



UNESCO Regional Office - Beirut



Cultural Aspects in Christian and Islamic Religions

Under the Supervision of
The UNESCO Regional Office – Beirut

And the UNESCO Chair of Comparative
Religious Studies,
Mediation and Dialogue
Saint Joseph University (USJ), Beirut

UNESCO Regional Office - Beirut, 2010



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Under the Supervision of:	UNESCO Regional Office – Beirut And UNESCO Chair of Comparative Religious Studies, Mediation and Dialogue Saint Joseph University (USJ), Beirut
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Dr. Abdel Moneim Osman

Director of the UNESCO Regional Office - Beirut

Introduction

Ever since the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was established on November 16, 1945, it has pledged to develop relations between groups and people. It aims for better understanding between people in order for each group and community to better know the traditions of other groups and communities. The Founding Charter of the UNESCO stated that throughout history, the fact that people did not know about the others was always a source of doubt and suspicion. People's differences often turned into wars.

In Lebanon, religious and cultural intermingling between Lebanese groups is a focal point. Even if this has allowed walls to be erected between individuals and groups, it has also been an incentive to build bridges and dig canals to help the network of relations between them. This is the very fabric of peaceful coexistence between the Lebanese.

Religious communities intermingle in some Lebanese regions. They know about each others' habits and customs. However, geographic distance between some villages and cities and the increase in non mixed aspects do not help this mutual knowledge.

Based on all of the above, there was a need to develop a substance that might reduce distances grown by historical, political, and geographic factors as well as daily life matters in our century.

We met on 2006 and we started working on the material of a book whose content might add – even in part – to the mutual culture of the Lebanese about one another.

We chose to work on the cultural aspects in Christian and Islamic religions since these aspects are directly linked with the daily life of the Lebanese. In fact, wherever we go, there are cultural, visual and auditory aspects that are related to both religions.

Ever since we started working on the material for this book, the aim was to enable the Lebanese youth to get a better understanding of the cultural aspects related to religions in Lebanon. Whenever the mind grasps meaning which is related to form, it is better able to tolerate others. Our aim was not to convince people of the significance of these aspects or to urge them to adopt them. Our aim was rather to strengthen an objective and neutral vision of these aspects. It would replace the attitude of defense or accusation that often prevails in our reaction to others who are different. In fact, our aim was to open up channels of scientific knowledge to look at others with both the heart and the mind.

In our presentation, we have attempted to both describe and explain: we first start by describing the aspect as we see or hear it, then describe its aspect. Then we touch upon the spiritual meaning existed behind this or that aspect, as sought by the believer. Therefore, we show the meaning that the believer seeks through form, which is closely related to the essence.

Our aim was not to enter the heart of the religious credo. Yet, it is important to point out some aspects of the latter credo in order for the reader to fully understand the meaning related to the cultural aspect. Although this book is primarily addressed to young people from the secondary and university levels, the style used makes it accessible to people of all ages without inducing boredom.

Finally, we would like to point out that this is the first edition of the book. It will be followed by other modified editions based on the reactions of readers and concerned individuals.

We hope this book has met the aim we have set for it. We hope it will contribute to communication between people's hearts through the mind. 'Since wars begin in the minds of men, in their minds must be built the defenses of peace' as stipulated in the Founding Charter of the UNESCO.

The members of the Consultative Committee

Foreword

13 December 2007: Maria, a French student who arrived two months ago to Beirut stands, puzzled, before the closed doors of a bank in Ashrafiyyah. She tries to understand why the bank might be closed on a Thursday...

25 December 2007: Mahmud, a tourist from the Gulf stops before closed shops in Hamra wondering why shops are closed on a Tuesday...

These scenes tell about some of the intermingling between the Lebanese during Holidays. Had Maria or Mahmud been Lebanese, they would have known that al-Adha and Christmas are official Holidays in Lebanon (in December of the year 2007).

Had Maria been Lebanese, she would have bought kellaj from Rawshah in the first week of Ramadan. Had Mahmud been Lebanese, his children would have decorated the Christmas tree in their homes.

These cultural aspects are as different as the seventeen Christian and Muslim communities in Lebanon. They go beyond Christian and Islamic religions to cover the life of all the Lebanese, be they religious or not.

This intermingling contributes to the setting up of a communication network between the Lebanese. It allows a better understanding of these aspects and therefore more tolerance of the latter and of those who practice them. Yet, many of these aspects remain ambiguous to those who live in regions where there are no groups that belong to different religious communities.

For instance, Joseph does not understand why his colleague Hasan has to pray at a specific hour whereas he can choose a time that fits his university schedule and his work in order to pray in his room as he does. Joseph may think that Hasan does so as a way to upset or look down upon him. On the other hand, Hasan may not understand why Joseph does not pay heed to prayer times and does not abide by these times.

He may think that Joseph is not religiously committed and does not practice in a way to grow closer to God. Had Hasan and Joseph known the concept of prayer in the Christian and Islamic religions, they would have looked at each other differently, i.e. with the eyes of the other and not with one's own. Had each known the meaning of prayer for the other, they may have understood the behavior of the other and respected him. Even if they have different opinions, trust would be prior to prejudice. They would allow the other to express his opinion before embarking upon heated debate as to the reasons for this expression and its background. This is an illustration of what we meet in our daily life, work and routine, in a country whose people belong to numerous religions, beliefs, communities, and ideologies.

This book allows the readers the opportunity to know about the cultural aspects related to religions, mainly in Lebanon and the Near East, their meaning and their aim. This knowledge will help the reader, firstly, to grasp the meaning of these various aspects, whether they concern him directly or the people who live in the same country, with whom he shares common space and living. Secondly, the book contributes to the Lebanese understanding one another's behaviors and their own behavior concerning these aspects. Therefore, the book also contributes to the Lebanese looking at one another with more trust before starting to criticize.

This book includes chapters that cover most of the different cultural aspects in Christian and Islamic religions. The first chapter deals with time, passing through each month of the year and its days, in a chronological manner. The second chapter delves into religious occasions in the Christian then Islamic religions. It explains the meaning of Holidays and remembrances of God and their particular aspects as well as the religious reasons of each. This chapter includes a part about *al-'awliya'* and Saints who are mentioned in some of the Lebanese daily rituals.

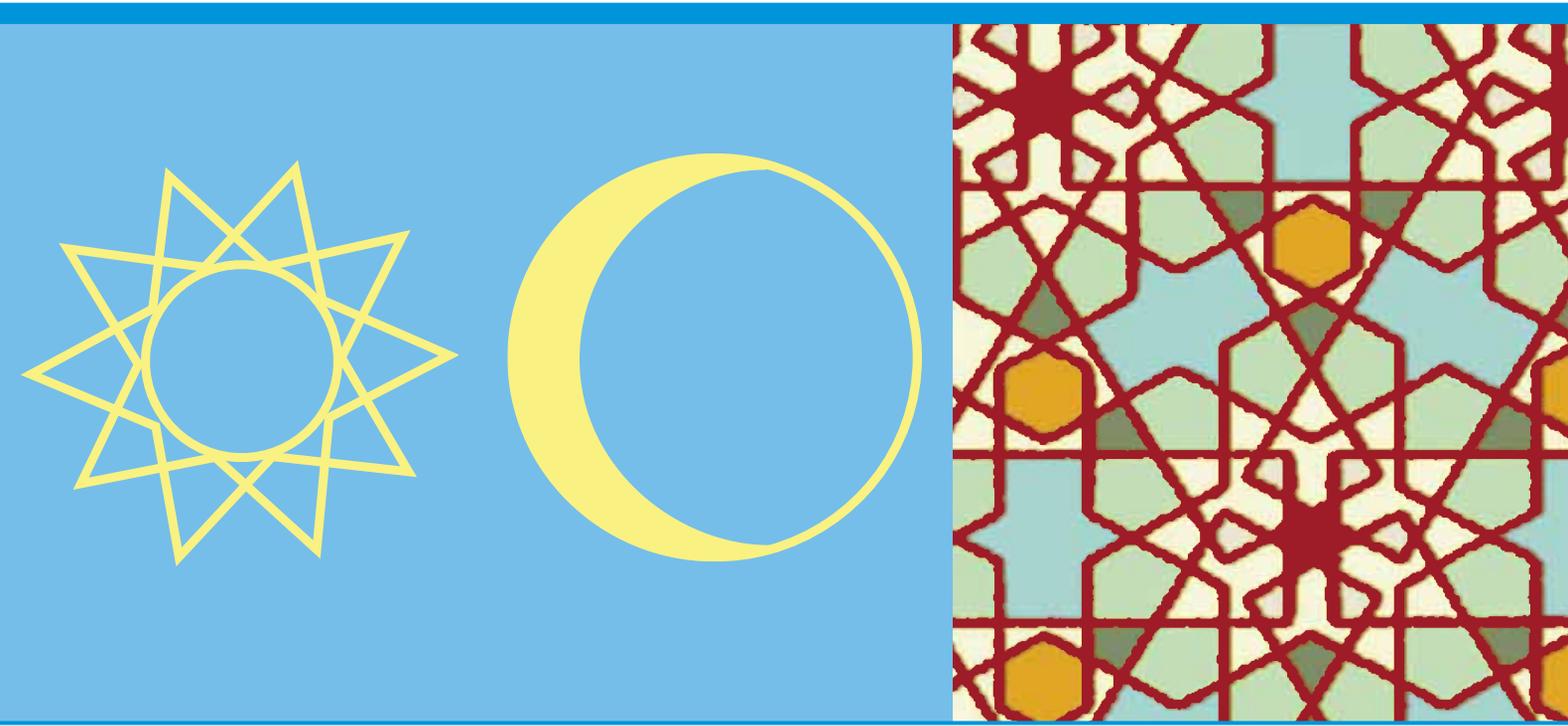
Chapter three delves into the individual's life stages from birth to religious vows, to marriage and death. The aspects that go with these stages constitute an important part in the life of the Lebanese. This chapter details the aspects and traditions of all these stages in which people take part, thus creating a common ground in a multi-religious society.

Chapter four deals with religious practices, acts of worship, and legal prescriptions. It describes them and deals with their spiritual meaning to individuals who express their faith when practicing them. Prayer, Mass, and Pilgrimage, among others, are religious practices that are detailed in a way to make the reader understand what they mean to those who perform them.

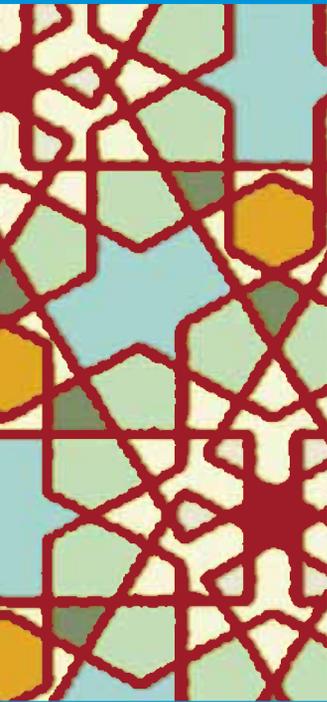
Chapter five leads us into religious places and their meaning, from churches to mosques and monasteries, *khalwat* and *husayniyyat*, all of which have different and divergent meanings to visitors. Yet, they all show the importance given by man to the place when expressing his faith and his relation with the Creator.

Chapter six takes us to religious habits and customs, such as the clothes worn by religious dignitaries, their symbolism and meaning. It also deals with some general habits and customs. The reader may find that some chapters overlap. In fact, we have tried to make each part related to the others yet independent from them. This method facilitates the reading and understanding of any subject on its own without the need to refer to prior or subsequent parts.

Finally, those who had any – minor or major – contribution in this book – despite the lacks that some readers might see – hope that they have offered a useful work in the process of discovering others who are different and who hold rich traditions as well human and spiritual values. This process is the only path to real peace and makes the 'Lebanon, a message' slogan a reality, for the region and for the world.



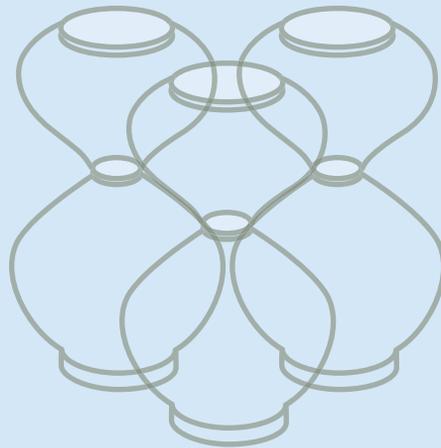
Time: Perceptions and Concepts



The modern man feels an inner dilemma, torn as he is between two concepts of time. The old conception considered time as a reality similar to space, i.e. having a circular shape and a regular movement – the movement of the planets – which repeats itself inevitably, continuously and consistently, never subject to alteration. The rhythm of days, seasons, and life moments helped organize the work and prayers of the faithful. Living in a circular time made them offer God important moments of life such as the beginning, the end, and the middle. Alongside this conception of time, a new concept of time emerged where every second is unique and is independent from the major natural cycles: it is the industrial time, the time of work imposed regardless of natural rhythms or personal problems. This time is separate from cycles of inevitability for it is the time of development and history. In it, tomorrow is not like yesterday for man endeavors to make tomorrow better.

Time in Christianity and Islam

Cultural aspects in the Christian and Islamic religions are closely linked with time. Although the cycle of Holidays and religious occasions is based on the path and life of Jesus Christ, and on the path and life of the Prophet Muhammad, Peace Be Upon Him (PBUH), the year, be it Gregorian or Hegira, remains the main unit in which occasions occur. Months, weeks, and days – night time and day time – are parts among which these occasions shift.



Time in Christianity

The Holy Book (the Scriptures in the Old Testament, that is before the Coming of Jesus Christ, and the New Testament, after the Coming of Jesus Christ, written by inspiration from the Holy Spirit) starts and ends with time indications: 'IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED the heavens and the earth.' (Genesis 1:1); "Surely I am coming soon." (Revelation 22:20). Therefore, God is not presented abstractedly, in His Eternal Essence as is the case with Plato and Aristotle. God is rather presented through His interventions on this Earth, which makes the history of the world a holy history. This is why divine inspiration can answer the religious questions that the human conscience raises about time, since this inspiration was descended and occurred in history.

Jesus Christ allowed us to understand through His parables the path to the completion of the

Kingdom of God that will come when time is right (Matthew 13:30 and Mark 4: 26 - 29). After Resurrection, Jesus Christ sends His Apostles on a mission that postulates an extension of time before the end of the world (Matthew 28: 19 - 20, Acts 1: 6 - 8).

Finally, the Ascension of Christ into heaven marks a difference between the time of the Church and the time when Christ will return in His Glory to achieve the prophecies (Acts 1: 11). Between the two there comes a middle time quite different than the 'times of ignorance' in which atheists were drowned (Acts 17: 30), or the disciplinary time in which the people of Israel lived (Galatians 3: 23 - 25, 4; 1- 3). This time is that of the Church.

The conception of time for Christians finds thus its roots in the Holy Bible, especially in the waiting for Christ, who rises above all cycles. History becomes a path towards a specific aim in the Kingdom of God that Christ started and called for man to help achieve, knowing that it will not be completed, to Him, until the 'close of the age' (Matthew 28: 19 - 20). Christians build their representation of time around Jesus Christ. The events celebrated by Christians in the church are organized based on the new time that was transformed with the light of Resurrection. Christians thus live every day, every week, and every year, the history of salvation that includes the whole world. Through time, God continues to achieve His resolve to establish a pact of life with the world, His creation, especially with humanity that lives in the world and passes through it to reach Him. God bestowed upon man time so that he may live it, minute by minute, accepting His grace, and fulfilling the Almighty's Will to be 'completely like' Christ according to Paul the Apostle (Ephesians 4:13).

