hand embroidered vestments from the Parish Community represented by Dr. Nicolas Nammour, Parish Council President. Bishop Zaidan accepted all gifts with great humility and gratitude and displayed them to the audience proudly.

The first video presentation showed clips from Bishop Zaidan's ordination in Lebanon in late September and installation in St. Louis in late October. The second presentation included a well-organized and nostalgic documentary of Bishop Zaidan's life, priesthood, and service in the United States, with emphasis on his support

and involvement in the parish community in Houston throughout the years.

Bishop Zaidan delivered his speech with lots of humility and expressed his deep gratitude to the entire Houston community for its sustained efforts in building this parish over the years. He stressed that it was the community, not he, who built this parish. He pledged his continued strong support for the community in the future and offered an open door policy as the new spiritual leader. He emphasized his motto of "Thy Will Be Done" as his main spiritual platform for service to his eparchy.

The following morning, Bishop Zaidan celebrated the Liturgy of Annunciation to the Virgin Mary with all the visiting Maronite clergy and clergy from the Galveston-Houston Roman Catholic Archdiocese, including His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, and Bishops Sheltz and Rizzotto. In his homily, Bishop Zaidan emphasized the importance of accepting and honoring God's will in one's life as our Blessed Mother did,

(Continues on page 20)

Washington, D.C. Christmas Pageant



Cast members of the Christmas Pageant at Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C.

by William J Prather, Ed.D.

This was one Sunday when parents did not have to worry about their children's sheepish grins. The little ones flocked together as angels and lambs accompanying the fifth and sixth graders to Bethlehem to witness the birth of Our Lord and Savior. The sixth through twelfth graders formed a choir to give the Christmas pageant a musical setting.

Chorbishop Dominic Ashkar, Pastor of Our Lady of Lebanon Church in Washington, D.C., opened the pageant with a prayer. The choir sang "I Have Made an Altar" in English and Arabic. The narrator read a poetic text. From the Annunciation of the Birth of Jesus to the Blessed Virgin Mary to the adoration of the Magi, the actors presented the events of the incarnation, and the choir sang appropriate carols for each event. The actors and choir then sang together "We Wish You a Merry Christmas."

This re-enactment of the Nativity served as a visible link between the liturgical worship on the Sunday of the Genealogy of Jesus and the social celebration in a potluck luncheon for the Our Lady of Lebanon Maronite Parish family. □

Warren, Michigan Annual Christmas Party

Saint Sharbel parishioners in Warren, Mich., braved the first winter storm of the season to celebrate the birth of Jesus at the Children's Annual Christmas Party. One would expect a low turnout in such inclement weather, but over 350 people could not be stopped by the snow on December 15, 2013! St. Sharbel families enjoyed food, carols, and Christmas stories together. And no Christmas party is complete without a visit from Santa! As children waited in excitement to tell Santa what toys they wanted, he turned their focus to the true gift that our Heavenly Father



Santa Claus cuts a cake while children from St. Sharbel Church in Warren, Mich., watch.

sent down to us on Christmas. Santa led the children in a celebration of the birth of our Savior Jesus. Just as Mary and Joseph faced a challenging journey to celebrate the birth of their son, Jesus, parishioners braved the snow storm for the same reason at the Children's Christmas Party.

Ladies Altar Society's Luncheon



The Ladies Altar Society of St. Sharbel Maronite Church in Warren, Michigan, sponsored its second Annual Senior Christmas Luncheon on December 4, 2013. This special event began with a liturgy celebrated by Chorbishop Alfred Badawi, Pastor, in honor of the seniors of the St. Sharbel Maronite community prior to the luncheon. A fun-filled afternoon was attended by 130 seniors who enjoyed a meal catered by the *LaSaj* Lebanese Bistro of Sterling Heights, Michigan.

The seniors enjoyed Christmas music and songs performed by very special guests, Alex Safi, Mary Anderson and Chorbishop Alfred, as well as door prizes, raffles, card playing and a time for relaxing and fellowship with one another! A great time was had by all and we look forward to next year's Senior event. □



Houston, Texas *Helping Hand to Female Veterans*



Fr. Pierre El Khoury (left), Fr. Milad Yaghi, Eliana Abou Jaoude, Shara Wier (with Catholic Charities), and Olivia Bush (Lotus Project Director).

The Helping Hands Ministry at Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Church in Houston, Tex., would like to thank everyone who participated in Lotus Project for Women Veterans. The Lotus Project for Women Veterans is a project of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. This project is exclusively dedicated to helping to improve the lives of homeless and disabled female veterans and their families, by providing basic needs and housing.

Through the support of the Parish, The Helping Hands Ministry was able to provide basic necessities such as clothing, food, toiletries to the thirty-one families currently in the Lotus Project for Women Veterans. The members of the parish also provide toys for the children of the female veterans served in this project. □

Tulsa, Oklahoma *Christmas Luncheon*

St. Thérèse Parish, Tulsa, Oklahoma, celebrated its 17th Annual Christmas Luncheon fundraiser on December 15, 2013. New this year was caroling by the Parish's own St. Therese Ad Hoc Chorale, with occasional audience participation, especially by children, with a rendition of "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer." The jolly old elf himself was present to give each child a gift.

The continued growth of the event is indicated by the fact that 532 lunches were served, according to Father Elias Abi Sarkis, Pastor. This is the largest number within memory. The festivities following the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and lasted beyond its scheduled ending of 2:30 p.m. The pleasant weather may have encouraged some to attend, for not everyone came with a pre-purchased ticket. Guest clergy also attended the luncheon at the invitation of the Parish.

Father Elias said that it takes the cooperation and work of many parishioners to host the luncheon and the sale of bakery items. In a departure from the usual practice of showing a



photo of happy participants, we show a picture of some happy workers, unseen usually in the kitchen. Recognizable are (l to r) Aida Feghali, Aida Hatter, Betty Boustani, and Joumana Neifi. □

Somerset, New Jersey *Pastoral Visit*



by Elias Machalany

The parishioners of Saint Sharbel Maronite Catholic Church in Somerset, N.J., were honored to host His Excellency Bishop Gregory Mansour for a parish visit on December 7- 8, 2013. Over the two-day visit, Bishop Gregory spent much of his time with the youth of the Parish, whom he calls the lifeblood of the church. On Saturday, Bishop Gregory met with thirty members from the Maronite Youth Organization. The group listened intently as their spiritual leader spoke passionately to them about turning the other cheek. The central message of the talk with the youth was to remind them of the essence of Christianity, which is love and forgiveness. The vigil liturgy was attended by youth from all ages, as the choir of students from the Maronite Formation program sang traditional Christmas hymns in English. After the Liturgy on Sunday, Bishop Gregory praised Fr. Tony Akoury, Pastor, for all his efforts in the parish, especially with the young people, saying that other parishes would be envious of the vibrant youth organizations and presence at St. Sharbel in Somerset. As always, we look forward to Bishop Gregory's next visit. □

Denver Colorado Christmas Benefit



St. Elias' and St. Rafka's Choirs perform Middle Eastern and Western Christmas Carols.

by Eliza Somers

A slice of Peace on Earth came to rest upon Denver, Colorado, on Friday, December 13, 2013, via St. Rafka Maronite Catholic Church's Christmas Benefit that emphasized a multicultural holiday celebration. The evening, dubbed *Mele Kalikimaka: From the Christmas Star of the East to the Sparkling Stars of the Islands Both Illuminating the Path to Peace on Earth*, featured entertainment from Polynesian FiaFia, and the children's choirs from St. Rafka (Lakewood, Colo.) and St. Elias Antiochian Orthodox Church (Arvada, Colo.)