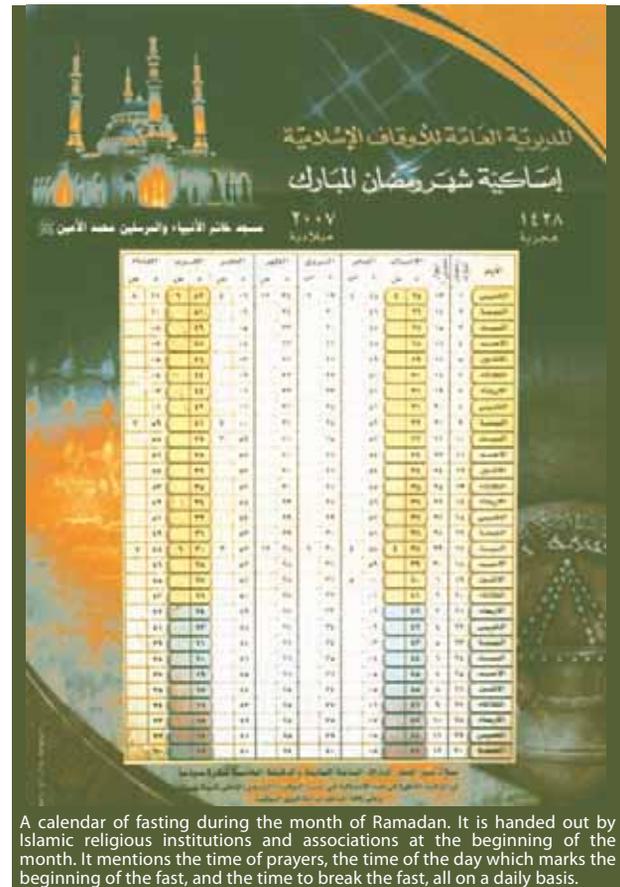


Time in Islam

Time in the Holy Koran is related to three concepts: first, the concept of the beginning of Creation; second, the concept of the Sunnah and laws of God [Glory to Him, the Exalted] to have the universe abide by them and to regulate the life of man according to them; third, the concept of time consecrated to praying God the Almighty: the Sacred months [Dhu-l-Qi'dah, Dhu-l-Hijjah, Muharram, and Rajab], the month of fasting (Ramadan), and the month of pilgrimage: Dhu-l-Hijjah.

In the first concept, that of Creation, He [Glory to Him, the Exalted] said in several verses of the Holy Koran: "He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days" (Sura: Hud (11), Verse 7; also: Sura: The Battlements (7), Verse 54, and Sura: Jonah (10), Verse 3). Creation is a fact in time to show man's dedication to meet the Will of God. "So as to test you: who among you is the best in works" (Sura: Hud (11), Verse 7).

The second concept implies repetition and regularity in conformity with the Will of God in the setting up of norms and laws that govern the world and regulate man's life. "He it is Who created the night and day, and the sun and moon, each in an orbit floating" (Sura: The Prophets (21), Verse 33). "A sign for them is the night, from which We strip the day, and behold they are plunged in darkness". "And the sun runs its own course unchanging. Such is the disposition of the Almighty, the Omniscient". "And the Moon, We disposed in phases until it comes back like a withered stalk of palm". "Neither the sun may outstrip the moon nor the night the day: each plies its own orbit." (Sura: Ya Sin (36), Verses 37 - 40).



A calendar of fasting during the month of Ramadan. It is handed out by Islamic religious institutions and associations at the beginning of the month. It mentions the time of prayers, the time of the day which marks the beginning of the fast, and the time to break the fast, all on a daily basis.

These verses related to the cosmos have other functions related to man's life, to the power of God, and His Will: "Who made the sun and moon to serve you, alternating, and made night and day to serve you" (Sura: Abraham (14), Verse 33). "He made the night to serve you as also the day, the sun, the moon" (Sura: The Bees (16), Verse 12). The third concept of time is related to the organization of the regular life of man: "reckoning its phases (the moon's) so that you may know the number of years and how to calculate". (Sura: Jonah (10), Verse 5) It is also related to the organization of people's religious life: "They ask you about the new moons. Say: They are times appointed for mankind and for the pilgrimage." (Sura: The Cow (2), Verse 189).

Moments in the Day

It is said that the moments of the day are three: one for acts of worship, one to provide means of living, and one for entertainment without falling into what is forbidden (muharram).

- At sunset: the worshipper is busy with glorifying God and asking for His forgiveness. He said [Glory to Him, the Exalted]: “and glorify the praise of your Lord before sunrise and before sunset” (Sura: Ta’Ha’ (20), Verse 130).
- For night time: He said [Glory to Him, the Exalted]: “And the vigil of night is heavier in burden, Yet better suited for recitation” (Sura: Muffled (73), Verse 6). It is said in the Hadith that night prayer is the honor of the worshipper. It bequeaths health of the body and is a penance for wrongdoing in the day.

In addition, the different parts of the day correspond to specific acts of worship and remembrance of God (*'adhkar*). The worshipper remains in relation with God at all times through acts of worship, remembrance and glorification of God, contemplation, and reflection.

Here we mean the following times:

- Between dawn and sunrise: these hours are considered the noble hours, in which it is recommended to remember God, glorify and worship Him, and not recommended to sleep.
- Between sunrise and sunset: it is preferable to be charitable at the beginning of the day, even with very little. Charity (*sadaqa*) has a social role since it is about giving to the poor and the needy that do not have enough to eat for the day. It also purifies the soul when it comes from a good intention. Charity has great human value.

Also, this time, between sunrise and sunset, is for work, for man is not asked to stay at home and perform acts of worship without working.

Calendars, their Meaning and the Reason why they are Used

The rotation of the moon around the earth and the rotation of the earth around the sun provided people with the possibility to calculate time and to divide it into years, seasons, months, days, and hours. The rotation of the moon around the earth provided the rhythmic and clearest visible means to determine months. Yet, people noticed that twelve lunar rotations do not necessarily coincide with the solar year since they only include 354 days and 8 hours whereas the earth needs 365 days and 6 hours approximately to revolve around the sun. This difference led to the setting up of two calendars: one solar and one lunar.



The Solar Calendar

The Christian year that we know is either a 'fixed cycle' that we follow in a specific 'calendar', or a 'moveable cycle', which is the 'liturgical year'.

The word 'calendar' is derived from the Latin 'calendarium'. It is found in modern European languages, 'calendar' in English, 'calendrier' in French, and means '*ruznamah*' or '*taqwim*' in Arabic. The Syriac Maronites agreed to use the word 'Codex' to signify 'the catalogue of Holidays throughout the year'. The word 'calendar' means originally 'the beginning of the month' and 'the day when debts are due' for the Romans. It meant, later on, a division of times and a calculation of moments and what is related to them.

This is how all civilizations got, from the beginning, calendars that are specific to them. This was in conformity with the rules of nature, for some followed the solar cycle and some the lunar cycle. The latter lunar cycle is related to a system whose bases are in the solar cycle. Nowadays, we notice a trace of this division in the names given to the days of the week in European languages such as 'Sonntag' and 'Sunday', literally 'the day of the sun'.

The division of the year into months was influenced by both the solar and lunar systems. Besides, the months of the year were initially not twelve but ten. They started, in the Roman calendar, with March. This calendar was used until 153 B.C. At that point, two months were added and the first day of January became New Year. The first to introduce the solar year into the Roman calendar was Emperor Julius Caesar in 45 B.C.

In the Sixth Century, (532 AD) Pope John the First imposed the Anno Domini calendar starting with the year Jesus was born – this date was determined by an Armenian Historian monk, Dennis the Little – all the while preserving the count of the solar Julian calendar.

The Syriac civilization, in which the Maronite Church is rooted, used to start its year in October. The word '*tishrin*' (October) in Syriac is derived from the verb '*sharu*', i.e. 'start'. Eastern Churches maintained this tradition in their calendar until they began to follow the Latin calendar, and started their civil year with the first day of January. Syriac Churches maintained the beginning of their liturgical year on the first Sunday of October whereas the liturgical year for the Byzantines starts in September.

Although the Church depends on the solar calendar in its liturgical year, it follows the lunar calendar to determine Easter. It is determined on the Sunday following the first full moon after the beginning of spring. Accordingly, in the liturgical periods that are related to this Holiday such as the periods of fasting and Pentecost, we see an ebb and flow as to the determining of Easter Day according to the yearly calendar.

After the Julian calendar, Pope Gregory XIII reformed the yearly calendar, which later became known as the Gregorian Calendar, that was put in use as of its publication on February 13, 1582. In 1575, Pope Gregory XIII had formed a committee that determined the differential between the two calendars. The committee reduced the time of

the solar year from 365.2465 to 365.2422 days. It also reduced the number of the leap years, which gather the remaining fractions of days in only one additional day, which is February 29. The leap year was maintained every four years, as was the case in the Julian calendar. The real solar year, i.e. the time the earth needs to revolve around the sun, was ten days short compared with the solar Julian year. Pope Gregory XIII decided to skip ten days ahead to make up for this difference. He announced his decision on February 24, 1582.

The shift was thus immediate from Thursday October 4 to Friday October 15 in the year 1582. From that day on, the Gregorian calendar was put in use next to the Julian calendar, especially by the Catholic Church. Some Orthodox Churches chose it to celebrate fixed Holidays whereas all Orthodox Churches use the Julian way of counting in moveable Holidays. With time, the Gregorian calendar became the civil calendar used worldwide.



Some Christian religious associations and foundations issue, at the beginning of each year, a special calendar mentioning religious Holidays throughout the year.

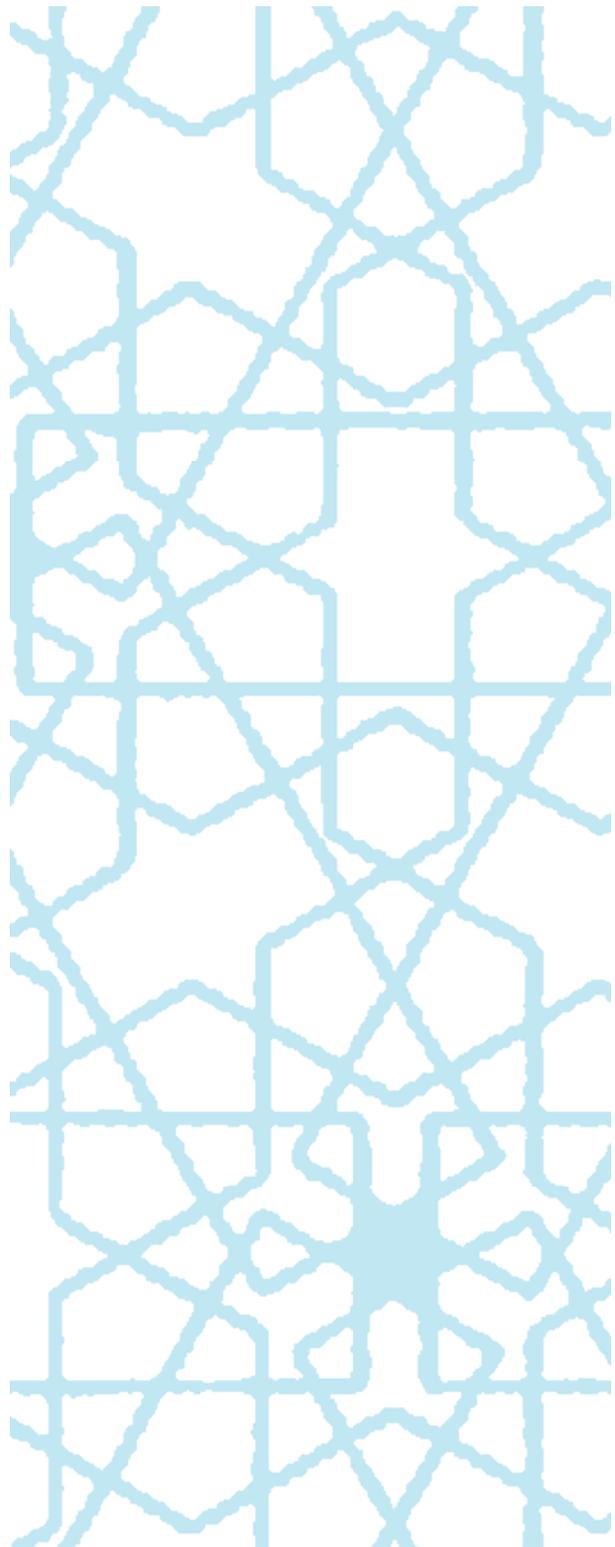
The Lunar Calendar

The Glorious Koran states: "The total of months with God is twelve months in the Book of God, from the day that God created the heavens and the earth. Of these, four are Sacred. This is the correct religious practice. So do yourselves no wrong therein" (Sura: Repentance (9), Verse 36).

The lunar month starts with the sight of the crescent and ends when it is seen again signifying the beginning of a new month. Its number of days is twenty-nine days and a half. Since this fraction of number is intricate, two months were counted as a total of fifty nine days, where one month has thirty days, the full month, and the other has twenty nine, the incomplete month.

Prior to Islam, people used to chronicle history based on their great events. Each nation would chronicle what it saw and convened upon as the great events they went through. In this context, Arabs chronicled events starting with the history of building al-Kaaba, until they separated. Every time a people left Mecca, they chronicled as of the day of their departure.

This situation remained as such until the death of the grandfather of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) as Meccans started to chronicle as of his death. This remained so until the second Caliph, 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab (R.A.A), (634 - 644 A.D.) decided, after consulting the people, to start the lunar count with the Hegira of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) from Mecca to Medina in 622. But the chronicle did not start with the day of the Hegira (12 Rabi' al-'Awwal) but rather with the first month of the lunar year (the month of Muharram) that Muslims call the year of the Hegira.



Months of the Churches Calendar in General

There are twelve months in the Christian calendar: January, 31 days; February 28 days and 29 in leap years; March, 31 days; April, 30 days; May, 31 days; June, 30 days; July 31 days; August, 31 days; September 30 days; October 31 days; November 30 days; and December 31 days.

The Latin Church bases its liturgy on the different months, some of which are consecrated to specific remembrances. To cite only a few as examples: the month of March is consecrated to Saint Joseph; the month of May to Virgin Mary; the month of June to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the month of November to the faithful departed.

Eastern Churches, on the other hand, base their liturgy – namely Syriac liturgy – on liturgical periods: Christmas time; Epiphany, *Aldenh* time¹ time of fasting; Passion Week; Resurrection; Pentecost²; the time of the Cross.

As for the Byzantine traditional liturgical year, it is based on three Seasons: Advent, Easter Season, and Kingdom Tide [*Al-Ta'lih*].

Moreover, Eastern Catholic Churches introduced to their liturgy some Latin practices, namely the month of May consecrated to honor Virgin Mary.

¹ See page 43.

² See page 62.



Sanctuary of our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa.

The Month of May: Honoring Virgin Mary

The whole month of May (in the Catholic Church) is consecrated to reviving the practices of honoring Virgin Mary, which is a tradition that dates back to the end of the Eighteenth Century. The link between the month of May and honoring Virgin Mary appeared in religious literature as early as the Thirteenth Century when poets celebrated the Beauty of the Virgin and compared this beauty to that of flowers in the month of May. Beautiful flower crowns were placed on the Statue of the Virgin, in churches as well as in homes. These popular practices went on until the year 1784 when the month of May took on its actual celebration aspect. It gradually spread from Rome to the rest of Italy then to all the Catholics around the world. In Lebanon, the celebration of Mary in this month started in the year 1850. During this month, people contemplate the life of Virgin Mary and make – as much possible – visits, both individually and in groups, to some sites built in her memory, especially Sayyidat Lubnan (Our Lady of Lebanon) in Harissa, where Masses are held and prayers are said all day.

The Lunar/ Hegira Months

The lunar year starts when the new moon is sighted in the beginning of the month of Muharram, and ends with the waning of the moon in the end of the month of Dhu-I-Hijjah. The year includes twelve months and the number of its days is 354 days and nine hours approximately. This is why, every three years, the year is 355 days (and is called 'abundant year'). It is worth noting that the word 'month' is mentioned twelve times in the Glorious Koran and the word 'day' is mentioned about 355 times.

"The total number of months with God is twelve months" (Sura: Repentance (9), Verse 36). Four months are Sacred, where combat is forbidden (*yuharram*); they are three consecutive months: Dhu-I-Qi'dah, Dhu-I-Hijjah, Muharram, as well as the month of Rajab, which is between Jumada and Sha'ban.

The Hegira months are: Muharram, Safar, Rabi' al-Awwal, Rabi' al-Akhir, Jumada al-Awwal, Jumada al-Akhir, Rajab, Sha'ban, Ramadan, Shawwal, Dhu-I-Qi'dah, and Dhu-I-Hijjah. The Arabs in pre-Islamic times would bring months back and forth based on periodic interests. The Holy Koran forbade this categorically.