The benefit for St. Rafka's children's education program brought together Catholics and Christians from the Maronite and Latin rites, Orthodox Antiochians, Muslims and Jews for an evening of fellowship that was hosted by St. Rafka's Pastor, Fr. Andre Y-Sebastian Mahanna. From east to west the countries represented were Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Israel, Egypt, Armenia, Mexico, the Samoan Islands and the United States, turning the event into a feast dedicated to the true meaning of Christmas - Peace and Love - shining on the day when a savior was born, the King of Peace.

Also participating in the event was Fr. George Shawareb of St. Elias, Fr. Antonio Flores Cota, Pastor of Holy Family in Fort Collins and Provincial of the Theatine Order in U.S., Theatine seminarian Cesar Arras, Jordanian priest Khaled Sawaged, and Deacon Kelvin Brath of All Souls Church, which was one of the first churches to host St. Rafka when it still was a mission without a home.

The Polynesian FiaFia dance group warmed the crowd at the Knights of Columbus center in Denver with traditional Island music and dancing that featured numerous costume changes and showed off the agility of warriors and the gentle ways of the Island people.

The children's choir performed traditional Middle Eastern and Western Christmas carols. The finale featured a live nativity scene with songs by Fr. Andre, Sonia Nasr, director of St. Elias' choir, Marsha Moussallem (flute), and the choirs.

"The multicultural event proved that people from all

different religions and nationalities can truly live in peace and harmony," Fr. Andre Mahanna said after the event concluded with Middle Eastern music and dancing. □

Milwaukee, Wisconsin Maronite Catholic Mission of Wisconsin



A group picture of the participants at the first Maronite Liturgy in Milwaukee. Msgr. sharbel Maroun is in the center.

The Maronite community in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, held its first Maronite Liturgy in the Milwaukee area on Sunday, December 15, 2013. Msgr. sharbel Maroun of St. Maron Church in Minneapolis, Minn., celebrated the first Liturgy and gave a beautiful homily on this occasion.

On Wednesday, December 25, 2013, Fr. Tony Massad of St. Rafka Mission in Livonia, Mich., celebrated an evening Christmas Liturgy for the community. □

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4611 Sadler Road
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(804) 762 - 4301 □

Newtown Square, Pennsylvania Christmas Pageant



Center front: Lillian Shahade, First row: Lauren Ward, Andrew Obeid, Lilly Obeid, Jessica Farhat, Charbel Sleiman, Anthony Sleiman, and Allesandro Sleiman. Second row: Andrew Polus, Aoun Earafej, Tarek Alkassir (hidden from view), Alvin Polus, Alex Azzi, Ilyas Muqbel, and Jennifer Farhat. Last row: Kameel Alkassir, Deacon Steve Kazanjian, Fr. Richard Cannuli, OSA, Tony Azzi and Reneen Muqbel. Altar Server: Issa Muqbel.

by Lillian Shahade

Yes, yet another Christmas Pageant was performed on this Dec. 22, 2013, by the children of St. Sharbel Church in Newtown Square, Penn. Very fittingly it was played out on the Sunday of the Genealogy of Jesus. The children found room for Jesus in their hearts as they played and sang the words of the Nativity written so many years before and played by children and grown men and women all over the world. The children sang all the hymns by themselves and they sang beautifully as they lifted their voices in melody and gave praises for the coming of the Christ Child. A party was held in the hall after the Liturgy for the benefit of the kids. No, Santa wasn't there, but the children were happy just the same partaking of all the goodies prepared by the parishioners and receiving accolades for a job well done.

Bishop's Pastoral Visit

The parishioners of St. Sharbel Church in Newtown Square, Penn., thank Bishop Gregory for celebrating the Divine Liturgy, on Saturday, November 23, 2013, for the intention



Bishop Gregory Mansour assisted by (from left to right): Deacon Steve Kazanjian, Fr. Kamil Al-Chouefati, Our Lady Star of the East, Pleasantville, N.J., Fr. Kail Ellis, OSA, Villanova University, and Fr. Richard Cannuli, OSA, Villanova University.

and healing of their beloved Pastor, Fr. Paul Mouawad. The Church that evening was filled with many of the faithful who wish nothing but the best for Fr. Paul. Many of the Knights of Columbus Mater Dei Council #4129 and the Fr. Emil Kapaun Assembly showed their love for their Faithful Friar by attending the Liturgy for his healing. Parishioners from Philadelphia and New Jersey came to support Fr. Paul, his family, and his parishioners. Bishop Gregory gave a homily full of hope and inspiration for Fr. Paul as well as his parishioners. He said, "Work together as Father taught you and make him proud of each and every one of you."

After the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, everyone met in the hall for coffee and cake and more words of hope from Bishop Gregory, assuring them to carry on in Fr. Paul's absence and pray for his recovery. With Bishop Gregory's blessing, Father Richard Canulli, OSA, will continue to celebrate the Divine Liturgy until Fr. Paul is able to return.

The parishioners of St. Sharbel also extend a warm and heartfelt "Thank You" to Fr. Richard and Deacon Steve for all they do. Both are well-loved and received by everyone. □



Deadline for next month's issue of *The Maronite Voice* is January 25, 2014.

The Maronite Voice is the official newsletter of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon and of the Eparchy of

Saint Maron of Brooklyn.

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Plans Are in Place for Pittsburgh NAM Convention in 2014



Fr. Rodolph Wakim with Mr. and Mrs. Marwan Sadaka.

by Marie Sadaka

Our Lady of Victory Parish in Pittsburgh, Penn., will host the NAM convention July, 2 -6, 2014, and the convention committee is busy planning a slate of exciting, informative and inspirational events.

In preparation for the convention, the NAM Board of Directors held its fall meeting at the Wyndham Grand Hotel in Pittsburgh.

On Thursday night a general meeting with the NAM Executive Director included members of the various Convention committees and featured a thorough discussion of their roles and responsibilities. Friday night everyone was invited for dinner at Our Lady of Victory Church Hall, prepared by Our Lady of Victory's parishioners. Saturday night NAM Board members, along with some parishioners, enjoyed dining at the Le Mont Restaurant, which included a spectacular view of downtown Pittsburgh from famous Mt. Washington.

On Sunday, Marie and Marwan Sadaka, Convention Co-chairs, carried the NAM banner into the Church in the presence of NAM Board members. Chorbishop Richard Saad, NAM Spiritual Director, and Fr. Rodolph Wakim, Pastor, celebrated the Divine Liturgy. At the end of the Liturgy, Dr. Elie Ayoub, the NAM President, presented the Massabki Brothers plaque to Fr. Rodolph Wakim, thanking him for hosting the Board meeting.

Pittsburgh, the city famous for its three rivers, will be hosting a regatta on the weekend of our convention. This spectacular event fills the rivers with boaters from all over the area, and is part of a city-wide festival featuring novelty foods, fireworks and outdoor shows. On top of this major event, the city's world-class restaurants, culture, entertainment and sports will surprise you, and add a true "vacation" feel to your convention experience. You will want to register early, as the hotel will fill quickly as people flock

to Pittsburgh's fabulous weekend events.

For more information about the NAM Convention 2014, please visit www.namnews.org or call (914) 964-3070 or by email at nam@namnews.org. For more information from the hosting parish, call (412) 278-0841 or check Pittsburgh convention website at www.nam2014pittsburgh.org. □

Schedule of Bishop Gregory Mansour

January 5, 2014

Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

January 6, 2014

Feast of Epiphany, St. Anthony Maronite Church, Danbury, Conn.

January 9, 2014

New York Bishops Meetings, New York, N.Y.

January 11 - 12, 2014

Parish Visit, St. Maron Mission, Jacksonville, Fla.

January 13 - 17, 2014

Annual Clergy Retreat, North Palm Beach, Fla.