The Specificity of Some Lunar/Hegira Months:

- **'The Months of Light'** are Rajab, Sha'ban, and Ramadan. They include some specific acts of worship performed by Muslims. Among these acts are: increased interest in the needy and the poor, interest in prayers, invocations, and pleadings, as well as fasting, and acts similar to Hajj (pilgrimage), such as 'Umra to Mecca, and visiting the Shrine of the Prophet (PBUH) in Medina, among other things. Some religious occasions occurred in these months: in Rajab, the birth of Imam Ali (A.S.), and Sha'ban, the birth of al-Imam al-Mahdi for Shiite Muslims. In the month of Ramadan, a very important occasion is *Laylat al-Qadr*.
- **The Month of Shawwal:** in it is 'Id al-Fitr which symbolizes the joy of those who fast as an act of worship that prepares the soul to be closer to God morally and spiritually. So when the 'Id occurs, it is first an indicator of the joy of those who fast at being closer to God. Joy here is communal and is related to good relations with other individuals.
- **The Month of Dhu-I-Hijjah:** is the time of Hajj to Mecca. This time symbolizes departure from home as though one is leaving behind worldly matters to reach God and al-Kaaba.
- **The Month of Muharram:** is the beginning of the Hegira year. In the beginning of Muharram 61 H. the tragedy of Karbala occurred with the Martyrdom of the last grandson of the Prophet (PBUH), Imam Husayn ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib (A.S.), his sons, siblings, and companions.
- **Safar:** is considered the month of affluence and prosperity. It is also the month that saw the death the Prophet (PBUH) died, on 28 Safar of the year 11 H., and the Martyrdom of Imam Hasan ibn Ali Al-Mujtaba on the 7th of Safar of the year 50 H.
- **Rabi' al-Awwal and Rabi' al-Akhir:** These months were called Rabi' because in them Arabs saw of a few drops of rain and the



appearance of grass. Rabi' al-Awwal is considered a noble month since in it was Al-Mawlid, the Birth of the Prophet (PBUH). It was also in this month that Mohammad (PBUH) emigrated to Yathrib on the thirteenth year of the Prophet's Mission.

- **Jumada al-Awwal and Jumada al-Akhir:** On 20 Jumada-l'Akhir was the birth of the daughter of the Prophet (PBUH), Fatima Zahra' (A.S.).
- **Rajab:** the two months of Rajab and Sha'ban are called together the two-Rajabs (*Ar-Rajaban*). Rajab is also said to be 'al-Murajjab', i.e. the Sacred and Venerated. It is one of the months of Light. In it died Abu Talib, uncle of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH). In it also is the commemoration of *al-Isra' wal Mi'raj* (see page 78). In it is also the birth of Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib.
- **Sha'ban:** is also considered venerated and noble. In it was the Sermon (Khutba) of

the Prophet (PBUH) welcoming the Holy Month of Ramadan, and the birth, for Shiite Muslims, of Mohammad Ibn Hasan, al-Mahdi al-Muntazar (the Awaited Mahdi).

- **Ramadan:** is the month of fasting. It is mentioned in the Glorious Kuran and is considered Holy. It is the best of months, its days are the best of days, and its nights are the best of nights.

In it is *Laylat al-Qadr* in which the Glorious Koran was Revealed: "We sent it down in the night of power" (Sura: Power (97), Verse 1). In this month, the gates of Heaven are opened, and the gates of hell are closed. In it, the Battle of Badr occurred.

- **Dhu-l-Qi'dah:** is the month that precedes the Hajj Pilgrimage. Its name is most likely based on the idea of refraining (*qou'oud*) from war.



Days of the Week, their Context, and Importance

The weekly celebration of one day of worship of God has determined, ever since the beginning, the cycle of the week. Jewish tradition has highlighted the importance of the book of Genesis in the story of Creation (Genesis 1: 3 -32). Christians adopted it and gave days the same numerical names, best seen in Arabic i.e. *Ahad* (Sunday- meaning one), *Ithnayn* (Monday-meaning two), *Thulatha'* (Tuesday-meaning three), etc. In more than one civilization, in which the cycle of the week was also taken into account, days were named after some planets. An interpretation of the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament by Saint Ephrem the Syriac, states on the same subject: 'the Sixth day before Sabbath was not named like previous days, since the five previous days were named by order of appearance: Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday*'. And the sixth day was not called the sixth. It was rather, in Hebraic and Greek and all the languages of the Bible: preparation! Arabs called it *Jum'a* (Friday)** since it is a day of gathering for prayer. The days of the week do not have a specific holy meaning for Muslims, except for Friday. Yet, in the *Hadith*, it was said that fasting is preferable on Monday and Thursday of every week for those who seek recompense from God. The Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) was born on Monday and would fast on this day as well as on Thursday. The *Hadith* does not mention the other days unless they would coincide with a Muslim Holiday or remembrance, or unless they coincide with the thirteenth or the fourteenth or the fifteenth of every month, what is called the white nights relatively to the light of the moon that shines on those nights. The Prophet (PBUH) would fast on these days as well, in addition to Monday and Thursday. Christians fast on Wednesday and Friday since on Wednesday Jesus was sentenced to death and on Friday He had to bear with the suffering of crucifixion [the Passion]. Christians consider Saturday and Sunday as Holidays: the former being a commemoration of Creation and the latter for Resurrection. Saturday also reminds Christians of Holy Saturday on which Jesus was in His tomb. This is why, on each Saturday of the week, Oriental liturgy mentions the faithful departed. Western liturgy on the other hand has consecrated Saturday to honor Virgin Mary ever since the Tenth Century.

* Sunday (*Ahad* = 1); Monday (*Ithnayn* = 2); Tuesday (*Thulatha'* = 3); Wednesday (*Arbou'a'* = 4); Thursday (*khamis* = 5).

** *Jum'a* means gathering.

Sunday for Christians

The liturgical year was established around the death of Christ and His resurrection. Christians have commemorated his death based on his request: 'Do this in remembrance of Me' (Luke 22:19) and the day of the Lord, Sunday, is the first day of the week. It is the core of the liturgical year and its very foundation. The history of this day, Sunday, dates back to the Resurrection of Christ which, as stated in all four Gospels, occurred on Sunday. The first celebration of Sunday occurred on the first Sunday after Resurrection, where all the Apostles were gathered and Thomas was among them. This was the New Sunday (John 20: 26 - 27). On Sunday also they received the Holy Spirit and they started to meet repeatedly on that day as stated in the Acts of the Apostles: 'On the first day of the week we met to break the bread together.' (Acts, 20:7). 'On the first day of the week' (Acts 2:16 - 21).

The Didascalia mentions these meetings saying: 'When you gather on the Day of the Lord, break the bread and be thankful, after having confessed your sins, so that the Eucharist is pure.' Saint Ignatius of Antioch deems the meeting on the day of the Lord as the core of Christian identity, and Saint Justin Martyr describes his contemporary group as coming from the cities and the countryside to gather in one place on the day called Sun Day. To the Christian community, Sunday is the celebration of Eucharist (prayer of thanks) and of remembering he who has risen from the dead, a day of prayer, of joy and a Holiday. This day has been, as of the beginning, the day of celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. This is why it was considered the first day of the week. It was also called the eighth day, despite the seven

days of the week, in order to highlight its being the day of perfect fullness (7 +1=8).

It is the eighth day for it concludes a period of Deliverance and a beginning of another period. It is the time of deliverance that lasts forever. This will be fundamental in the distribution of Sundays in the Byzantine and Syriac rites. In addition, in Eastern liturgy this day has become the equivalent of the Adventus (awaiting the Return of Christ). It has become a day that Christians long for just like the day of the return of Christ. In it is the resurrection of the dead for which Christians pray in the Act of Faith. In the fourth century, Saint Basil the Great indicated the similarities between Sunday, which is the first day of Creation in the Book of Genesis, when God Created light in the world, and Sunday when the light of resurrection flooded the world. It is the day of Resurrection of Christ from the dead.





Friday for Muslims

It is commonly known that prayers are five in occurrence from dawn until evening. Muslims can perform these prayers individually, or communally, or in a Mosque, except for the Friday Prayer (two *rak'at* [prostrations] after the Sermon) that cannot be performed other than in the congregational Mosque.

The text of the Glorious Koran indicates that there is no need to take the whole day off: "O believers, when the call is made for prayer on Congregation Day, hasten to the remembrance of God and leave your commerce aside: this is best for you, if only you knew. When prayer is ended, disperse in the land and seek the bounty of God, and mention God often – perhaps you will prosper." (Sura: Congregational Prayer (62), Verses 9 - 10).

Worshippers come to the Mosque in their finest clothes. They listen to the Sermon (*khutba*) given by a *khatib* (preacher) who preaches about fine morals, and may speak to them about public concerns on some major occasions. Then he or someone else leads the community prayer. The community prays after him two *rak'at* (prostrations), during which The Opening Chapter of the Glorious Koran and other Verses from the Glorious Koran are read out loud. Then people greet each other celebrating the common religious obligation (*farida*). Then each returns home or to work. Most Arab and Islamic states have considered Friday as a Holiday although this is not necessary, as previously said.

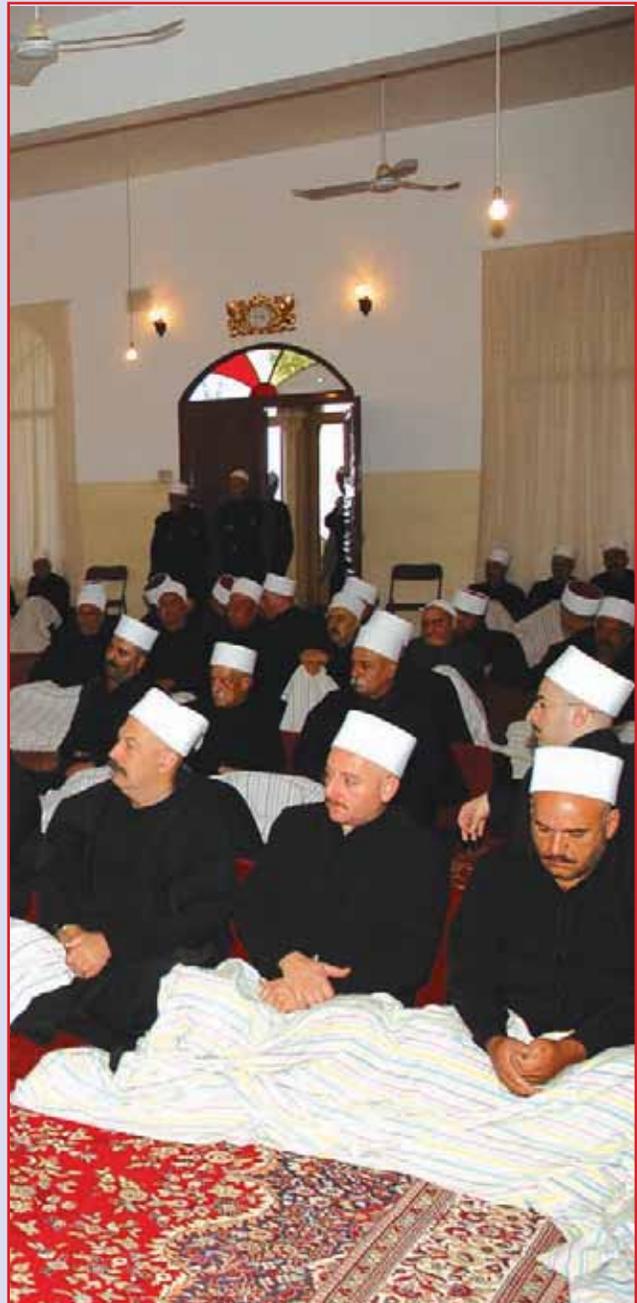
Friday has many virtues namely the fact that it is the day of the Friday prayer, one of the major

Muslim acts of worship, as mentioned. In it is also an hour during which invocation of God is answered, for the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) said: 'On Friday there is an hour in which any Muslim servant of God can ask God and he will be given.' It is a day during which sins are forgiven and charity on this day is better than on any other, as are good deeds. Death on a Friday is a sign for Muslims of a good end. The Prophet (PBUH) said about this day: 'A fine day the sun rose on, Friday. On this day Adam was created. On this day, he entered Paradise and brought out of it. The final Hour does not come other than on this day.'

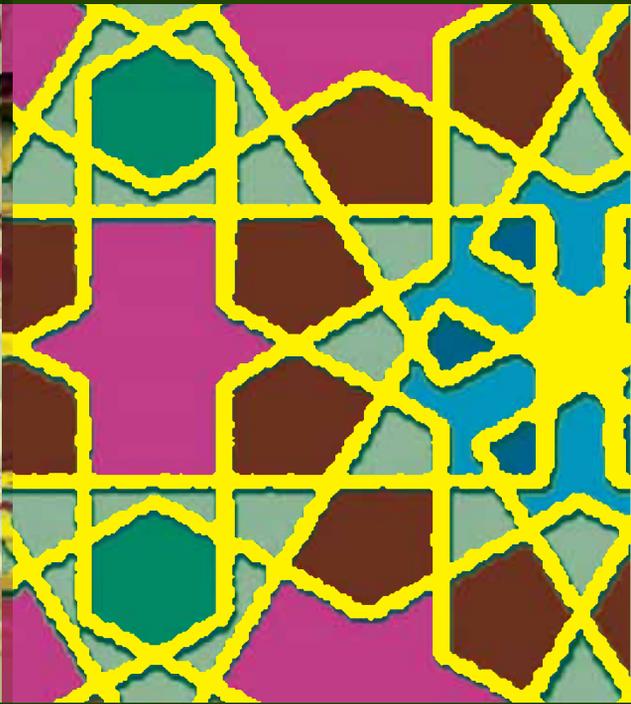
In the Muwahidoon (Unitarian) Druze religious community, the Muwahidoon Druze Sheikhs enter *ihram* (a state of ritual consecration) at sunset of every Thursday of every week to get the blessing of the 'Friday eve'. They commemorate this evening with prayer and remembrance of God, and prepare for Judgment Day. This 'religious evening' goes on in some *khalwas* (Druze house of prayer) until the break of dawn. *Al-'Uqqal* ["the Knowledgeable Initiates"]³ gather on Friday morning around their trusted Sheikhs, each in their mosque to hold a *dhikr*, an invocation of God, until the end of the time of the Friday prayer.

This stable ritual has been firmly established through hundreds of years and has had consequences on the strengthening of some traditions of the Unitarian Druze. Many now revere this night and seek in it piety in their hearts. They light candles and pray and observe virtuousness and serenity until the day is done.

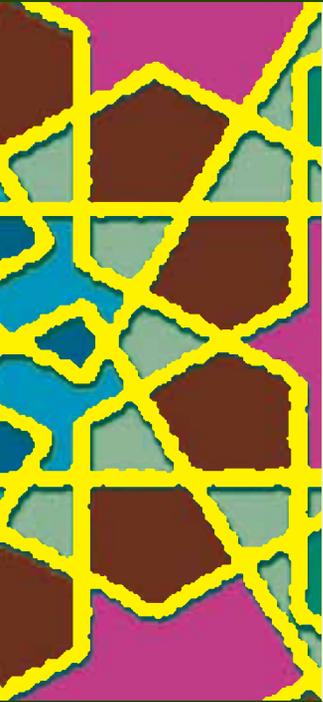
³ See page 187.



Gathering of religious contemplation in the Muwahidoon Druze Community

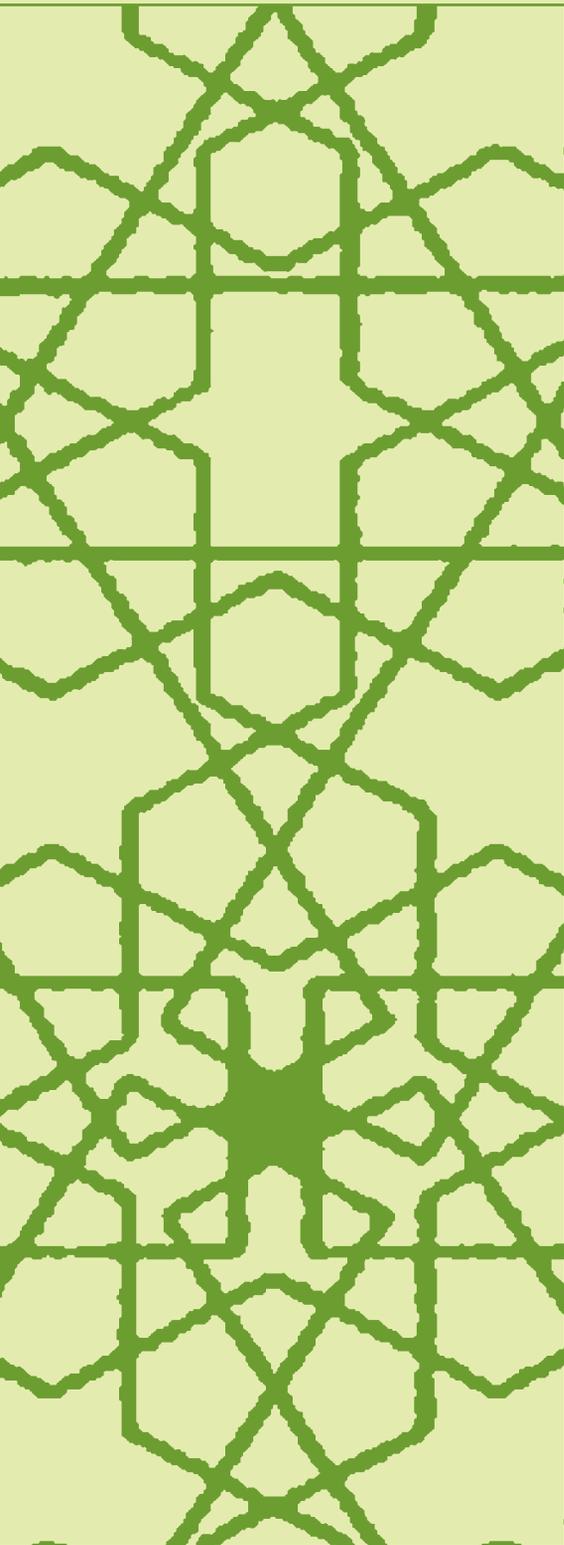


Special Religious Occasions and Holidays, and their Celebrations in Christian and Muslim Religions



Many Holidays are closely linked with religion. In Holidays too, different cultural aspects are clearly visible. If Holidays and celebrations vary from a religion to the other, they nonetheless all meet around common concepts linked to joy, sharing, and gathering. Religious Holidays are special days related to the life or history of a central religious figure. They can also be a commemoration related to the history or journey of a specific religious group. The dates of some Holidays can vary from one year to another in accordance with the calendar they are related to, others can remain fixed.

In addition to Holidays, other religious occasions and special days have their commemoration throughout the year, and they vary between joy and sorrow.



The Liturgical Cycle and Holidays in the Christian Religion

Just like the calendar year (or civil year) is based on the earth revolving around the sun – so that we have days, seasons, and years – the liturgical year is based on the Church revolving around Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, so that we have salvation stages based on the thirty-three years in the life of Jesus-Christ, all in one year.

This great structure that we call ‘the liturgical year’ was not built all at once, in one step, or in one place. From a nucleus – a real tiny point – it evolved and grew to become a great tree with lofty branches.

The Church first gathered under the same liturgical Season of Resurrection all of Resurrection, Ascension, and Pentecost, as is witnessed by many texts that we have today. Then, with time, these Holidays were distributed as we know them today.

The yearly liturgical cycle in Byzantine Churches starts on the first of September and lasts twelve months starting with the Christmas season, then the Easter season, and finally Pentecost.

The liturgical cycle in Syriac Churches (Eastern and Western) start in November whereas the cycle of Saints starts early October.

Christmas and Epiphany

25 December and 6 January

Christmas and Epiphany were originally one Holiday celebrated by the Church in the West on December 25, and in the Church in the East on January 6. It commemorated and included the birth of Christ in body, Epiphany in Jesus' Baptism, Epiphany in Cana's miracle, and the appearance of a star to the Magi. It is a Holiday that includes several elements of the act of Redemption⁴.

The first reference in the history of the Church to determine the date of Christmas on December 25 dates back to 336. The Church chose this date because pagans used to celebrate the sun, their god, on that day. Since Christ is the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), and the Light of the World (John 8:12) the pagan holiday was given Christian characteristics and became the Holiday of the birth of Christ in body. This did not contradict with historical customs, for the habit was, at that time, for Romans and Greeks, to celebrate the birth of kings (Matthew 14:6) or any major character, even after their death. They would choose a symbolic day as was the case for Plato since they celebrated him on the day they celebrated Apollo.

As the Church in the West decided on December 25 to celebrate Christmas instead of the pagan holiday, the Eastern Church placed Epiphany in

⁴ See page 43.



place of the pagan holiday on January 6. With time, the East and the West exchanged the two holidays (Epiphany and Christmas) that represent two stages – each completed by the other – of one reality. This exchange occurred in the fourth century, according to John Chrysostom, with the introduction of December 25 as a Holiday by the Church of Antioch.

The Eastern Armenian Church is the only one to maintain the unity of both holidays (Christmas and Baptism of Christ) to be celebrated on January 6. Coptic and Ethiopian Churches celebrate the birth of Christ on January 7. On Christmas, midnight Mass is held in the East and the West, and the liturgical period around that date is called Christmas time. Christmas is the celebration of joy for St. Ephrem, it is 'Id al-Anwar, The Feast of Lights

for Syriacs, whereas Byzantines celebrate the Feast of Lights on Epiphany and Westerners celebrate it on the day commemorating the Presentation of Christ to the Temple.

The West prepares for Christmas four weeks in advance, Syriacs five weeks in advance, and Maronites seven weeks before Christmas. This preparation starts with the beginning of the liturgical year, i.e. on the first Sunday of November and goes on ten days after the Holiday.

Easterners in general and Byzantines in particular, often fast on this Holiday and abstinence from eating animal and dairy products for a duration that varies from one tradition to another. Popular traditions were derived from the liturgy of the Holiday. They include exchange of gifts, tolling of bells, lighting of fire, and building Nativity scenes. Some rituals have been inspired from old traditions that have been given Christian characteristics.



Popular Customs and Habits

The Planting of Seeds

"As they prepare for the Holiday, the Lebanese give particular importance to the planting of seeds in metal, earthenware, or glass plates which they fill with grain. They water them until they germinate and sprout. They use them to decorate their homes and Nativity scenes. These sprouts symbolize life after death, hope after desperation, and faith in the blessing of the newborn so that it may flood what they sow and remain in their homes abundantly."⁵

This popular tradition has roots in the Bible and in liturgy for Jesus Christ has compared Himself to a grain of wheat (John 12:24) and liturgy (official Church service) sees in it the grain of wheat that grew from the bosom of Virgin Mary (fertile ground).

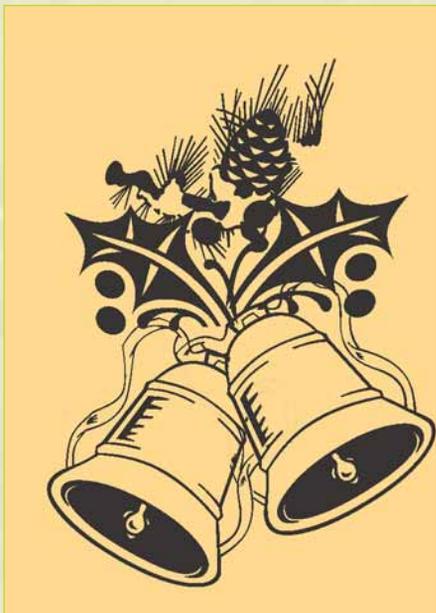
⁵ Khatir Lahd, *Lebanese Traditions and Customs, Part One*, Al-Jabal Printing Press, Dar'un, Lebanon, 1977, pages 116- 117.

Christmas Bells

On Christmas Eve churches toll the bells. On that particular night, the tolling of bells has a spectacular and moving effect. They stir faith and piety in the hearts, summoning people for religious celebrations that are held in specially-decorated churches. The first to spread this habit was the Emperor Constantine. After having built the Church of the Nativity with its own manger in Bethlehem, he ordered that the church toll its bells all of Christmas night to commemorate it.

Mangers or Nativity Scenes

The first to build them was Pope Telesphorus in the middle of the Second Century A.D. (125 - 135 A.D.). Emperor Constantine the Great built a great church in Bethlehem where the actual manger was (the manger where Christ was born). He built a Nativity scene which people visited in order to honor Christ. In the Seventh Century A.D., the



people of Rome who had returned from a visit to the Holy Land and Bethlehem built a similar manger to that in Bethlehem and presented it for honoring in Saint Peter's Basilica. In the Twelfth Century, Saint Francis of Assisi built in Graccio Forest in Italy a similar nativity scene to that in Bethlehem upon his return from a visit to the Holy Land. It included its figures and some real animals. This Nativity scene became famous around the world. People from all countries visited, and built similar Nativity scenes to represent the birth of Jesus Christ. These Nativity scenes were not introduced in Lebanon until recently, coming from the West through European missionaries and Priests who had studied in Europe.

Christmas Gifts

It is said that the habit of exchanging gifts on Christmas has been inspired from the gifts of the Magi who carried gold, myrrh, and frankincense. Exchange of gifts mainly occurs among relatives,

friends or colleagues, each within his means or his social standard. One of the oldest gifts for blessing is the Holiday pastry. Some would go on preparing it from 'birth to baptism', i.e. from Christmas to Epiphany, probably believing in the unity of the two Holidays. Christ was born in the manger, and to Him, the Magi offered their spiritual offerings. To Him too are offered the material presents we offer to our relatives. On Christmas, many charitable initiatives and deeds are undertaken, which echo the prayers of the Church: we no longer distinguish between Your face, Our Lord, and the face of the needy, the lost, the oppressed, the hungry, the naked, and the sick.

Bayramun (Pre-Christmas Fast)

What Christians also seek on Christmas is the spiritual preparation for the Holiday. The Church used to impose fasting and vegetarian diet to prepare for this Holiday. With time, the Church reduced this period to one day, called bayramun.



Yet, though the Church no longer imposes fast, Christians do so voluntarily, eating only bread and boiled food without oil or butter. Some fast three days prior to Christmas without any food intake.

The Christmas Tree

The tree has a major symbolic role in Christianity. It starts with the Tree of Life in Paradise. The tree and decoration became one of the popular habits at Christmas time in the early Eleventh Century. The tree at the door of the church at Christmas time is meant to link between the Creation of humanity from Adam and Eve and the birth of Christ, the new Adam, and the rebirth of humanity. The Christmas tree was particularly used in Alsace in the Sixteenth Century. It was lit and had a star on top. In the Nineteenth Century the Christmas tree



spread in Northern and Southern Europe. After World War I, the Christmas tree was everywhere in the world all lit and always with renewed decoration.

The Christmas Log

The lights of joy would be kindled in the chimney at the start of winter. After Christmas was set on December 25, it became a habit for the youngest and the oldest in the family to put a log from a fruitful tree or an oak tree into the chimney on Christmas night. This habit would sometimes last for twelve nights from Christmas to Epiphany, from birth to baptism wishing for the light of Christmas to be always lit and its warmth radiant in the home and in the hearts.

The log has turned into a cake that is called 'Christmas log' that all the family members eat, wishing one another a good life hoping to meet again on the following Christmas. The Christmas log in its various forms has also become a gift that siblings, relatives, and friends offer with 'Merry Christmas and Happy New Year' spelled out on top with piped cream.



Santa Claus

Ever since the Fourth Century, there spread in the Christianity the story of Saint Nicolas who had saved innocent children from a mean butcher. This child-loving Saint was commemorated on December 6. Along with his story, there came another legend that on the day of his commemoration, he was seen moving from the roof of one home to another to place gifts and sweets in the shoes placed by the fireplace.

These factors contributed to the development of a tradition, which is the exchange of gifts to express genuine affection. The legend of gift distribution in the life story of Saint Nicolas inspired the character of 'Santa Claus' in Europe. The consumer market that prevails in most societies has contributed to making the phenomenon of 'Santa Claus' widespread in the world. He is portrayed as a plump, white-bearded old man who brings surprise gifts to children. The children of the Armenian Orthodox Church await 'Santa Claus' on New Year's Eve to have their gifts.



Epiphany (Theophania or Aldenh)

The words Theophania or *Aldenh* in Syriac express the true meaning of Epiphany, the day of Baptism of Christ in the River Jordan by John the Baptist, when the sky opened above Him, the Spirit came down upon Him, and in a loud voice, God said 'This is my own dear Son, and I am pleased with him.' (Matthew 3: 16,17).

Epiphany as well as Resurrection and Pentecost are the major Holidays and foundations of the Eastern liturgical year. Epiphany is a fixed starting point. Celebrating this Holiday includes, in addition to mass and duties, the rite of 'blessing of water by night'. Similarly to Christ who was baptized in the River Jordan then went to the desert to fast for forty days, the Church baptizes its spiritual sons on the day of Epiphany after having blessed the water of rivers and sources. Then all start a period of fasting for forty days. The start of the fasting period is determined by virtue of the lunar calendar as mentioned previously and the date is moveable.

On the Eve of Epiphany, Christian practices are many, based on popular beliefs and traditions. The major popular belief is that Christ will pass by all homes at midnight to bless all those who live in it saying 'For ever and ever' (*Da'im, da'im*).

This is why people stay up awaiting the passage of Christ to receive His blessing. They light candles, light a fire in the fireplace, and prepare special sweets for the Holiday namely fried sweets dipped in syrup as a symbol of the Baptism of Christ when He plunged in the River Jordan. Among the special sweets are also a sort of pancake (*zlabiyah*) and ma'karun symbolizing the finger of John the Baptist who pointed at Christ and said: 'Behold the lamb of God who carries the sins of

the world'. In some homes, housewives turn the grain and contents of different jars saying 'For ever and ever' (*Da'im da'im*) thus asking for the permanent blessing of Christ. An old tradition has it that Epiphany night is 'Laylat al-Qadr' as people believe that the doors of Heaven will open just as they were on the Baptism of Christ. So the Angels descend to Earth to carry to God the invocations and wishes of people.

The New Yeast

Housewives used to prepare bread and cook it in their homes. They would use new yeast instead of the old on Epiphany night. Tradition had it that they would mix flour with water and turn it into a circular shape on which they would draw a Cross. They would place this piece in a bag made of white gauze. It would be left on a tree until morning to rise without adding any yeast. Some would add to the dough a few silver coins that they would split in the morning as they have been blessed with the new yeast. They would place these coins in their wallets as an omen of good wealth. The only condition was that the tree not be a fig tree as people believed that when Christ passes by at night all trees bow to him except the fig tree that Christ had cursed.

The Blessing of Water

On Epiphany, Christians go to church to celebrate Mass and take part in the rite of the blessing of water. Many carry a bottle filled with water which they place next to a recipient filled with drinking water in the middle of the church. The Priest celebrating Mass blesses the water then sprinkles the church

and those who are in it, as a sign that the church and those who are in it are dedicated to God. A part of the blessed water in the recipient is given to those among the congregation who want it. After Mass, each takes his bottle to distribute holy water to those who could not come. The Priest later visits his parishioners and sprinkles their homes with holy water. Families that have a new-born try to have him/her baptized on this day because Christ was baptized on this day. The church bells toll all day announcing the celebration of many baptisms. In the Armenian Orthodox Church, Priests visit the homes of their Parish starting the Eve of the Holiday and for forty days, to announce the Good News of Christ's birth. They do the same starting from the Eve of Holy Saturday which precedes Easter as they announce the Good News of Christ's Resurrection. Thus, they visit the homes in their Parishes blessing them and blessing as well bread, salt, and water as symbols of life. After Mass and the Baptism of Jesus Christ on Christmas Day, January 6, holy water blessed with holy Chrism (*mayrun*) is distributed to the faithful.

The Prostration of the Magi

Epiphany in the West is the Holiday of the star appearing to the Magi Kings coming from the East to Bethlehem to prostrate in worship of the newborn Jesus. This is why a custom was spread that in family feast meals, a fava bean is inserted in the dough of a round cake that is cut in even pieces and handed out to all the members. The member of the family that finds the bean in his/her piece of cake is hailed king.

The Blessing of Fruits

In some villages, farmers tend to place a part of their harvest in front of the Nativity scene of the town church then they retrieve these agricultural products after Epiphany and hand them out to each other to be eaten. It is believed that Christ blesses the fruits and crops as He passes the Eve of the Holiday. New plentiful crops are harvested as a result.



Lent

The Importance of Lent

People fast to give their prayer more weight, to be granted pardon for their sins, to economize their money in order to give more of it to the needy and to prepare for the Holiday.

The Fathers of the Church⁶ state that some Christians would fast for two or three days in a row and some would fast for two weeks except Saturday and Sunday. At the end of the fourth century, the faithful used to fast for three weeks.

This 'numeric evolution' started progressively from the older nucleus: from three days (Easter Triduum)⁷ prior to Easter, to a week recalling Holy week, to forty days. This number is mentioned in the Bible: Moses, Elijah... and Jesus Christ all fasted for forty days.