January 19, 2014

Parish Visit, Tequesta (Palm Beach), Fla.

January 21 - 22, 2014

March For Life, Washington, D.C.

January 26, 2014

Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

February 1 - 2, 2014

Pastoral Visit, Our Lady of Lebanon Church, Waterbury, Conn.

February 8 - 9, 2014

Feast of St. Maron, Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

February 16, 2014

Our Lady of Lebanon Cathedral, Brooklyn, N.Y.

February 17 - 21, 2014

El Salvador Visit with Catholic Relief Services □

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Appeals for More Aid

Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal of Jerusalem appealed for an increase in aid for Syrian refugees. The plea comes as weather conditions worsen in the winter months. According to Fides News Agency, Patriarch Twal called "for the generosity of all to support the refugee victims of a conflict which has exceeded 1,000 days and of material hardships affecting their lives."

The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem explained that after a welcome rainfall following a drought in November, the weather has become much colder, with a snow storm hitting the Middle East. Almost two-million Syrian refugees are living currently in Jordan and Lebanon, areas that were struck by the storms. □

(Zenit.org, December 17, 2013)

Glen Allen, Virginia *Charitable Drive And Pastoral Visit*

by Brandon Shulleeta

St. Anthony Maronite Catholic Church in Glen Allen, Virginia, ended 2013 with fundraisers that helped children in both Lebanon and the Richmond area; numerous social and worship activities, and a pastoral visit from Bishop Gregory Mansour.

\$18,500 was raised in the church's annual golf tournament in September. The proceeds from the Tournament were sent through the Chancery Office in Brooklyn, N.Y., to His Beatitude Patriarch Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai to benefit orphaned children in Lebanon. \$19,000 more was raised during the annual Christmas Benefit Dinner on December 8, 2013, for the same cause.

On November 1, 2013, the Parish welcomed Deacon Pierre Al-Feghaly, of the Archeparchy of Beirut, Lebanon, for his pastoral internship before ordination.

On December 21 - 22, 2013, Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, made a pastoral visit to St. Anthony. At a luncheon with the Pastoral and Finance Councils on Saturday, he discussed Pope Francis' pastoral survey about the 'Pastoral Challenges to the family in the Context of Evangelization.' In the evening he heard confessions and presided over the Christmas Novena. Following the Christmas Novena, a parish Christmas reception was held, welcoming Bishop Mansour.

On Sunday, the youth of the Parish began the morning with a depiction of the nativity and Christmas carols followed by a children's liturgy, planned and sung by the students from the Maronite Formation Program. Following the Christmas carols and nativity, Bishop Gregory Mansour celebrated the Divine Liturgy. In his homily, he explained the meaning of the Genealogy Gospel, thanked the Parish for welcoming Deacon Pierre, and marveled that the youth were in the church on a Sunday morning before 8:00 a.m. After the liturgy, a breakfast was held with Santa. The children brought imperishable food items to benefit the Central Virginia Food Bank. Following the breakfast Bishop



© Dylan Patterson

Danielle El-Jor (Mary) and Sam Shibley (Joseph) and some of St. Anthony's youth present a depiction of the nativity on Sunday, December 22, 2013.

Mansour celebrated the 11:00 o'clock Liturgy and installed Sam Haboush into the Order of Saint Sharbel.

Sunday was also the deadline for Saint Anthony's Christmas Charitable Christmas Tree Project. Beginning the Sunday after Thanksgiving, 160 stars with a variety of needs were placed on a tree in the church vestibule. The parishioners purchased gifts, wrapped them and made sure they were returned in time for Christmas. Some of the gifts went to migrant people with limited financial means, and the majority went to inner-city families provided by Good Samaritan Ministries. Theresa Shibley and her volunteers sorted and delivered about 200 gifts before Christmas.

In letters addressed to the parishioners of St. Anthony and its Pastor, Monsignor George Sebaali, Bishop Mansour expressed appreciation for the hospitality during his visit. "You really made my Christmas so much happier," he wrote. In another letter, he thanked parishioners for the "noble" contributions to orphaned children in Lebanon.

The Parish had numerous other social events in the final months of the year, such as an annual parish picnic in September and a Halloween party in October (with food prepared by the

Ladies Auxiliary). There were also a variety of educational and worship opportunities for parishioners.

In recognition of the Month of the Holy Rosary in October, for example, parishioners were invited to pray the rosary at the church on weekday evenings throughout the month. And while youth received their religious education on Sundays, adult parishioners were invited to numerous study sessions on weekday evenings to study and reflect on a video program led by Rev. Robert E. Barron, a doctor of sacred theology, the Eucharist: "Sacred Meal, Sacrifice and Real Presence." □



The Cedar of Lebanon

A House Divided Cannot Stand Ethical Pluralism and the Problem of Western Society

by Rev. David A. Fisher

Moral arguments go on and on today and seem to have no end. There seems to be no rationally grounded way to arrive at moral agreement today (Alasdair MacIntyre). If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand (Mk 3:24).

Introduction

Abraham Lincoln paraphrased these words from the Gospel of Mark to begin his acceptance speech after being nominated by the Republican Party to run for President of the United States. Against the advice of his collaborators who felt these words, while true, would be politically inflammatory, Lincoln insisted that this sentence would illustrate to his listeners the importance of the slavery problem. These few but powerful words of Jesus, recorded by Mark, also illustrate, the contemporary problem of ethics.

Ethics as a distinct discipline in itself begins with Aristotle, who coined the word to refer to the nature of human activity. Aristotle created the classifications of vegetable, animal, and rational animal (human beings). What makes rational animals distinct from other animals is that they are ethical, that is to say, they can use reason to form habits of moderation that leads the person to fulfill their natural "ends." For Aristotle, being ethical, contemplating rationally on our actions, was as close as we could become in imitating his idea of God, who was pure reason eternally reflecting on itself or perfection.

Classically the moral life was understood to be transformational. We are born fallen, untutored, and uncivilized - sweet and cuddly, yes (when we're not screaming or throwing up), but with potential for both great good and horrible evil. What the classical moral tradition believed justified moral rules and virtues was that they were the disciplines needed to transform us from our untutored, fallen self to the perfected self we were meant and created to be.¹

With the creation of Christendom, which was the cultural synthesis of Greco-Roman rationalism and Judeo-Christian monotheism; the glue which held that culture together was a shared understanding of ethics. This allowed for a common platform to judge right from wrong, valuable or not valuable, for the living of a morally acceptable life.

Consequentialism and Modern Ethics

It is not my intention in this article to trace the connection between modern secular ethics and the Protestant Reformation but for an indepth understanding of the connection please consult *The Unintended Reformation: How*

a Religious Revolution Secularized Society, by Brad S. Gregory.

The dissolution of traditional western ethics began with the Scottish philosopher David Hume, a friend of Benjamin Franklin, and part of the intellectual movement known as British Empiricism. Hume's atheism and philosophical skepticism lead him to see ethics as art rather than faith and reason. By art he meant that there were no metaphysical foundations for ethics or ethical principles. To speak of natural human ends in a world that lacked any universal truths meant for Hume that the origin of ethics was the application of common sense to preserve justice and order. The realm of ethics was the immediate consequence, a smug relativism whose main question was "Why be moral?" In the world of secular ethics begun by Hume, one might say Moses comes down from the mountain empty handed.

Two most popular modern ethical theories are Utilitarianism and Kantianism. While coming from two different directions they arrive at the same relativistic conclusion. Utilitarians start from the premise that what is ethical is what I desire or feel is good for me to the limit of not harming another. Kantians, on the other hand, start from the assumption that every person is an autonomous rational being and therefore has the ability to create his own ethical code to dutifully follow. So while as Kant suggested one must act "as if" he is a universal lawgiver, the laws I make are only relative to me.

Modern ethicists tend to focus their attention solely on discrete, individual acts as conceived of and chosen by a completely rational, self-possessed, autonomous being. Modern moral philosophy, because it presupposes that human beings are fundamentally individual and autonomous beings, has the problem of justifying to these self-regarding, self-interested individuals why they should consider becoming "other-regarding."²

Added to the relativism of modern ethics is an extreme understanding of human freedom. Where St. Augustine understood true freedom as one's Free Will aligned with the Will of God, modern secular ethicists see freedom as freedom from any constraint. To paraphrase 20th century French Existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre, we do not realize we are human until we realize we are free. When we realize we are free we also realize we are in hell because for the sake of symbiosis with others we cannot do whatever we want without penalty.

¹Smith, Randall, *Moral Theology and Human Flourishing*, 2013. p.2

² Smith, p.1.

With the words of Sartre we see that in modern secular society, ethics and licentiousness have become one. The autonomous independent individual is a spoiled brat who cries because he does not get everything he wants.

Catholic Ethics

Traditional Catholic ethics is referred to in the academic arena as Virtue Ethics, Aristotelian Ethics, or The Natural Law Theory. Its roots are, of course, the Biblical tradition first, followed by Socrates, Plato, Stoicism and especially Aristotle. The Fathers of the Church added to the tradition and St. Thomas Aquinas possibly gave it its greatest exposition as a complete system. Unfortunately, after Aquinas the tradition did not continue to grow as much as fall into a Scholastic tradition of commentaries on St. Thomas Aquinas's thought. This will lend fuel to the fire of not only the Protestant Reformers but even devout Catholics within the Enlightenment Era, such as Descartes and Pascal.

The revitalization of Virtue Ethics in the 20th century is in great part due to the Catholic convert and British philosopher Gertrude Elizabeth Anscombe. In 1958 she wrote a paper entitled, "Modern Moral Philosophy," in which she greatly criticized the ethics of Utilitarianism and Kant for positing universal principles whose grounding is not in a Universal Lawgiver, i.e. God, but in the autonomous individual man or woman. She called for a return to seeing morality from the perspective of virtue and human flourishing. In her 1972 article "Contraception and Chastity" she writes:

“What people are for is, we believe, like guided missiles, to home in on God, God who is the one truth it is infinitely worth knowing, the possession of which you could never get tired of, like the water which if you have you can never thirst again, because your thirst is slaked forever and always. It's this potentiality, this incredible possibility, of the knowledge of God of such a kind as even to be sharing in his nature, which Christianity holds out to people; and because of this potentiality every life, right up to the last, must be treated as precious. Its potentialities in all things the world cares about may be slight; but there is always the possibility of what it's for. We can't ever know that the time of possibility of gaining eternal life is over, however old, wretched, "useless" someone has become.”³

The concepts of virtue and human flourishing release Catholic ethics from the narrow perspective of the individual human lawgiver and from seeing ethics and morality as being all about "me." Virtue means that human actions must be judged not by their consequences but across the total behavior, from intention and motivation to the act itself and what it produces. Anscombe expressed virtue in this way in her writing on contraception and chastity:

“There is no such thing as a casual, non-significant

³Anscombe, G.E., *Contraception and Chastity*, 1972, page 4.

sexual act; everyone knows this. Contrast sex with eating - you're strolling along a lane, you see a mushroom on a bank as you pass by, you know about mushrooms, you pick it and you eat it quite casually - sex is never like that. That's why virtue in connection with eating is basically a matter only of the pattern of one's eating habits. But virtue in sex - chastity - is not only a matter of such a pattern, that is of its role in a pair of lives. A single sexual action can be bad even without regard to its context, its further intentions and its motives.”⁴

Conclusion

Randall Smith, the Scanlan Foundation Chair of Theology at the University of St. Thomas, alerts us to the significance our *divided moral house* has for future generations. He writes:

"One of our biggest problems, is that even when young people know the moral rules, because they have no conception whatsoever of the Church's notion of freedom and human flourishing, they have no notion of the reason for the rules, and thus the rules remain alien: idealistic, unrealistic, and thus for the most part, irrelevant.”⁵

Ethics is possibly the most significant battleground the Church finds itself on today. We need thorough education on all levels, formal and informal, to teach and explain the Church's understanding of the ethical life and how the concept of human flourishing means a life lived for others is the natural end of being a human being created in the image and likeness of God. □

About the Author

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Food For Thought

An authentic faith - which is never comfortable or completely personal - always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, N.183)

The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, No 47)

⁴ Anscombe, page 10.

⁵ Smith, page 3.

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And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Mt. 16: 18).

Do We Need Priests?



by Deacon John Jarvis

No one would argue that the Church has, and will always face significant challenges. The Church sometimes must live in opposition to much of what the world values. The question is not, and has never been, whether the Church is under attack, but rather, do we believe the words of Christ, that despite everything that is occurring, and will continue to occur, the Church will survive, will prevail. In fact, history is littered with the corpses of those who thought victory over the Church was inevitable: Joseph Stalin in Russia, Adolf Hitler in Germany, or Victoriano Huerta in Mexico, to name a few in the last century alone. Yet the fight continues, as one can see, in the continuing persecution of Christians in Africa and the Middle East. Despite the history of opposition by much of the world, the Church still grows with more than a billion believers.

Yet every day, somewhere, some place, the media speaks of the Church in terms of decline. One of the most prevalent themes is there are fewer priests and the existing priests are getting older. What is the Church to do as there is no hope? It is a drumbeat that continues until it permeates the fabric of the Church. Both religious and laity begin to believe the lie that they are part of a dying institution. It is easy to understand this

feeling as the evidence would seem to suggest this reality - fewer replacement priests for those retiring and dying and

the closing of churches and seminaries. Yet, is that truly the reality or is the Church simply in transition? There are signs across the world that the Church is growing with new Catholics, new religious orders, and new priests, nuns and religious.

Take for example the latest report on the priesthood by Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). As an article by Cathy Lynn Grossman in Religious News Service stated: "After decades of glum trends - fewer priests, fewer parishes - the Catholic Church in the United States has a new statistic to cheer: More men are now enrolled in graduate level seminaries, the main pipeline to the priesthood, than in nearly two decades. This year's tally of 3,694 graduate theology students represents a sixteen percent increase since 1995 and a ten percent jump since 2005 ..."

Is this increase enough? No, but it is a good start. Ordinations are up slightly and fewer parishes are closing. Should we be encouraged and hopeful? Yes. Didn't Christ give us every assurance that His Church will prevail? Shouldn't Christ's word be enough? Shouldn't we tune out the voices of gloom? This does not mean we should ignore the problems confronting us, and ignore those voices who continually speak of failure. Isn't that what Pope Francis is challenging us to do every day? He asks us to confront the world, to confront the Church with optimism, love, and mercy!

If you don't think it works, one can look again to the CARA study and the conclusion cited by Grossman in her article that "Seminary directors cite more encouragement from bishops and parishes, the draw of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and the social-justice minded Pope Francis, and a growing

(Continues on page 20)

A Vocation Reflection



Sister Therese Maria (left), Mother Marla Marie and Natalie Salameh.

by Natalie Salameh

I would like to share about my second visit to the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light, from November 11 to December 11, 2013. I will happily begin my faith journey with the Maronite Servants in early 2014. I approached this trip secure in the knowledge that I would be serving God and His people in a wonderful way soon.

I am drawn to the vocation and charism of the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light, because I want to be God's instrument in nurturing and fostering the spiritual growth of our Maronite people. As the Bethlehem Star was radiant and led the Magi and Shepherds to the newborn King, I too wish to become another Bethlehem Star that radiates God's light and leads others to Him. This is precisely what a Maronite Servant is called to do. As a Maronite Servant, I will be at the service of God's people and His Church as a spiritual mother who nourishes and fosters the growth of her children.