This Holy time was a time of preparation for catechumens and the best time for repentance. It is also and most especially a preparation for the Holy Resurrection. The faithful remember their baptism and try to repent as they live with the struggling Church a fight against Satan, one which will not end other than by the return of Christ. Lent is often a time for the faithful to remember the law about abstinence from food and drink. The aim is for the faithful to fast spiritually forgetting about all worldly matters, to live with the heart and the soul and be prepared for the Holy Resurrection.

It is a time to look and listen to Christ trying to follow His steps, praying as He did and praying as He taught them. It is also a time of acceptance of the strength of Christ who struggled against the Temptation of the devil, was crucified, died, and then rose from the dead. The Holy time of Lent is a time to follow the steps of the Redeemer⁸ and take part in Salvation. It is a time of love to be given to one's neighbor, oneself, and God.

The ones who fast find strength and resistance to hardships by communal prayer. Spiritual exercises⁹ are organized in many churches and associations to make faith related matters clearer and guide people through the necessary religious practices they may have forgotten. The Church's recommendation is not to organize marriages during the forty day Lent.

The Apostles followed in the steps of their Master and also fasted. Their fast was a spiritual context through which they would feel the Holy Spirit amidst the community of the faithful. Fasting would also precede events related to the new Annunciation (Acts 2:3 - 13). Paul the Apostle recommended that Churches fast (1 Corinthians 5: 7). Paul himself would fast a lot (2 Corinthians 11: 27). In addition to the fasting of Lent, which is called Great Lent, Christians fast at other times such as the time before Christmas, the Apostles day, and Assumption...

⁶ The Fathers of the Church are the early theologians and writers in the Christian Church. They were characterized by quality teaching and holy life as well as approval from the church.

⁷ Easter Triduum are the three days that precede Easter Sunday and in which the events linked with the Passion of the Christ are recalled, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

⁸ The Redeemer is the name given to Christ who with the Mystery of his death and Resurrection, redeems man and frees him from sin and gives him eternal life in God.

⁹ Spiritual exercise is a time when believers withdraw from public life to think, mediate, and pray.

Carnival

The word is derived from the Latin word *levare*, which is 'to remove', 'to raise'. It is a period of preparation to refrain from food and drink as well as other prohibited practices during the forty-day Lent. Thus, Christians hold feasts in the days prior to Lent. Some regions such as Venice in Italy, Nice in France, and Rio de Janeiro in Brazil hold pre-Lenten carnivals. On the last day of the week, on the eve of Lent, a lot of marriages and family reunions are held. All meat, eggs and dairy products are brought out of homes. Carnival is held for a week prior to Great Lent in Catholic Churches. The Orthodox Church holds two Carnivals, one for meat, which is two Sundays before Lent, after which the faithful refrain from eating any meat. The other Carnival is for dairy products, and is right before Lent [It is called the 'Cheese fare']. After that, all dairy products (meat, eggs, cheese, and milk) are forbidden. The Armenian Orthodox Church considers Great Lent –where the faithful refrain from dairy products - as the most important although they have many other periods of fasting.

The Beginning of Lent

The Eve of Forgiveness Sunday in Byzantine Churches, Ash Monday in the Maronite Church, and Ash Wednesday in the Latin Church.

The Eve of Forgiveness Sunday: Forgiveness Sunday is the Sunday prior to Great Lent. It is called so since its spiritual meaning focuses on forgiveness among Christians. The Triodion, the book of Lent prayers, calls it 'The Sunday Adam was expelled from Paradise' because he had sinned. The Chapter from the Bible dedicated to this day highlights forgiveness: 'If you forgive others for the wrongs they do to you, your Father in heaven will forgive you. But if you don't forgive others, your Father will not forgive you.' (Matthew 6: 14 - 15). This is why at the end of the vespers (late afternoon prayer) held on Forgiveness Sunday, the faithful approach the Priest and kneel in front of the Cross, embrace it, and ask God for forgiveness. Then they ask each other for forgiveness saying 'Forgive me brother' and the answer is 'God has forgiven you, beloved brother'. This is how they start the following day with repentance through Great Lent.

Ash: Calling the beginning of Lent 'Ash Monday' is taken from the Latin liturgy that starts Lent on Wednesday with the rite of the blessing of ashes, and is called Ash Wednesday. Ash Monday is seven weeks prior to Easter.

The habit of placing ashes on the forehead is old. It symbolizes regret and sorrow for sins and faults one has done against the Creator. The Church chose ashes for this rite because they symbolize

the origin of man and his end. God has created him from 'ashes' and his fate after death is to become 'ashes' again. Job says: 'I repent in dust and ashes.' The Prophets of Israel¹⁰ incited people to repent and placed ashes on people's heads. Penitents have followed in their footsteps since the beginning of Christianity. The habit was generalized in Western Churches as a liturgical practice on the first day of Lent, at the time of the twelfth century. As concerns Eastern liturgy, the practice was used mainly in the Maronite Church in the beginning of Lent.

In the Old Testament, the body was covered with ashes as a sign of repentance and sorrow. Written testimonies in this sense abound, for instance: Joshua 7: 2 and 6, Samuel 13:19, Ezekiel 27:30, Job 2:12, and 42:7, Jonas 3:6, and finally Esther 4:3. Christians in the first generations would place ashes on their bodies as a particular and special ritual. This use would express communal repentance. During the rite of ashes, since the beginning, the placing of the ashes on the foreheads was accompanied with the proclamation of this verse from the Scriptures: 'Remember (O man) that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' (Genesis 3:19) or 'Repent and believe the Gospel'. The habit of collecting ashes became popular in many churches, the ashes being gathered from the burning of blessed branches from the previous year's Palm Sunday that were kept in the church.

¹⁰ Israel also called the Northern Kingdom was in constant fight with the Kingdom of Judah in the South until its destruction in 721 B. C.



On Ash Monday, the Priest places ashes on the foreheads of Christians in the shape of a Cross saying; 'Remember (O man) that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.' Other individuals may help the Priest.

Sundays of Lent

Fasting season in the Maronite liturgy consists of Sundays and weeks. The Sundays are: Cana Sunday, The Leper Sunday, the Hemorrhaging Woman Sunday, the Prodigal Son Sunday, the Paralytic Sunday and Bartimeus the Blind Sunday. Lent season officially ends on Good Friday before Lazarus Saturday and Hosanna Sunday. The Church then reads the chapter on the Temptation of Christ (Matthew 4 /1 - 11). Weeks on the other hand, include liturgically the first week, called the Week of Lent, which is repeated in the second and third weeks, the fourth week called the Week of Miracles and that is repeated in the fifth week, and Hosanna Week, which is the sixth week and is never repeated. In Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches, there are two particular Sundays: the first, 'The Triumph of Orthodoxy' and the third, 'Adoration of the Cross' Sunday.

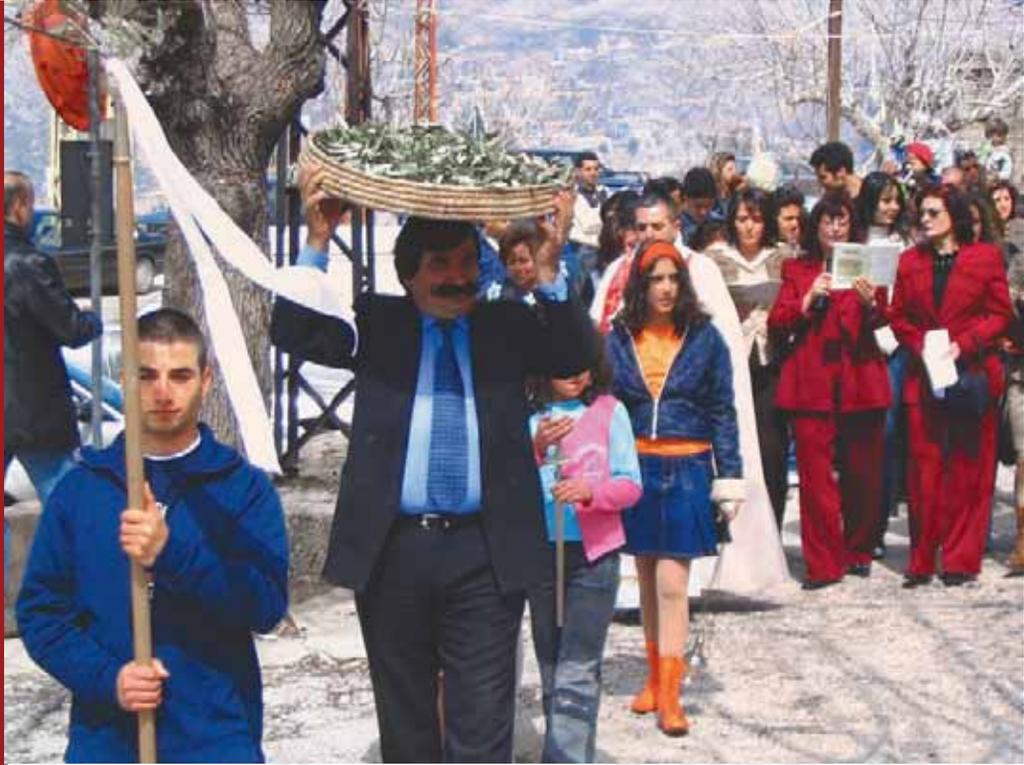
The Triumph of the Orthodoxy [on Iconoclasm]: Orthodox Churches are particularly known for honoring Holy icons that the faithful put up in churches and homes to help them in always remembering God, in praying and in living piously. The Byzantine Church witnessed in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries a war that lasted 120 years. It was launched by the Emperor on Holy icons trying to remove them from churches, monasteries, and homes. This war ended in 843 when Empress Theodora approved the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (787 AD) which stipulated that icons and the Cross should always be honored and put up in churches and homes. The faithful in Constantinople carried icons and held a procession carrying them. This was on the first Sunday of the Great Lent which was henceforth called Sunday

of the Orthodoxy which is 'The Triumph of the Orthodoxy'. The faithful bring icons from their homes to the church to Holy Mass and carry them in procession inside the church.

Adoration of the Cross Sunday: on this Sunday the faithful prostrate before the Cross, drawing from it strength and hope to proceed with their fasting. At Matins [early morning prayer service], the priest brings the Cross out of the sanctuary. He sets the Cross on a tray decorated with flowers, and surrounded with three candles and incense-burners and takes them in procession to the center of the church, where he sets the Cross rests on a Holy Table where it remains for a week. The Priest leads the faithful who prostrate before the Cross and kiss the feet of Christ on the Cross. They take one flower as a symbol of Christ's victory over death and carry it with them back home. Some keep these flowers year after year placing them in the Bible or in prayer books or in spiritual books.

Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday or Hosanna Sunday is taken from the cry of acclamation and adoration used to welcome Christ upon His entry into Jerusalem, "Hosanna". Palm Sunday, that precedes Passion Week, commemorates a major event, the peak of Christ's ministry, namely: His entry into Jerusalem, the Holy City, on a donkey as a victorious king. Christ appears in this event as a humble king entering the capital of his kingdom, Jerusalem, amidst a great crowd. The people, the Apostles and children were chanting 'Hosanna', meaning 'O Savior, O Savior'. They waved olive and palm branches. Thus, Palm Sunday prefigures Resurrection from the dead and the final kingly victory!



Yet, this event and the ensuing purification of worship in the Temple, when Christ threw out the merchants and money-changers, among others, from the Temple, were the main reason why Christ was tried to death by the Sanhedrin. This is why the Glory of Hosanna is foreshadowed by the Cross and death, and why Palm Sunday prefigures of Good Friday and Crucifixion.

This great event was celebrated at first by the Church in Jerusalem. It then spread from Jerusalem to all Churches, Eastern and Western, each preserving it in their own way.

There is one famous book by a Spanish pilgrim, the nun Egeria, *Itinerarium Egeriae*, or the *Travels of Egeria* in which she describes minutely the liturgy in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, in Jerusalem, on Palm Sunday:

'At seven, all go out with the Bishop to the Mount of Olives' church. They sing and chant special hymns for this day and place, and have special readings. When the hour is near nine, they go singing hymns to where the Lord ascended to Heaven. They sit

there and all are asked to sit with the Bishop, all except deacons who remain standing, singing and chanting. They chant hymns, prayers and readings specific to this day and place.

At eleven, is read from the Gospels the chapter about the children who hurried to greet Christ, waving palm and olive branches, and shouting 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'

The Bishop and the rest of the crowd then stand and go down on foot from Mount Olive, the people ahead of the Bishop shouting 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'. All the children in the city, even toddlers, carried on their parents' shoulders, wave olive and palm branches. They go with the Bishop as it had been done for the Lord back then.'

The celebration of the blessing of branches as a rite and the palm procession are still quite popular and widespread. This celebration comes at the end of the six-week Lent. On the morning



of this Palm Sunday, parents dress their children up with fine clothes and pick for them beautiful candles that vary in color and shape, decorated with colored satin ribbons.

The congregation then carries the candles in procession either in the church or outside chanting 'Hosanna in the heavens' whereas the church bells toll. The Priest blesses the branches that are carried in the procession. At the end of the ceremony, olive branches are distributed to the congregation as a blessing, and each member of the congregation takes his/her branch home respectfully. Some of the faithful place the branches above the entrance door of their homes, and others see in them the hope of Resurrection.



Holy Week (Passion Week)

On the Eve of Palm Sunday starts the rite of 'arrival to harbor' (*al wusul ila al mina'*) in the Maronite Church, the rite of Lights (*naheeré*) for Chaldeans, the rite of the ten virgins for Syriacs, and the Prayer of the Spouse (*salat al khatn*) for Byzantines. The church is in mourning and all decoration is removed.

All ceremonies during Passion Week and its liturgy are an embodiment of the major stages of Salvation as mentioned in the Holy Scriptures and as lived by the early Christians and maintained in the tradition of the Church. The faithful attempt to follow in the footsteps of the last stages of the life of Christ, the Savior, just like they take part in all the spiritual and human stages of the life of Christ, the Redeemer.

In the first days of the week, the Church brings people closer to those whose lives were a symbol to the life of the Redeemer: Joseph, Son of Jacob, who was sold by his own brothers; Isaac whose father Abraham wanted to offer as a sacrifice; Job, etc. The prophecies of the Prophets are heard as well as their strong lamentations, all of which help the faithful think more deeply and more clearly, trying to follow in the steps of the life of the divine Redeemer.

On Holy Wednesday, called *Urbu'a' Ayyub (Job)*, the rite of Holy Unction is performed. Oil is blessed, and is placed on the forehead of the believers as a sign of repentance, consolation, and strength.



Holy Thursday

It is a Holiday in which the church is decorated and lit with Candles. On this day is the rite of blessing of holy oils and chrisms¹¹. Also there is the rite of the washing of feet and Mass. John is the only one in the Gospel to mention the washing by Christ of the Twelve Apostles' feet in the Cenacle on the eve of his Passion, during his Last paschal Supper.

After evening Mass, the Holy Eucharist is taken to a place of reposition, usually a side chapel. The altar is made bare. The faithful visit the Holy Eucharist in churches to take part in the Agony of Christ when He was in the Garden [of Gethsemane]. The Holy Eucharist is exposed until morning in some churches, when pre-sanctified mass is celebrated.

¹¹ Holy oils are those of Baptism and the unction of the sick. The oil of chrisms is balm and oil used in the Sacraments of confirmation and ordination.





The Rite of Washing of Feet has Two Traditions

The first – and perhaps oldest – used to be widespread in Churches where the priest would wash the feet of the congregation and anoint them.

The other – relatively more recent – tradition is found today. The priest washes the feet of twelve individuals only to represent the twelve Apostles.

The root of this practice appears to be found in the hospitality customs of Jews at the time of Jesus. Feet would grow dirty quickly from dusty roads and servants or slaves would wash the feet of the guest.



There would be jars full of water at the door of the house and servants would wash the feet of guests before they entered the house. Christ washed the feet of His disciples and then explained to them what He had done as a lesson of humility and humbleness. He said: 'The most important one of you should be like the least important, and your leader should be like a servant.' (John 13:16)

In the beginning of the last supper, Jesus Christ blessed the bread and the wine in the presence of His disciples and He gave bread and wine new

Holy meaning as He said: 'Take this and eat it. This is my body... Take this and drink it. This is my blood, and with it God makes his agreement with you.' (mathew 26: 26 - 28). 'But if you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you will have eternal life and I will rise to you on the last day.' (John 6:54). This was the first Holy Eucharist¹² in Han history. Since then, every Holy Thursday and in every Mass, the Priest blesses the bread and the wine in remembrance of what Christ did.