During my recent visit, I immersed myself in the life that God is calling me to, and that I wholeheartedly and joyously embrace. What can I say, except what a wonderful four weeks! I was very sad to leave my new home (the convent) and my new family - even if only for a little while, but I was able to witness the diversity of spiritual and religious events,

programs and activities engaged in by the Maronite Servants.

In my first week, the Maronite Servants hosted a combined MYO gathering for the teens of the New Bedford, Brockton and Boston parishes. The Mother of the Light Convent was absolutely buzzing with the fresh faces of these youth. The Sisters helped them prepare for the Glorious Birth of Our Divine Lord.

In my second week, the attention turned to the young children of the New Bedford parish for their monthly Maronite Faith Formation (MFF). The focus of November's MFF was the centrality of Divine Liturgy (or Qorbono) in our Maronite faith, and Jesus' complete self-offering. I loved the fact that the children embraced the Syriac roots of our faith.

I might also mention that in my second week I had my first taste of delicious roasted turkey cooked to perfection by Mother Marla Marie. It was such a delight to celebrate my first Thanksgiving with the Sisters. The third week was filled with mission events. The Maronite Servants hosted and facilitated Bible sharing for couples at the home of a parishioner.

A couple of days later, Mother Marla Marie, Sr. Therese Maria and I, began a six-day silent retreat. I must say I approached this retreat with some fear and nervousness. I hadn't been on retreat for years, and the last retreat I did participate in was not a silent one. But I found it very peaceful, prayerful and full of many graces and blessings. God is so good, but we need to listen to Him in the quiet of our hearts. As soon as I had regained my vocal powers, I called my family back home in Sydney, and my father could not believe that I had remained silent for six days.

On the Sunday following our retreat, December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, I witnessed Sr. Therese Maria renew her vows during the Divine Liturgy at Our Lady of Purgatory Parish, New Bedford. It was a great honour for me to see this and the pure joy on Sr. Therese Maria's face as she renewed her "yes" to Christ. I could see and feel the elation and jubilation in the Sisters, and it spoke to me in volumes.

In the evening, the Sisters hosted the monthly *Ramsho* and Supper gathering at the Mother of the Light Convent. I met some lovely parishioners from Our Lady of the Cedars Maronite Parish in Boston and from the local Catholic Church, St Julie Billiart. These parishioners joined us for our Maronite evening prayer and a great supper with lots of fellowship and sharing.

Mother Marla Marie has helped me in every way possible to discern my vocation. She has supported and encouraged me throughout my discernment with regular spiritual direction and has been very accommodating throughout both my visits to the U.S. Indeed, Mother Marla Marie's unstinting support, guidance and encouragement helped me a great deal in making the commitment and saying "yes" to Jesus.

Well, four weeks went quickly, but I am grateful to Mother Marla Marie and Sr. Therese Maria for their great hospitality. I was at home, I felt at home, and I can't wait to come back home in the New Year and embark on the greatest adventure of my life with Our Lord and Our Lady by my side. I ask you to remember me in prayer. ☐

Natalie Salameh is from Sydney, Australia. She will be joining the Maronite Servants of Christ the Light convent.



Let Us Never Lose the Courage of Prayer Pope's Christmas Message to the City and to the World

Pope Francis delivered his *Urbi et Orbi* address on Christmas Day to an estimated 150,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square, leading them in prayer for those suffering in conflicts and disasters around the world.

Beginning the traditional address, the Holy Father took up "the song of the angels" in praising God for the birth of Jesus.

"I ask everyone to share in this song: it is a song for every man or woman who keeps watch through the night, who hopes for a better world, who cares for others while humbly seeking to do his or her duty," he said.

Referring to [the] song of praise given by the angels to the shepherds of Bethlehem, the Pope expressed his hope that in giving glory to God, all may come to know the true face of God that brings peace.

The Holy Father stressed that true peace cannot be achieved by a balance of opposing forces or facade that conceals divisions, but rather a daily commitment.

"Looking at the Child in the manger, Child of peace, our thoughts turn to those children who are the most vulnerable victims of wars, but we think, too, of the elderly, to battered women, to the sick... Wars shatter and hurt so many lives!," he exclaimed.

"Too many lives have been shattered in recent times by the conflict in Syria, fueling hatred and vengeance. Let us continue to ask the Lord to spare the beloved Syrian people further suffering, and to enable the parties in conflict to put an end to all violence and guarantee access to humanitarian aid. We have seen how powerful prayer is! And I am happy today, too, that the followers of different religious confessions are joining us in our prayer for peace in Syria. Let us never lose the courage of prayer! The courage to say: Lord, grant your peace to Syria and to the whole world. And I also invite non-believers to desire peace with that yearning that makes the heart grow: all united, either by prayer or by desire. But all of us, for peace."

The Holy Father continued his appeal for peace in the Central African Republic, Nigeria and in particular South Sudan, where he noted that tensions threatened "peaceful coexistence in that young state."

Regarding the Middle East, the Holy Father asked the Lord to "bless the land where you chose to come into the world." The Pope prayed for a favorable outcome to the ongoing peace talks between Israel and Palestine as well as, for peace in Iraq, which is "struck by frequent acts of violence."



The Holy Father also brought attention to the plight of immigrants and those persecuted by the faith. "Lord of life, protect all who are persecuted for your name. Grant hope and consolation to the displaced and refugees, especially in the Horn of Africa and in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo," he said.

"Grant that migrants in search of a dignified life may find acceptance and assistance. May tragedies like those we have witnessed this year, with so many deaths at Lampedusa, never occur again!"

Prayer for Victims of Trafficking and Natural Disaster

Pope Francis prayed for those robbed of their childhood through war and human trafficking. To those engaged in human trafficking, the Holy Father asked the Christ Child to "touch the hearts of all those engaged in human trafficking, that they may realize the gravity of this crime against humanity."

"Lord of heaven and earth, look upon our planet, frequently exploited by human greed and rapacity. Help and protect all the victims of natural disasters, especially the beloved people of the Philippines, gravely affected by the recent typhoon," he said.

Before imparting his blessing "to the city and to the world," the Pope prayed that God would touch the hearts of all in order to be peacemakers "each day, in our life, in our families, in our cities and nations, and in the whole world." □

(Zenit.org, December 26, 2013)

Christmas Manger



*by Archbishop Samir Nassar,
Maronite Archbishop of Damascus, Syria*

At this Christmas Syria is a lot like a manger; open stable without doors, cold, deprived and extremely poor.

Jesus Child is not lacking of companions in Syria. Thousands of children who have lost their homes are living under tents as poor as the Bethlehem Manger.

Jesus is not alone in his misery. Syrian children abandoned and marked by scenes of violence want to be in the place of Jesus who has parents surrounding and cherishing Him. This bitterness is clearly visible in the kids' eyes, tears and silence.

Some envy the Divine Child because he found the manger to be born and shelter, while some of these unfortunate Syrian children are born under bombs or on the road of the exodus.

Mary is not alone in her difficulties; many unhappy and less fortunate mothers live in extreme poverty, and assume their family responsibilities alone, without their husbands ... The insecurity (precariousness) of Bethlehem's crib brings consolation to these poor mothers crushed by intractable problems and despair.

The reassuring presence of Joseph with the Holy Family is a source of jealousy for thousands of families without father, deprivation that breeds fear, anxiety and worries, our jobless people are envying Joseph the carpenter who saves his family from being in need..

The shepherds and their flocks nearby the crib, are chatting with many Syrian farmers who have lost 70% of their livestock in this war.

The nomadic life on this biblical earth that dates back to Abraham and way before, disappears brusquely with its ancient customs of hospitality and traditional culture.

Dogs of Christmas' shepherds sympathize with the plight of pets in Syria ravaged by deadly violence; they wander the ruins and feed on corpses.

The infernal noise of war stifles the Gloria of Christmas Angel... This symphony for peace gives way to the hatred, division and cruel atrocity ...

May the three wise men bring to the manger of Syria, the most precious gift of Christmas: Peace, Forgiveness and Reconciliation, so that the Christmas Star shines again in our dark nights .. Let us pray to the Divine Child. ☐

Pope Francis' Message for World Day of Peace Reflects on the Need for Fraternity to Combat Indifference



Pope Francis' message for the 47th World Day of Peace cited fraternity as a means to combat indifference and suffering in the world.

During a press conference at the Holy See Press Office on December 12, 2013, the Holy Father's message was presented for this year's celebration under the theme: "Fraternity as the foundation of peace and as a pathway to peace."

Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, was unable

to attend the conference as he was sent to Johannesburg as

the Pope's envoy for Nelson Mandela's funeral. Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, Director of the Holy See Press Office, however read a text from the Cardinal introducing the message.

In his message, Cardinal Turkson noted the first crime of fratricide, committed by Cain against Abel, continues on even in today's society. "Every taking of an innocent life – whether it is called abortion, murder, or euthanasia – whether it is called crime or starvation or war – is, in fact, fratricide, is it not?" the Cardinal asked.

"How can we fail to recognize that we are brothers and sisters, since we all have the same Father? How can we fail to recognize that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is our brother? By His Cross and Resurrection, He repaired a broken humanity and continually offers everyone the promise of salvation."

Cardinal Turkson wrote that the Holy Father's message challenges all to examine the "deficit of fraternity" that exists in today's world. In his message, Pope Francis poses the question as to whether selfishness, fear and competitiveness "poisoned our incomparable dignity as sons and daughters of God."

The Cardinal reminded journalists of the Holy Father's first meeting with the media after his election, where he explained the name he took, the name of Francis, who was a man of poverty, peace and love.

Cardinal Turkson also highlighted the Pope's emphasis on the importance of fraternity in dealing with economical remedies for the poor and disadvantaged. The Pope's message also cited fraternity as a guide to eliminate war.

"Fraternity," the Pope writes, "overcomes the indifference with which we observe the many wars at a safe distance. It overcomes the tendency to dehumanize and demonize the enemy."

"It motivates the hard work needed to accomplish non-proliferation and disarmament, including nuclear, chemical, conventional and unmanned weapons, as well as small arms. When it comes to social conflict, fraternity resists corruption, organized crime, and the drug trade; slavery, human trafficking and prostitution; and those forms of economic and financial 'warfare' which are 'destructive of lives, families and businesses.'"

Concluding his statement on the Pope's message for the World Day of Peace, Cardinal Turkson cited Nelson Mandela as an example of one who "overcame the temptation to seek revenge."

"Only on the basis of truth and reconciliation could the majority of South Africans aspire to a better life. No one should underestimate how much faith, how much courage, how great a spirit, it required of Mandela to put into practice the wisdom which he had learned in prison," the Cardinal stated.

"By his example and leadership, Nelson Mandela facilitated the conversion of hearts away from fratricide. Conversion of minds and hearts is what Pope Francis is pursuing daily." ☐

(Zenit.org, December 12, 2013)



Pope Francis: Be Silent to Know God's Tenderness

tenderness . . . 'You are a worm, but I love you so much.' [Let us pray] for this, and to be silent in this time in which, as it says in the preface, we are watchful in waiting." □

(Zenit.org, December 12, 2013)

Holy Father says God speaks to us as a parent speaks to his children. Pope Francis has said that in preparing for Christmas, we would do well to take a moment of silence to listen to God who speaks to us with the tenderness of a father and of a mother.

In his homily on December 12, during Mass at the Casa Santa Marta, the Holy Father referred to the first reading, from the Prophet Isaiah, stressing the importance of recognizing not only "what the Lord says" but "how He says it."

God speaks to us as a father or a mother speaks to their children, he said. "When the child has a bad dream, he wakes up, cries . . . the father goes and says, 'Don't be afraid, don't be afraid, I'm here.' That's how the Lord speaks to us. 'Do not fear, you worm Jacob, you maggot Israel' (Isaiah 41:13)."

"The Lord has this way of speaking to us: He is near," he continued. "When we look at a father or a mother who speaks to their little child, we see that they become little and speak with a voice of a child and with the manners of children."

Someone looking in from the outside would think it "ridiculous!" he said. "They become smaller, right there, no? Because the love of a father and a mother needs to be close. I say this word: to lower themselves to the world of the child. If the father and mother spoke to them normally, the child would still understand; but they want to take up the manner of speaking of the child. They come close, they become children. And so it is with the Lord."

The Greek theologians, Pope Francis recalled, explained this attitude of God with a somewhat difficult word: "synkatábasi" or "the condescension of God who comes down to make Himself one of us."

"And so, the father and the mother also say ridiculous things to the child: 'Ah, my love, my toy . . .' and all these things. And the Lord says this too, 'you worm Jacob,' 'you are like a worm to me, a tiny little thing, but I love you so much.'"

"This is the language of the Lord, the language of the love of a father, of a mother," the Pope stressed. "The word of the Lord? Yes, we understand what He tells us. But we also see how He says it. And we must do what the Lord does, do what He says and do it as He says it: with love, with tenderness, with that condescension towards the brethren."

Pope Francis referred to Elijah's encounter with God, when the Lord came to him as "a sweet breeze" (cf. 1 Kings 19:11ff), or, as it says in the original text, "a sound of silence." That is how the Lord draws near, with that resonance of silence that is proper to love. Without making a spectacle." And "He becomes small in order to make me strong; He goes to death, with that condescension, so that I might live."

"This is the music of the language of the Lord, and we, in the preparation for Christmas, ought to hear it - it would do us so much good," the Holy Father said in closing.

"Normally, Christmas seems to be a very noisy holiday: it would do us good to have a little silence and to hear these words of love, these words of such nearness, these words of

Future of the Catholic Church Michael Coren's New Book

by Father John Flynn, LC

Is the Church going to change? What will Pope Francis do? In his new book, "The Future of Catholicism," (Signal) Michael Coren addresses these and other questions that have been the subject of so much media speculation.

Coren, the author of many books on Church issues and Catholic topics, asked in his introduction where it might be that the Church needs to change and what is it that cannot be changed.

Change, he observed, in the sense of following the latest intellectual trends, is simply foreign to how the Church functions, based as it is on something quite different from the opinions expressed at a dinner party.

Revelation, handed down to us from God, cannot be changed at whim. Yes, the Church does have the power of loosing and binding (Mt. 18:18), but it is a power exercised within the context of divinely revealed truth.

This means, he acknowledged, that the Church will come into conflict with public opinion, and also with state laws.

For example, on the issue of same-sex "marriage" he explained that: "Marriage is a Sacrament, sexual union has a specific purpose, and the Church can no more affirm homosexual behavior than it can abandon Jesus Christ."

Marriage

Yet, we find ourselves in a time when "support for same-sex marriage has become one of the central litmus tests for social acceptability and inclusion in the body politic and polite society," Coren observed.

In spite of the pressure the Church will face on this issue it cannot and will not change its teaching. It is important, he added, to understand why this is the case.

It is not about being intolerant towards homosexuals, he explained, but instead why it is that the Church defends the sacrament of marriage.

What is at stake is a whole range of truths the Church upholds on marriage, the family, children, human dignity and natural law. Moral absolutes do exist in Catholic teaching, Coren noted, and for that very reason they are not going to change, no matter how out of fashion they may be with the latest trends in contemporary culture.