¹² First action of thanksgiving to God.



After Supper, Christ went as usual with His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives to spend the night praying. As He was bent in deep prayer, Judas Iscariot, one of the disciples who had partaken in the supper in the Cenacle [upper room], shows up with a group of soldiers of the High Priest. Judas rushed to Jesus, embraced and kissed Him. Jesus said to him: 'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' (Luke 22: 48) The soldiers arrested Him and led Him to the high priest. Jesus was tried and crucified. Peter, the Apostle, denied Christ thrice

before the crowing of the cock. Then he repented and wept.

On this Thursday, the faithful go to church to visit the exposed Holy Eucharist. There is an old tradition in Jerusalem that dates back to the first generation and is about visiting all the places Jesus stopped on the Golgotha. They have been summed up today in the visit to seven churches, whence the habit Christians have of visiting seven churches on that day.



Last Supper icon: Christ amidst His twelve Disciples on Thursday's supper, the night prior to His handing in to the Sanhedrin and His condemnation to death. Christians remember this event during Mass.

Good Friday

Good Friday, Redemption day, is the great turning point in the history of God, the universe, and man: Jesus Christ dies on the Cross. Thus, He renews and gathers all what is in Heaven and on Earth. The Gospel, Matthew, Marc, Luke, and John, have all spoken of this great historical moment. They depicted the Passion of Christ, hour by hour, until His Calvary and His death on the Cross, naked, surrounded by two thieves, under the very eyes of His Mother, the Virgin Mary, and his Disciple, John.

As they commemorate the Passion of Christ and his death, the faithful kneel to the Cross, in the Rite of Kneeling, bow to the Crucified as He overcomes and is victorious of pain and death with the Holy resurrection. There is no distinction between Good Friday and the great Resurrection Sunday. The mourning of the Church does not express sorrow for the Dead by crying, lamenting, wailing, and bemoaning but rather with fasting, mortification, prayer, as well as a good and pious life.

In liturgical texts, grief and sorrow are mixed with hope and joy. In the Chaldean liturgy, Paschal season starts with Good Friday. Standing in the church lasts until Pentecost. There is an old tradition, which is to paint Christ, dead, in the clothes of a king, with eyes wide open, to symbolize the living Christ despite his death on the Cross.

Good Friday is a particularly special day in Christ's communal Church. On this day, the Christians fast, priests do not celebrate Mass and do not give the final blessing. The only rite is the benediction of Chalice or the pre-sanctified mass. The Holy Eucharist is cleared from churches, and other places of worship as a sign that the Church is mourning and in deep sorrow for the death of its Heavenly beloved.

The rites of the burial of Christ or of prostrating before the Cross are held before and after noon in honor of He who has sacrificed himself as Redeemer. Grief is expressed in many ways as the



day is a reminder of the many sufferings in the history of mankind and in the life of Christ.

Some churches commemorate the Golgotha at the time Christ died, in the afternoon, in church or in the streets, in front of a great fervent crowd, especially on this day. Churches hold a lot of celebrations to mark the funeral and burial of Christ. Some of the faithful place flowers on

the Sepulcher as they enter the church, as a reenactment of the burial of Christ.

Good Friday is a day to unite with the Passion of Christ, lead an ascetic life, repent, and commit to fasting. Fasting actually becomes harder on this day, some of the faithful fast without any food intake, eat very little on Holy Saturday, and go on fasting until Easter Sunday.





Holy Saturday

Holy Saturday, or Great Saturday, is a day of rest for Christ after His agony and His death. On this day, he is said to have preached the Good News to the departed. He announced Resurrection that may fill the universe with light, and man with joy and new life.

Holy Saturday is the last day of Holy Week and is a special day in the liturgical year as no Mass is celebrated. In Byzantine Churches, Mass is celebrated on Holy Saturday. It is the only day on which fasting is compulsory whereas the breaking of fast is allowed on all the other Saturdays of Lent. Holy Saturday liturgy in all Syriac liturgies is characterized by the 'prayer of forgiveness' (Salat al-Ghufran). It is a rite of communal reconciliation and repentance completely different than the rest of prayers during Holy Week. At the time of this prayer, mourning in church is lifted and the Priest gives the blessing once again after having been stopped during the Holy Week. Traditionally, the Priest says at the end of the rite: 'Christ is risen!' and the congregation answer: 'Truly, He is risen'. Then starts the joy of Resurrection.

The core of this liturgical rite comprises two elements: asking God for forgiveness and one's brothers for pardon. The communal aspect of this rite is essential to the concept of repentance as the sinner returns to God and to the community of the Church. On this Holy Saturday, catechumens would be prepared to the Sacrament of Baptism and a special paschal evening would be held for prayer.

Easter

In the Old Testament, this Holiday had the same name, Easter and Passover. It was a yearly compulsory religious celebration and the ritual of lamb eating for the Holiday was also compulsory on the fourteenth of April (based on the Lunar Calendar). Christ celebrated Passover with His Disciples. But on the Last Supper, he ended this symbol, and He became the Lamb of God. Passover was celebrated every Sunday, the Day of God, and it remained so until the end of the second century. Since then, there appeared the desire to consecrate one Sunday of the year for a special celebration, as Passover feast. It was agreed in the East and the West that Easter should be commemorated on the Sunday following the full moon after the spring equinox, i.e. between March 22 and April 25.

In 1582, after the reform introduced by Pope Gregory XIII to the Julian calendar which had been used so far, ten days were ruled out of the year. States and Churches adopted this Reform, as concerns the civil year as well as the liturgical year for fixed Holidays such as Christmas, Epiphany, Assumption, and the Exaltation of the Cross. The problem remained only for Easter and has been so ever since. Contention is only about the date of the Holiday and not the essence or the liturgy of the Holiday that are the same in both the east and the West. Resurrection Sunday is THE Holiday in the faithful Church. It has become the center of all other Holidays that have gradually arisen in the Church. They set off from this day and to it they return.



Ever since the celebration of Easter became yearly, it has come to last fifty days. They form, according to Tertilianus, one Holiday just like Sunday. The Church started to stop at major stages: the first week after Resurrection (Octave of Easter, *Usbu' al-Hiwariyyin*) and the first Sunday after Resurrection, the Ascension of the Lord to heaven a Thursday at the end of the fortieth day, and Pentecost, which concludes a liturgical time, Eastertide, after which starts Ordinary Time. On Resurrection Sunday, the communal Church celebrates different rites to express the importance of this singular event: the Byzantine liturgy celebrates the 'Opening of the Doors' procession (*Al-Hajmah*), Armenian liturgy celebrates 'Myrrh bearers', Chaldean liturgy celebrates 'Evening hymns', and all are 'Resurrection religious obligations'. The Maronite and Syriac liturgies celebrate the 'Paschal Peace' rite in which the Cross is lifted from the grave, where it was buried on Good Friday in the rite of Prostration. A white flag is placed on it, the sign of victory over death, pain, and sin. A procession carries the Cross around the church for the believers to kiss and be blessed by it. The link between Good Friday and Resurrection Sunday is very strong: the One to have died on the Cross and to have been buried in the grave, is the same to Rise victorious over pain and death.

As concerns the 'Opening of the Doors' procession, after the members of the congregation gather in the church, they start to pray. Then they come out of the church in procession to the door of the church. The latter door is locked from inside. The chief-Priest comes forth and knocks thrice asking for the door to be opened. Upon the third time, the door is opened, and all enter the church which has been fully lit. People carry candles and sing:

'Christ is Risen from the Dead, Trampling Down Death by Death, and Upon Those in the Tombs Bestowing Life'. When the faithful come out of church they exchange the Paschal greeting: 'Christ is risen!' to which the answer is: 'Truly, He is risen' as a public declaration of creed.

Distribution of Eggs

The traditional distribution of hardboiled and colored eggs to those who are coming out of church is common. Eggs are a symbol of fertility and especially of Christ's resurrection from the grave, just like the young bird makes its way out of the egg alive. Eggs were forbidden during fast in the first centuries, which is why Christian tradition encouraged the eating of eggs upon breaking them on Easter.

Cakes and Ma'mul

Christians prepare round cakes in the shape of crowns and fill them with dates. They also prepare *ma'mul* in the shape of cones and fill them with pistachio, almonds, and sugar. They aim at commemorating the pain and suffering of Christ which resulted in the joy of Resurrection. The round shape of the cakes symbolizes the thorny crown that was placed on Christ's head, and the conic shape of *Ma'muul* symbolizes the sponge that was dipped in vinegar given by the soldiers to Christ when He asked for water. The date filling of the cake and pistachio or almond and sugar filling of *Ma'mul* all represent the aftermath of Christ's suffering, the joy of Resurrection and redemption.



Chocolate Eggs

About a century ago, chocolate eggs became a tradition in addition to other chocolate shapes in order to meet growing demand in this sense. People made chocolate hens, which provide the eggs, or chocolate fish, the symbol of early Christians (fish in Greek is 'Ichthys', which is an anagram for 'Jesus Christ Son of God, Savior').

Al- Ba'uth (Resurrection Procession)

In Byzantine Churches and for Easter, a procession is held on Sunday or Monday in the church and around it. Christians read in various languages the Gospel about the apparition of Christ in the attic whereas the doors were closed. On that day, all are allowed to read the Bible, whereas it is usually a priest or a bishop who reads the Bible. This celebration symbolizes the spreading of Good news about Christ's Resurrection to everyone, each one in his own language.

Ascension

Ascension is celebrated on the sixth Thursday after Easter, i.e. forty days after Christ's death. On this day, Christ appeared for the last time to His Disciples. Before ascending to Heaven under the eyes of His Disciples on the Mount of Olives, He wanted to make it clear that His ascension did not mean that he was forsaking humanity. This is why He announced to His Disciples the coming of the Holy Spirit. He promised to stay with them to spread the message about deliverance to the world over and promised to return on Salvation Day. His ascension

to Heaven means his meeting with the Divine World, reaching Glory, and expressing visibly all what has been achieved with Resurrection.

Pentecost

Pentecost is celebrated on Sunday, fifty days after Easter. It commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire. For this reason, Pentecost is described as the Church's birthday. The word for Pentecost in Arabic, 'Ansara, is derived from Syriac, where it means 'gathering'. The Holiday indicates the effusion of the miraculous graces of the Holy Spirit on the Disciples, and then on the whole Church. Upon their return from morning Mass, parents place their children on swings and tell them all day about what happened to the Apostles (Acts: 1 - 2).



Corpus Christi Thursday

It is the Thursday after Trinity observed as a Roman Catholic Holiday in honor of the Eucharist. Pope Urban IV imposed this celebration (Corpus Christi) on August 11, 1264. It was spread in the fourteenth century. Henceforth, popular religious processions became widespread. In them, people honor publically and wholeheartedly the Body of Christ (Corpus Christi) in the Eucharist (*qurban*). In Lebanon, the town of *Zahlé* is particularly famous for this procession.



Celebrating Corpus Christi Thursday in one of the churches in North Lebanon. The town of Zahlah is particularly famous for holding one of the biggest processions on Corpus Christi Thursday.]

The Exaltation of the Cross

On September 14, the Church commemorates two events:

The first commemoration: is the finding of the Cross upon which Christ was crucified. This occurred in 327 in the Sepulchre on Mount Golgotha in the suburbs of Jerusalem during Emperor Constantine's reign (306 - 337). He ordered the start of digging and searching supervised by his mother, Queen Helena. The Queen was so moved by the finding of the Cross that she ordered the lighting of fires on mountain tops, based on a prearranged plan, in order for the

news to reach the Emperor in Constantinople as fast as possible. This is the origin of the tradition of fire lighting on mountain tops on September 14, the holiday decided by the Emperor himself.

The second commemoration: The recovery of the true Cross from the Persians in 628 as they had seized it in 614 upon entering Jerusalem. It is Emperor Heraclius (610 - 641) who recovered the true Cross from Emperor Tabriz after defeating the Persians. Heraclius carried the Cross on his shoulders upon arriving to Jerusalem and



carried it in procession to the church of the Holy Sepulchre.

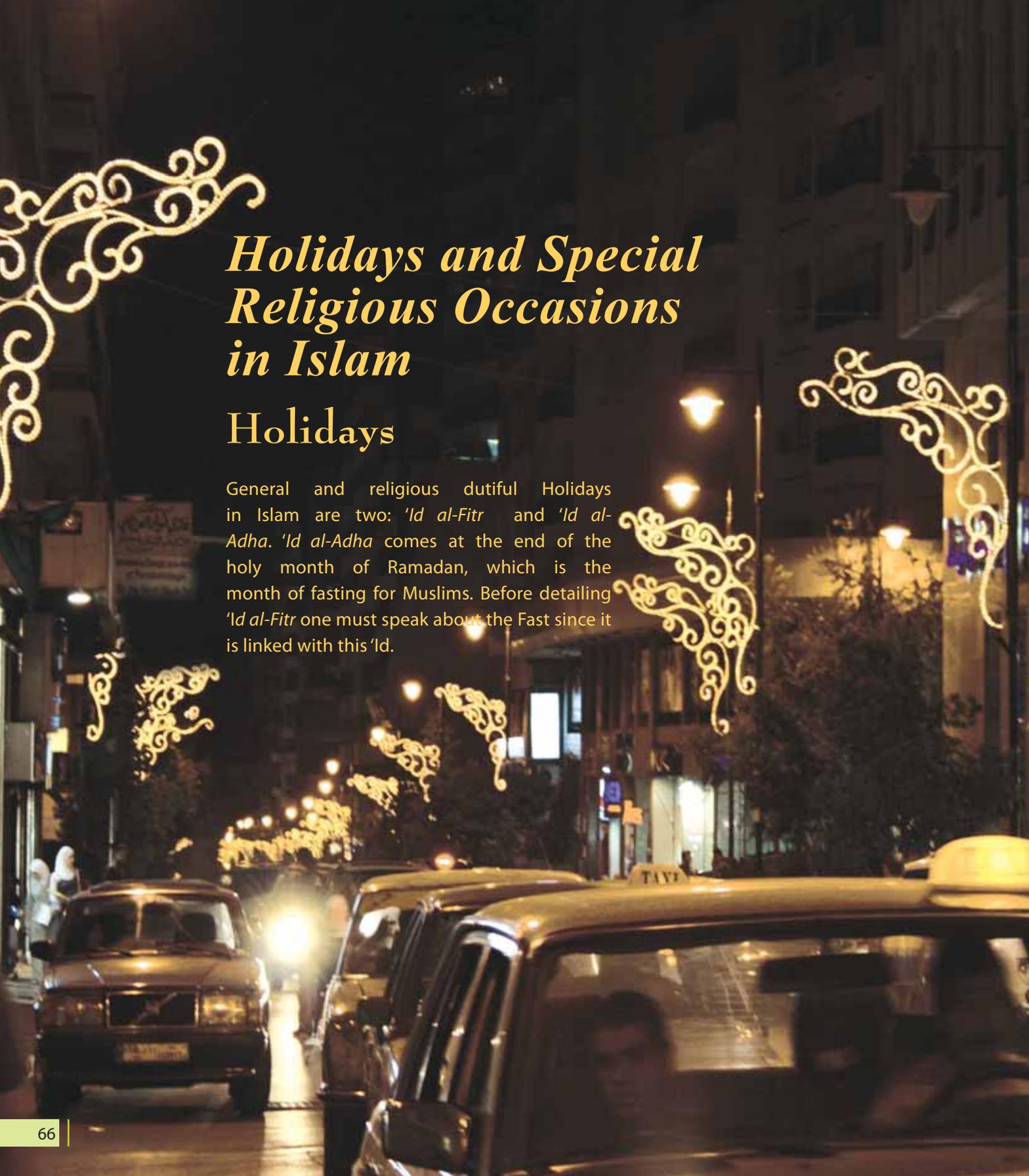
On the eve of this Holiday, Christians gather on mountain tops or in public squares and light fires with wood or timber. They express their joy by singing and dancing. They also light candles on roof tops and balconies all night. Children rejoice with fire works and firecrackers.

Christian farmers believe this Holiday gives them clues as to what to expect the following year concerning rain or dry weather, cheapness or expensiveness. These clues are called in their terminology, Ember Days (*Bawahir, Salibiyyat*). They cover twelve days after the Exaltation of the Cross. The way of counting is to consider the day of

the Holiday the end of the month. Each following day corresponds to one month in the year. Every moment corresponds to one day of the month. On the eve of the Holiday they would take a fig or mulberry leaf and would tie it to a stick. The latter stick would be placed on a roof that might witness dew falling. Each leaf would correspond to one month, as of September. They would then rise early to check the leaves. If the leaf is dry, then the corresponding month would be so, if not then the corresponding month would be wet.