Abortion, contraception, and euthanasia are other issues that Coren explored. Pope Francis, he commented, "is in no way going to change Catholic teaching regarding the unborn."

In the future the Church will be misunderstood, criticized and face anger "over its refusal to conform to a sexualized

culture that has misplaced love and transformed sex and sexuality into a deity," Coren said.

Quoting John Paul II he said that true freedom is not the possibility to do whatever we wish, but is something that needs to be exercised in union with what are fundamental moral values.

Coren goes on to examine many other topical issues, such as female priests, married priests, and the future of the papacy.

In a chapter on Church and state he touched upon the controversies regarding the Kennedy family, Nancy Pelosi, the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, and observed that the Church will continue to remind people about the need for integrity and religious and moral consistency, "in an age that refuses to appreciate and understand either."

Changes Needed

The possibility of changing Church teaching is quite different when it comes to the area of organizational or disciplinary measures.

One of the issues very much at the forefront in terms of Vatican reforms is the matter of finances. Coren explained that the popes had already started to improve matters with the appointment by John Paul II of Cardinal Edmund Szoka to modernize the accounting system.

Then, Benedict XVI took further measures to adopt the financial standards of Moneyval, a European body established to guard against money laundering and financing of terrorism.

Pope Francis is continuing the reforms and, Coren affirmed, while there is relatively little financial corruption in the Vatican curia, there is a need for greater competence and transparency, so this is one area where change is needed.

The Curia, he added, "has to be dragged several hundred years into the modern and future age."

At the same time, while admitting a need for these changes, and while also insisting that the Church needs to use the media better, Coren argued that it is a serious mistake to think there need to be changes to make the Church more "relevant" or "fashionable."

"The truths may be told in a different form, may be expressed in a new format and even communicated in a way that some of us will find novel and challenging, but they will be the same truths," Coren concluded in his closing remarks.

Anyone who wants some good pointers on where the Church might be headed in the near future will find some very good advice in Coren's book. □

(Zenit.org, December 13, 2013)

Maronite Patriarch Denounces Lawyers Who Help Couples Convert to Other Sects

The Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai, has denounced lawyers helping Catholic couples divorce suggesting to convert to other non-Catholic Christian churches. "Every lawyer who helps a married couple to convert in order to divorce them is banned

from representing cases in religious courts," the Patriarch said. "We," added His Beatitude Rai "call on religious courts and the courts of two well-known Churches to stop committing this sin in return for a fistful of money."

The phenomenon referred to by Patriarch Rai regards Catholics - including Maronites - who in order to seek a divorce choose to convert to other Christian sects. □

(News.Va/fides, December 21, 2013)

Pope Francis Says Youth Important in Proclaiming Christ in the Digital Age

Pope Francis has said that proclaiming Christ in the digital era is a special field for the work of youth. In an address on December 9, 2013, to the Pontifical Council for the Laity, whose members were concluding their plenary assembly on the theme of "Proclaiming Christ in the Digital Era," the Holy Father began by saying that the theme chosen by the Dicastery recalls the Church in the first centuries, who "wished to measure up to the extraordinary legacy of Greek culture."

"Faced with philosophies of great depth and an educational method of exceptional value, but infused with pagan elements, the Fathers did not shy away from comparison, nor did they compromise with any ideas contrary to their faith," the Holy Father said.

"Instead, they were able to recognize and assimilate the most elevated concepts, transforming them from within in the light of the Word of God. They implemented St. Paul's call to 'test everything, hold on to the good'."

While warning of "dangerous illusions and traps to be avoided from the internet," the Pope said that if guided by the Holy Spirit, they can discover opportunities to lead mankind towards God."

The most important possibility that digital communication offers, he continued, is the proclamation of the Gospel that requires authentic and direct human relations. Technological skills, although important are insufficient.

"This, however, does not mean that the presence of the Church on the web is useless; on the contrary, it is indispensable to be present, always in an evangelical style, in what has become for many people, especially the young, a sort of life environment, to reawaken the insuppressible questions the heart asks about the meaning of existence, and to indicate the way to Him Who is the answer, the divine Mercy made flesh, the Lord Jesus," the Pope said.

Concluding his address to the Pontifical Council of the Laity, Pope Francis told the members that the Church will continue in searching new ways to evangelize. In this mission, he concluded, "the contribution and the witness of lay faithful is shown every day to be indispensable." □

(Zenit.org, December 9, 2013)

HOUSE OF STONE:

A
Memoir
of
Home,
Family,
and a
Lost Middle
East

by
Anthony Shadid

Houghton Mifflin
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Boston and New York
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Reviewed

by

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The late Anthony Shadid was a journalist and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner for both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, covering the Middle East. An Orthodox Christian born in the United States, Shadid had family roots in the town of *Marja'youn* in Lebanon. Shadid died earlier in 2013 from a severe asthma attack while on assignment in the Middle East.

House of Stone: A Memoir of Home, Family, and a Lost Middle East, is not only the story of Shadid's renovating the family home in Lebanon, but also his intimate and fond memories of his family's journey to the United States and additionally a keen journalist's assessment of the most recent history of not only Lebanon but also the wider context of Mideast history. In other words, his grandfather's house of stone in *Marja'youn* symbolizes not only his personal journey but that of the whole Middle East region, including, of course, Lebanon and its struggles. Shadid skillfully weaves with deep insight these various strands into an interesting and often poignant novel.

The author's writing is not only clear, eloquent and interesting, but he possesses the ability to move the heart. However, sometimes the everyday language of the ordinary slang of Lebanese workmen for the project may be offensive to some readers. Suffice it to say, the language is coarse but accurate.

Since he professes to be Orthodox, Shadid's writing and reflections often come from a Christian perspective. He often comments on the relations between many Christian groups, including the Maronites, not always, however, in a totally flattering way. Yet he knows and respects the religious plurality of Lebanon.

One of the strengths of the writing is the author's ability to penetrate the basis of what he observes is the current state of Lebanon (and by extension much of the Middle East): The "old days" are gone and a brave, new world, so often scary, has come to birth. In a dialogue with Hikmat, the gardener in the village, we read on page 267:

"Are your father's days gone forever, Hikmat?"

He blinked his eyes, a gesture in the affirmative. "Different men, different people, different world,

different society, different mentality. The young used to respect the old. Different everything. What is *akhlaq* in English?"

"Morals," I said.

"Ahh, morals. Now the morals of the people are to be a crook."

And in another instance the same theme is stated in a different, less disparaging, way, in a reflection about a conversation with yet another resident of the village (p. 178):

I felt—though I did not want to—a bit of a kindred spirit with the embittered man. It was the first time I had heard him say anything generous about either *Marjayoun* or Lebanon, and it reminded me of the nostalgia that is so often pronounced here, always unprompted: the longing for a peaceful but vibrant past. I wondered whether he was trying to return to a place that no longer existed. Isn't that always the case when we try to go home again?

How many people of our own Lebanese émigrés have secretly thought this, or not so secretly said this?