Note: Farmers' almanac for Catholics starts on September 14 whereas for the Orthodox it starts on September 27.



A night street scene with cars and decorative light fixtures. The scene is illuminated by streetlights and decorative golden light fixtures that resemble intricate scrollwork or floral patterns. Several cars are visible, including a taxi with a 'TAXI' sign on its roof. The background shows buildings and more streetlights, creating a warm, urban atmosphere.

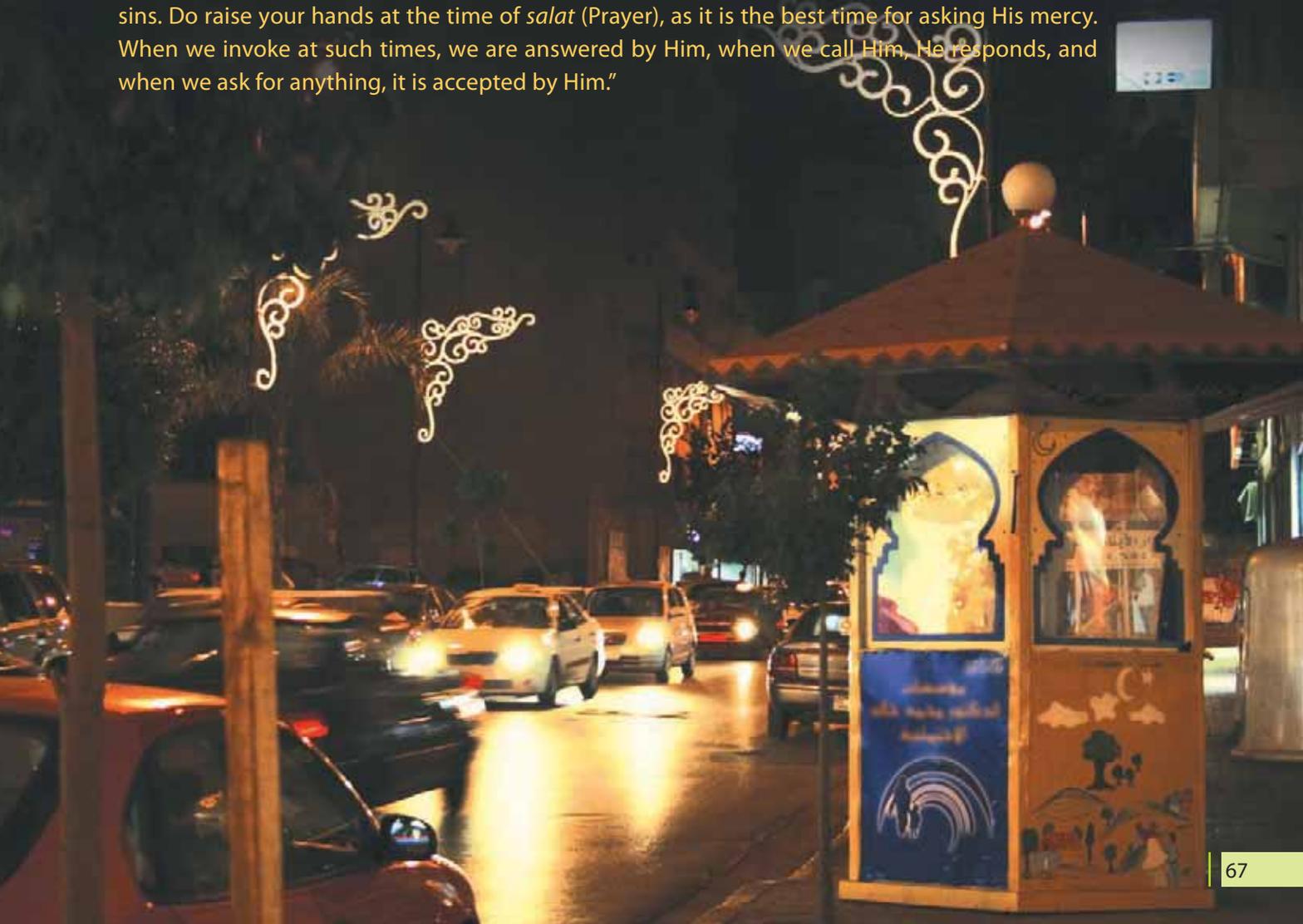
Holidays and Special Religious Occasions in Islam

Holidays

General and religious dutiful Holidays in Islam are two: *'Id al-Fitr* and *'Id al-Adha*. *'Id al-Adha* comes at the end of the holy month of Ramadan, which is the month of fasting for Muslims. Before detailing *'Id al-Fitr* one must speak about the Fast since it is linked with this *'Id*.

The Holy Month of Ramadan and Fasting

Muslims fast in the holy month of Ramadan as they refrain from eating and drinking, as well as from other things that are mentioned in books of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Fasting does not only concern bodily matters, but rather includes as well social and moral behavioral teachings. The Prophet (PBUH) said, as it was reported, in his khutba (sermon) welcoming the holy month of Ramadan: "Give alms to the poor and the needy. Pay respects to your elders. Have pity on those younger than you and be kind towards your relatives and kinsmen. Guard your tongues against unworthy words, and your eyes from such scenes that are not worth seeing and your ears from such sounds that should not be heard by you. Be kind to orphans so that when your children become orphans they also may be treated with kindness. Do invoke that God may forgive your sins. Do raise your hands at the time of *salat* (Prayer), as it is the best time for asking His mercy. When we invoke at such times, we are answered by Him, when we call Him, He responds, and when we ask for anything, it is accepted by Him."





Based on the Holy Koran and Prophetic *Hadith*, Muslims consider that the holy month of Ramadan is a holy time, which is why it is called the 'month of God'. Its days are the best of days, and its hours are the best hours. Fasting is an obligatory duty for education in terms of piety: "the fast is ordained upon you, as it was ordained upon those who came before you – perhaps you will fear God – for a number of days." (Sura: The Cow (2), Verse 183).

Fasting starts in the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan. The ones who are fasting evoke their intention (*niyyah*) to fast as a deed which is entirely for the sake of God and to grow nearer to Him. Fasting starts at dawn, early in the morning and goes on until sunset. Those who fast respect a number of acts of worship such as the reading of the Glorious Koran, the reading of some invocations (*du'a'*) special to the month of Ramadan, such as, for Shiite muslims: *Du'a' al-'Iftitah*, *'Ad'iyat al-Sahar* (pre-dawn prayers for Shiite Muslims), as well as many other Islamic prayers.

The teachings of the Prophet (PBUH) in the month of Ramadan include:

- Ensuring *'iftar* (fast-breaking meal) to the poor among those who are fasting by offering them a meal.
- Improving social morals
- Praying, invoking God, and asking for His forgiveness
- Meditating on the day of encounter of God on Judgment Day. Man must be prepared for this day, by making sure that he is not unfair to anyone, for injustice to mankind in Islam is a great offense.

Based on these educational values and goals, Muslims have some religious and popular traditions, among which:

- Holding evenings in Mosques, namely *Laylat al-Qadr* and the last ten nights in Ramadan.
- Holding family *Iftar* based on the need to strengthen ties among family members and kin.
- Preparing some meals for the poor, the needy, and orphans. These meals are commonly called '*Mawa'id al-rahman*' [meals of mercy].
- Some charity associations have taken the habit of organizing '*Iftar* in order to urge those present to give financial aid to charity associations.
- Some families regularly prepare '*fattush*' (a local salad dish), or soup, or dates that are given to those who fast before meal as they say: "Oh God! We have fasted for you. We break our fast with your sustenance. So please accept our fast and our night prayer (*qiyam*)". Common beverages for this time include tamarind, julep, and licorice.
- Lately, some shops have included some pastries such as '*kallaj*', and '*asabi' al-sitt*'.



Preparing 'kallaj', a main pastry, in one shop in Beirut.



'Id al-Fitr

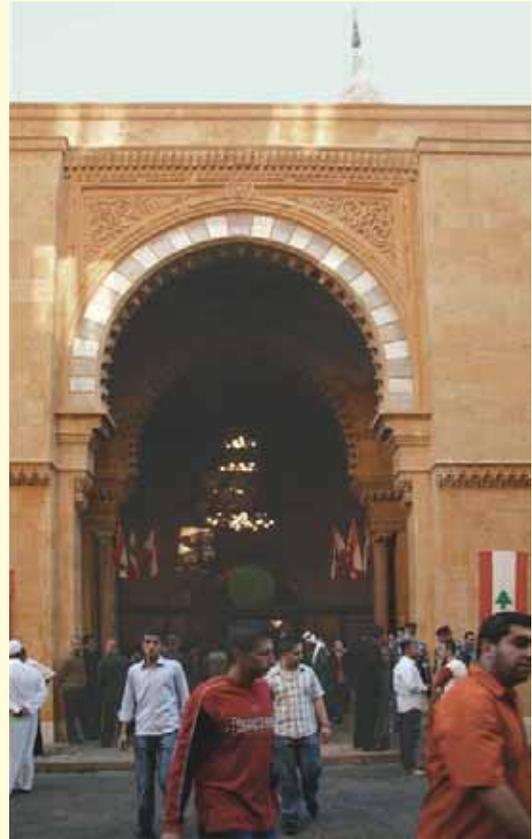
It is the first day of the month of Shawwal, which comes after the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims break their fast after twenty-nine or thirty days depending on when the new moon is appeared.

Among religious duties for 'Id al-Fitr is the paying of 'zakat al-Fitr' to the poor. This zakat (almsgiving) is paid either on the day or on the eve of the holiday. The fairly well-off male head of the household pays it on behalf of himself and those he provides for. *Zakat* is estimated to around three kilos of conventional food. It is given to the poor in specie or in kind. 'Id Prayer: Since the occasion is a major congregational ceremony attended by all, it was agreed to perform two *rak'a* (prostrations) and to listen to the *khutbah* (sermon) in a public square that can hold as many people as possible so that the prayer and *khutbah* may be an occasion for a public gathering filled with joy



and goodwill: joy of completing the act of worship, i.e. fasting, and the joy of communicating and meeting with people.

Worshippers first perform prayer which includes two *rak'at* behind the *Imam*. During each *rak'a*, the (Fatiha) Opening Sura is recited as well as other verses from the Glorious Koran. Then the *khatib* takes the stand and gives a *khutba* in which he reiterates the Greatness of God (*takbir*) and reminds worshippers of the benefits of fasting, as well as other public matters of concern to worshippers and those who are celebrating the 'Id. Worshippers engage, before and after prayer and *khutbah*, as a congregation, in one voice, in *takbirat al-'Id* [repetition of the expression Allah Akbar], as well as the inherited ode (*nashid*) from the time of the Prophet (PBUH) and his Companions in the early times of Islam: "God is the Greatest. God is the Greatest. God is the Greatest of all. To Him be all praise. Glory be to



God, He is free from imperfection. Glory be to God, eventide and morning. There is no true deity except God. He has fulfilled His Promise. He made victorious His servant, Made mighty His Soldiers, and Defeated the confederates Alone. Nothing comes before Him. Nothing comes after Him. There is no Deity but God. He alone we worship with sincere and exclusive devotion”, “Oh God, Pray on our Prophet Muhammad, and on the Family of the Prophet Muhammad, on the Companions of the Prophet Muhammad, on the helpers of the Prophet Muhammad, and on the Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. And bestow upon them much Peace. Oh my Lord, Pardon me and my parents. Oh my Lord, Have Mercy on them as they have brought me up when I was little.”

Muslims who are present for the *khutba* and prayer congratulate each other. On this day, most Muslims visit the graves of relatives and acquaintances; they recite the Opening Sura (Fatiha) to ask God to have mercy on them. It is customary that these visits come prior to the prayer of *'Id*. After this prayer, people return home,

offer each other gifts, and have breakfast together for the first time after one month of fasting.

The whole day is spent in well-wishing visits to relatives and acquaintances. *'Id* is originally one day. But the Holiday vacation are customarily three days. Since *'Id* al-Fitr is related to the fast of Ramadan whose date changes, then its date is moveable around the year and around seasons, based on Lunar months.

Some customs related to this Holiday are:

- Family preparation for this Holiday includes also preparing family members especially the young ones with new clothes to express through a new outfit the birth of joy in the hearts.
- Pastry preparation at home. It includes *ma'mul*, round date and nut cakes, mulberry and rosewater drinks. Families have morning breakfast together and prepare for lunch, which often includes turkey or the like.
- Graves are decorated with flowers and green sage branches. People visit graves to recite the Opening Sura and other Verses from the Glorious Koran for the dead. In some villages, people usually visit the graves of



a person who died the same day to bring comfort and solace to his bereaved kin.

- Aid in specie or in clothes – as it is called *kaswat al-'id'* – is provided to the poor and needy. This is part of the *Zakat al-Fitra*¹³ and *Sadaqat* [voluntary charity]. *Zaqat al-Fitrah* is 'a condition for proper and accepted fasting for those who fast in the month of Ramadan.'
- Gifts are offered and children are given special Holiday money in the family and among relatives.
- According to the teachings of their religion, Muslims consider that, 'those who fast rejoice twice, first when they break the fast, and then when they meet God'. Joy of breaking fast is the success of man's will to overcome the cravings of body and soul in order to communicate with the Mercy of God. This is why the main concern of those who fast is how to receive the Mercy of God

by considering the poor and needy with mercifulness. Having tried hunger, those who have fasted must attempt to help the needy in the holy month of Ramadan and after it. This is how every day Muslim worshippers do not disobey God and help other people is, in fact, a holiday.

In addition, *'Id al-Fitr* is a blessed day. It is important in that it increases social ties and social bonds, releases hatreds, brings people closer, creates harmony among them, and adds joy and happiness to the general atmosphere, which is why Muslims eagerly await this Holiday every year.

¹³ see page 142.



[Green sage branches usually used by Muslims on the graves of their kin when they visit these graves the morning of the Holiday.]



'Id al-Adha

Just like *'Id al-Fitr* is linked with the end of the obligatory duty of fasting, *'Id al-Adha* is linked with the obligatory duty of pilgrimage to Mecca¹⁴. It occurs after Muslims descend from Mount 'Arafa in Mecca, at the end of Pilgrimage (*Hajj*), where Muslim pilgrims, like other Muslims all around the world, would have spent the ten days of the month of *Dhu-l-Hijjah* praying, fasting, and doing good deeds.

'Id al-Adha is the tenth day of the month of *Dhu-l-Hijjah*. It is called the "Festival of Sacrifice". It is a religious festival to commemorate the willingness of Abraham (A.S.) to sacrifice his son Ishmael as an act of obedience to God. Pilgrims offer a sacrifice called *udhiya*, which is an obligatory duty during Pilgrimage, commemorating how God provided a ram in place of Ishmael once Abraham demonstrated his willingness to follow God's commands. Most Muslims –pilgrims and non-pilgrims- offer a sacrifice, then the family eats from the meat of the sacrifice on the day of *al-'Id*, and they distribute to neighbors and to the poor, although this is not obligatory as they did not go on Pilgrimage.

Prayer for *'Id al-Adha* and *'Id al-Fitr* is similar. The *khatib* usually deals with the Holiday and its meaning. He speaks about *'Id al-Fitr* and about fasting although this is not necessary, and he may suggest any religious subject or deal with any social concept that is related to the occasion or not. Muslims have the same popular traditions in celebrating *'Id al-Adha* as the ones celebrating *'Id al-Fitr* with two additions:

First: the sacrifices: Muslims who can afford it offer sacrifices and distribute them to the needy and poor.

Second: Often people prepare special decorations to welcome the Pilgrims – usually with palm branches – at the entrance of homes. With the palm branches, Muslims symbolize the land of Hijaz, the site of the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina, where one finds many palm trees.



¹⁴ see page 139.

'Ushur al-'Id for the Muwahidoon (Unitarian) Druze

These days occur for the Muwahidoon Druze between the first and the tenth day of the month of *Dhu-l-Hijjah*. As soon as *Dhu-l-Hijjah* crescent moon appears every year, marking the arrival of a period of intense preparation all members of the Muwahidoon Druze community head for '*khalwat*' (Druze Houses of Prayer), shrines, sanctuaries and dignified Sheikhs, seeking knowledge and

blessing by listening to their recitations and religious deliberations, in preparation for the important Holiday on the tenth day.