At the end of the day, the real point of this book is the importance of family to the author, something that has always been traditional in many countries of the Mediterranean and the Levant. It is clear, in *House of Stone*, that despite any negatives that author discovered in covering the Middle East in his work, the positives he unearthed in the rehabilitation of his ancestral home welled up for Shadid a love and longing that was rewarded in the journey. □

About the Book's Author

Anthony Shadid, author of *Night Draws Near*, was an unparalleled chronicler of the human stories behind the news. He gained attention and awards, including the Pulitzer Prize, for his front-page reports in the *Washington Post* from Iraq. More recently, as Middle East correspondent for the *New York Times*, he covered the Arab Spring from Egypt to Libya (where he was held captive in March 2011) to Syria. In 2010, he earned his second Pulitzer. Tragically on February 16, 2012, he died while on assignment in Syria. (*Taken from the Book's inside cover jacket.*)

Pope Francis: The Person of the Year

by Very Rev. Robert Barron

It is splendid indeed that Time magazine has made Pope Francis its "Person of the Year" for 2013. The Pope has captured the imagination of the world and has breathed a new life into the Catholic Church. The authors of the Time piece are right in saying that his choice of name has set the tone for his papacy so far: he has resolved to be, like his namesake of old, a friend of the poor and the forgotten. He has determined to be a person of compassion, leading with the merciful face of Christ.



Pope Francis, Time's Man of the Year.

Details matter in this regard: his choice to live in the *Casa Santa Marta* rather than in the Apostolic Palace, being driven around in an old clunker rather than a Vatican limousine, paying his own bill at the clerical residence where he stayed prior to his election, flying coach class, embracing the man with the severely deformed face (How like St. Francis who famously embraced a leper.) The controversial interviews that he granted just a few months ago also speak of this change in focus. The Pope does not want priests and other Catholic ministers to lead with the "hot button" issues largely centering around sexual morality; rather, he wants the Church to present itself as a "field hospital" after a battle, a place of comfort and mercy. His insistence that Holy Communion is "not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak" is also perfectly congruent with this shift in emphasis. As I say, all of this is remarkable and worth celebrating, and I'm glad the popular secular press has caught on.

However, there is something that has been bothering me ever since Francis became Pope, and it is on rather massive display in the Time article, namely, a tendency to distinguish radically between this lovely Franciscan emphasis on mercy and love for the poor and the apparently far less than lovely emphasis on doctrine so characteristic of the Papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. There is actually a good deal of dangerous silliness in this way of characterizing things. If I might cite the much-maligned Benedict, the Church does essentially three things: it cares for the poor; it worships God; and it evangelizes. Isolate any of the three from the other two, and distortions set in. Indeed, without deep care for the poor and for social justice, the worship of God can become lifeless ("liturgical fussiness") and evangelizing can devolve into cultural criticism or mere intellectual debating.

But isolate care for the poor from the other two and equally problematic distortions ensue. Without the worship of God and evangelization, the Church deteriorates in short order into one more social service institution among many, a mere "NGO" in Francis's own language. Now listen to the authors of the Time article: "In a matter of months, Francis has elevated the healing mission of the church—the church as servant and comforter of hurting people in an often harsh world—above the doctrinal police work so important to his

recent predecessors." And "his vision is of a pastoral—and not doctrinaire—church." This is so much nonsense.

The source of a good deal of this mischief is the 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant, whose influence on the modern sensibility can scarcely be overstated. Kant famously held that religion is reducible to ethics. By the Enlightenment period, the doctrinal claims of the great religions had come to seem incredible to many, and worship a pathetic holdover from a more primitive time. For Kant, therefore, authentic, grown-up, enlightened religious people would see that morality is the heart of the matter, both doctrine and worship serving, at best, to bolster ethics. It is always a source of amazement to me how thoroughly modern people have gone down the Kantian autobahn in regard to this issue. How we take the following for granted: it doesn't really matter what you believe, as long as you are a good person.

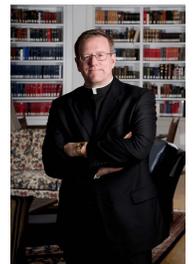
But the Kantian construal is simply repugnant to classical Christianity. In point of fact, Christians have been, from the beginning, massively interested in both worship and doctrine. How could you read any of the Gospels or any of the letters of Paul and think otherwise? Moreover, the great figures of the Church—Irenaeus, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Newman, etc., etc. have taken doctrine with utmost seriousness. No one doubts that Francis of Assisi himself loved the poor and marginalized, but how many realize that one of his principal concerns was for liturgical propriety?

Toward the end of the Time piece, the authors mention two features of Francis's life which effectively undermine their central argument. The "Person of the Year" spends huge swaths of his day at prayer. Rising at five, he prays until seven and then celebrates Mass. And after dinner, he spends several more hours before the Blessed Sacrament. As has been the case with so many of the Church's saints, his love for the poor flows from an intense worship of God. The article closes with a look at one of the Pope's Wednesday general audiences. The topic of Francis's remarks that day was the resurrection of Jesus. After declaring the Church's age-old doctrine, the Pope looked up from his text and asked the crowd, "do you believe it?" When they responded, "Yes!" he said again, "Do you believe it?" This is not a man who is unconcerned with clarity of dogma.

I'm delighted that Time Magazine has made the Pope the "Person of the Year," but I would caution all of the commentariat: don't drive a wedge between the three dimensions of Francis's life and of the Church's life! □

About the Author

Father Robert Barron is the founder of the global ministry, Word on Fire, and the Rector/President of Mundelein Seminary. He is the creator of the award winning documentary series, "Catholicism" and "Catholicism: The New Evangelization." Learn more at www.WordonFire.org.



Do We Need Priests?

(Continues from page 12)

sense that the church is past the corrosive impact of the sexual abuse crisis that exploded in 2002." It may be slow, but the Church is prevailing.

Thus we need more of our young men to consider the priesthood, and we need to hear the witness like Bishop Gregory Mansour, Bishop of the Eparchy of Saint Maron, who said, "I have been a priest since 1982 and a bishop since 2004. Altogether, this is over thirty-one years. I have been very happy serving our Lord even in the midst of some very difficult times. I would do it all again if asked. God's grace has been an extraordinary special blessing." Bishop Gregory also adds that the state of the Eparchy is good but we still have great need for more good priests. "It is a sign of grace that our Church has attracted a twenty-one-year-old and a fifty-seven-year-old to consider a vocation, as well as Lebanese-born and an American-born, likewise men who were not born into the Maronite Church but who are Maronite by choice through adoption and love - these are good signs.

Bishop Elias Zaidan, Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon, has stated, "God has called me years back to be missionary priest and since then He has never left me alone. His grace sustained me every step of the way despite the various difficulties and challenges. He has placed in my life many people - clergy, religious, and laity - who have supported me through their prayer, spiritual direction and assistance. I am forever grateful, and I will always strive to do His will in my life."

One can also look at the words of Rev. Mark Latcovich, Rector of St. Mary's Seminary in Wickliffe, Ohio, as quoted by Grossman. He credits ninety-two seminarians, the highest number in decades, to the encouraging words of current

seminarians and priests who are "our best recruiters. If they are happy and witnessing their faith and opening their hearts, that enthusiasm and joy is contagious." He continues to say that young men today "want to give their life for something that counts. These men are tired of living in a culture of relativism. They want to say there must be something true, beautiful and good. They have discovered the beauty of God."

Do we need more priests? Yes. Will God provide? Yes, if we continue to do His will and spread the Gospel with enthusiasm, confidence, mercy, hope, and love. We are called to be happy Christians, aware of the great need, but not discouraged by the work to be done, or by the world that tells us it is impossible. Will the Church decline? Maybe, but she will "prevail" because Our Lord promised this! Think of your own vocation. Live it with hope. ☐

Houston, Texas Pastoral Visit

(Continued from page 3)

and reemphasized the centrality of his motto "Thy Will Be Done" in his mission as bishop. In a most gentle and charismatic way, Bishop Elias Zaidan offered his prayers and pledge of support and service to all community members. After communion, Cardinal Di Nardo congratulated Bishop Zaidan on his new role and expressed his continued admiration and respect for the parish community of Our Lady of the Cedars.

The parishioners of Our Lady of the Cedars ask God to grant Bishop Zaidan wisdom, strength, and perseverance in his new role as our Shepherd. ☐