The Sheikhs spent the entire night in effort (*mujahada*) and acts of contrition asking God's forgiveness, recalling the Koranic verse, "By the dawn, and ten nights" (Sura: Dawn (89), Verses 12-), in a state of total abstention (Ihram) in their bodies and hearts, in order to purify their intentions and fulfill the inner meaning of sacrifice '*udhia*, their souls directed only towards God.



A gathering of religious contemplation in the Mowahidoon Druze community

Religious Occasions

Al-Mawlid al-Nabawi

Tradition says that on the day of the *Mawlid* (birth) of the Prophet (PBUH) many events occurred, the most important of which the appearance of a light in Mecca, illuminating the East and the West, announcing the good news of the blessed birth. Muslims celebrate the *Mawlid* in the month of *Rabi' al-Awwal*. Some Islamic countries consider the *Mawlid* day as a day off. Some say he (PBUH) was born on 12 Rabi' al-Awwal (April 10) A.D. 571 while others say that he (PBUH) was born on 17 Rabi' al-Awwal. That's why some call for a whole week off to celebrate what they call 'The Islamic unity week'. To commemorate this occasion, Muslims light small colored lanterns on the eve of the *Mawlid*, and a street procession praises the merits of the Prophet (PBUH) and recollects his virtues. *Mawlid* meals are held in homes where pastry is prepared, the Life of the Prophet (PBUH) is read, and *daf* (tambourine) is heard. People also visit orphanages to bring comfort and joy to orphans.

Throughout history, hundreds of texts citing the virtues of the Prophet (PBUH) have appeared. These texts have praised the Prophet (PBUH) in verse and in prose. People in homes and mosques raise their voices on this occasion to express their love for the Prophet (PBUH), and the joy of his birth. For some time now, *Mawlid* odes are no longer limited to 12 or 17 Rabi' al-Awwal, for *Mawlid* ceremonies are held on various public or private occasions, on any date.

The Hegira New Year

In the past, Muslims did not celebrate the Hijra of the Prophet (PBUH), i.e. his emigration from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622. This celebration started when the calendar started with the *Hijra*, as decided by 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab (R.A.A). The Prophet had left to Medina in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal. But 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab started the Islamic Calendar in the first of *Muharram* as mentioned, i.e. in the beginning of the lunar calendar.

Hijra is a major celebration for two reasons: first, it is a reminder of the suffering of the Prophet (PBUH) and his Companions in Mecca on the hands of the notables of Quraysh tribe who tortured and persecuted the followers of Islam as well as those who supported the Prophet (PBUH) or defended him. They tried to isolate early Muslims and starve them, so much that some were forced into emigration to Ethiopia. When there was a resolve to kill the Prophet (PBUH) himself, he migrated to



Medina (which was called *Yathrib*, but the Prophet (PBUH) called it Medina to highlight its central role in the Islamic religion). The other reason for which Muslims considered *Hijra* to Medina important is that it is the start of communal life for Muslims who now led a free social, cultural, and religious life since most of the inhabitants of Medina believed in the Mission of the Prophet (PBUH) within less than two years (A.D. 622-624). Since the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH) realized how important the event was, they chronicled it, as stated before. Some Arab and Islamic states commemorate *Hijra* every year with the closing of schools and public offices. The Head of State gives an address in an official celebration. With the beginning of the new *Hijra* / lunar year, people repeat what was written by the people of Yathrib in welcoming the Prophet (PBUH) when he came to them from Mecca:

O the white moon rose over us, from the valley of Wada'.



And we owe it to show gratefulness, where the call is to God.

O you who were raised amongst us, coming with a word to be obeyed.

You have brought to the city nobleness. Welcome! Best caller to God's way.

Shiite Muslims start celebrating the first night of '*Ashura*' on the first day of the month of *Muharram* since it was the start of confrontation in *Karbala*'. This is why in the beginning of the month of *Muharram*, Muslim Shiite preachers (*khatib*) speak about the *Hijrah* of the Prophet (PBUH) and relate it to '*Ashura*'.

Laylat al-Qadr

The celebration by Muslims of *Laylat al-Qadr* is based on what is mentioned in the Verses in the Glorious Koran about it: "We sent it down in the Night of Power! But how can you know what is the Night of Power? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. In it, the angels and the Spirit are sent swarming down, By their Lord's leave, attending to every command. Peace is it that Night, till the break of dawn." (Sura: Power (97), Verse 1). This means two things: the Revelation of the Koran started on one of the nights of the month of Ramadan: "The month of Ramadan is the one in which the Qur'an was sent down" (Sura: The Cow (2), Verse 185). It also means that this Night includes mysteries and powers that influence the worshipper's entire life.

This is why Muslims have endeavored to stay up this Night and await it in the last ten days of the Holy month of Ramadan, on the eves of the odd days (23 or 25 or 27 or 29). Popular belief has it that Muslims can ask for a blessing on *Laylat al-Qadr*, i.e. divine favors for those who are blessed enough, by spending the afore-mentioned nights in prayer and invocation. On this Night, Angels and the Spirit (Holy Spirit) descend in peace until the break of dawn and sunrise which would be without radiance or beam. This is a purely religious celebration and a blessing people hope for. Muslims also feel pride and glory that God chose the Prophet (PBUH) on one of these blessed nights to reveal the Koran to him, and to be the seal of prophets and prophethood. All of these blessings occurred on this Night, the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*).

Al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj

Al-Isra' originally means walking or traveling by night. But when the word is used along with *al-mi'raj* it means what has been mentioned in the Glorious Koran in Sura 'The Journey by Night': "Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We have, to show him of Our wonders! He it is Who is All-Hearing, All-Seeing!" (Sura: The Journey by Night (17), Verse 1). Exegetes and writers of *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* (the life of the Prophet, PBUH) mention that God blessed the Prophet (PBUH) with a miracle when he carried him one night in the early years of his Mission, from Mecca to Jerusalem. Then He made him ascend beyond the seventh sky with Gabriel (A.S.) (called the Spirit of Sanctity, *Ruh al-Quds*). There, he met his brothers, early Prophets, Abraham, then Jesus, Son of Mary (A.S.), and then he returned to his bed while this very same bed was still warm. All of this occurred in one night. The Hadith of *Al-Mi'raj* (Ascension) truly shows great spiritual and moral meanings and values that indicate that God respects man's dignity and considers him above all other beings.

Muslims sense the particular importance of the two events, that of *al-Isra'* and that of *al-mi'raj* since they confer honor upon the Prophet (PBUH), they link Islam with the two previous Abrahamic religions, and they glorify Jerusalem in Islam by linking it with Mecca. Muslims used to turn towards Jerusalem in their prayers (and according to Islamic texts the five prayers were made an obligatory duty on the night of '*Isra'* and *mi'raj*'), before they were ordered in the Glorious Koran to turn in prayer towards Mecca. Since the two events – *Al-Isra' wal-mi'raj* – are mentioned in the Glorious Koran, Muslims started celebrating the two events in the Middle Ages. *Al-mi'raj* is particularly celebrated by night prayer, worshipping God, and invoking Him. It is also celebrated in the last ten days of the holy month of Ramadan, which coincide with the awaiting of *Laylat al-Qadr*, the Night the revelation of the Koran started. Because of the great symbolism around *Al-mi'raj* as well, authors have written, throughout the centuries, popular *mi'rajat* detailing the ascent of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to heaven, his meeting other Prophets, and his nearness to the Divine Throne. In the episode of *Mi'raj*, poet Abul-'Ala' al-Ma'arri found inspiration for his beautiful book, '*Risalat al-Ghufran*'. Major Sufi Muslims have written spiritual *mi'rajat*.





The lifted hand is a symbol of *'Id al-Ghadir* for Shiite Muslims: the hand of Imam Ali (A.S.) that the Prophet (PBUH) lifted in a place called *'Ghadir Khumm'* when he spoke to the gathering.



'Id al-Ghadir

On the 18th of *Dhu-I-Hijjah*, Shiite Muslims commemorate the day they believe the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) designated Ali (A.S.) his heir as leader of the Muslim community. On his return trip from the Farewell Pilgrimage to Medina, the Prophet (PBUH) ordered the caravan to halt at a place called *'Ghadir Khumm'*. He spoke to the crowd saying: "Do I not have more right over you than you have yourself?" The gathering assented in unison, "Of course! It is so!" So He said: "Of whom I am Master, this `Ali (A.S.) too is his Master! O God! Whomsoever befriends him, be his friend; and be the enemy of those who have enmity for him!"

'Al-Nisf Min Sha'ban

On the 15th of *Sha'ban*, Shiites celebrate the birth of al-Imam al-Mahdi in 255 A.D. – the Imam who is concealed and will return to spread good, justice, and peace on earth. The religious celebration of *'Al-Nisf Min Sha'ban* (Mid-*Sha'ban*, two weeks prior to Ramadan) is included in popular customs and traditions in some Islamic societies nowadays. In addition to night prayer and worshipping after evening prayer, a religious celebration is held in which religious chants (*anashid*) are repeated as Ramadan draws nearer. Other *anashid* are repeated in praise of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). On this night, deeds are presented to God, which is why people engage in acts of worship so that their deeds are presented to Him in this state. Muslims hope on this night for a day when social justice will reign upon all people and all countries, a day when injustice and unfairness will be defeated, and people from both religions, Islam and Christianity will be unified led by Christ and al-Mahdi in the end of times.



'Ashura'

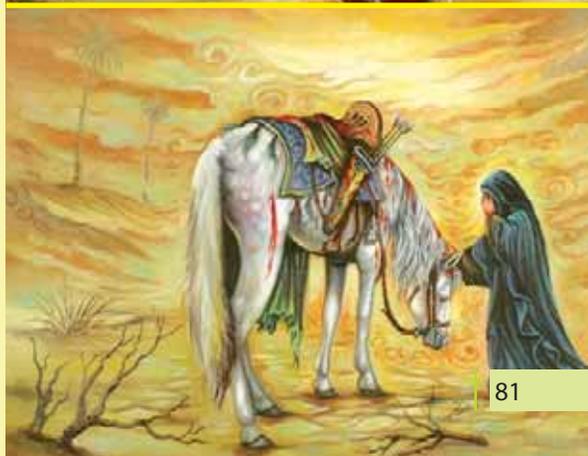
The occasion occurs on the 10th of Muharram every year. In Islamic sources, it is said that prior to Islam, Meccans used to fast on this day as part of traditions remaining from the father of all Prophets, Abraham. In other sources, it is said that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) came to know about the fast of 'Ashura' in the Jewish community when he emigrated to Medina. The Jews used to fast on this day since it was the day the Prophet Moses was born. The Prophet (PBUH) then ordered that fasting be on the 9th and on 10th day instead of the 10th alone. In most Islamic countries, Muslims fast on this day to obey the Prophet (PBUH) as the Prophetic *Hadith* states:

"This is a good day, a day on which God saved Moses and drowned the Pharaoh, so Moses fasted to thank God". And the Prophet (PBUH) added: 'We have more claim over Moses than they do.' Then, Muhammad fasted on the tenth of Muharram and ordered that it may be a day of fasting." The commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (A.S.) by Shiite Muslims starts with the first of the month of *Muharram* and lasts for forty days. This commemoration has nothing to do with what was in Mecca or in Medina. It is so because the martyrdom of the third Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (A.S.) as well as tens of his kin and supporters occurred on the tenth day of AH. 61, (A.D. 680), on the hands of Umayyad soldiers. The reason for this tragic event is that Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan (died in A.H. 59, A.D. 678) designating his son Yazid as head of State, although he had promised he would not designate a successor. Yazid was known among the Muslim society for being unjust, and in Islam unfair rulers should not rule. This designation of a successor brought about anger and discontent among the people of Mecca and Medina, and among the sons of the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH). Al-Imam Husayn was among those who refused to acknowledge the caliphate of Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah. He received thousands of letters of support from his supporters and the supporters of his father, Ali (H. 41, A.D. 661) in Kufah in Iraq. He left Mecca with his relatives and some of his supporters heading towards Kufah. Upon reaching the desert of Karbala', he found an Umayyad army that attacked and fought with him. He and his brother, Al-'Abbas as well as some of his cousins and supporters were killed in moving and tragic scenes. This event had a profound effect on Muslims, especially on the supporters of Ali and his family. It moved people against the Umayyads and against

Yazid and his supporters. They were full of vindictive feelings against the Umayyad state and led many uprisings against it. Shiite Muslims have commemorated the martyrdom of Imam Husayn for forty days since the 4th Century AH. (10th century A.D.). On the sad days and nights of mourning and commemoration, the *ta'ziyat* are read, i.e. texts of grief, mourning and lamentation. They narrate in details the martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his family as well as the suffering of all his relatives from oppression, poverty, and injustice. They were able to withstand injustice repeatedly; intent as they were on sacrifice, remembering the words of Imam Husayn (A.S.) about dignity, death, and life, and that man without a dignified life has no value. This commemoration has become an endless source of inspiration for dignity, pride, and the priority to martyrdom over an undignified life. Further on, the commemoration acquired a cultural aspect with some traditions as the wearing of black mourning clothes and the reading of the sad events that occurred in Karbala'.

Among these traditions:

- The spreading of black items in houses, *husayniyyat*, and neighborhoods as a sign of mourning.
- Refraining from holding weddings.
- Representing the events in plays reenacting the main events that occurred on 'Ashura'. This art work has evolved today with 'Ashura' series, films, and panoramas.
- Organizing *Husayni* processions: the first of the kind was in the Lebanese town of Nabatiyyah, and the village of Majdal Silm in the South of Lebanon. It then spread to other towns and cities. Some actions would occur during these processions and were refused by many religious dignitaries such as the wounding of the head for the blood to flow, which is called '*tatbir*'. Today, there are associations that have replaced this procession with another idea: the donation of blood to hospitals and medical centers.
- Preparing some popular meals, namely *hrissah*, also some pastry, namely Turkish delight and biscuits. The idea developed into the preparation of lunches on the 10th for those who attend *al-majliss* since the early morning and fast as a sign of refusal of oppression and injustice.
- Going on pilgrimage to the shrines of some Imams. Whoever cannot make these pilgrimages can pay alms to the poor and read '*Al-Ziyarah*', which expresses lamentation for the death of the Imams, namely Imam Husayn (A.S.).





Remembering Al-‘Awliya’ and the Saints

In both Christianity and Islam religions we see individuals who have led a pious and virtuous life. They have had a minor or major influence on people’s lives in a way that gave them a rank which is higher than that of ordinary people. They might have a direct bond with Christ or with the Prophet (PBUH) or might be people who led a non-materialistic life, far from the hustle and bustle of life, leading an ascetic life closer to God.

People often honor these individuals after their death although the signs of their piety appear in their lifetime. Christians call these individuals Saints. For Muslims, they are *Al-‘Awliya’* (the Trusted Ones) in Sunni Islam and Sufism; they are *Al-‘Immah al-Ma’sumin* (The Infallible Imams) for Shiites; and they are *Shuyukh Thiqaat* (dignified trusted Sheikhs) for the Druze.

Feasts of Saints in General

For Christians, Feasts are quintessentially related to the history of Salvation. They have several dimensions since they remind Christians of the past, when the word of God and mission of Salvation were revealed. They drive the faithful to have hope in the future since God's Acts in the past are a guarantee of His faithful people's future. They strengthen them in the present so that they know the Will of God and live it in joy and repentance. Celebrating these feasts must come from the hearts that have repented, that are thankful, and are truthful. Otherwise, it would be dissembling one's true feelings from God as mentioned by the Prophet Amos: "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies."(Amos 5:21).

Christians worship God alone and no other at all. Worshipping God is a duty to Him, and they express it towards Him alone. Yet, some Churches honor the Saints whose life reflects some of the radiant Sanctity of Christ and shows the various Christian experiences leading to Salvation. These Saints offer in their pure acts a paradigm. Catholic and Orthodox Christians ask Saints to intercede with God on their behalf. Their number allows each human being to choose a special patron Saint. Some traditions that have been passed on from one generation to another have considered some Saints the patrons of some specific causes. For instance, Saint Anthony of Padua is the patron Saint of lost articles, and Saint Rita is the patron Saint of "impossible or lost causes".

With time, the canonization of Saints in the Catholic Church evolved. What we see today dates

back to January 25, 1983 when Pope John Paul II simplified the official procedure by implicating in it the concerned bishops in their own jurisdiction, i.e. at the diocesan level [where the candidate died or is buried]. When one of the faithful lives his Christian creed, his hope, and his love of God until his last day, when he practises all Christian virtues, then as he reposes in the grave, his spiritual light goes on shining after his repose and many miracles occur with his intercession, then, a postulator is designated to present a plea at the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints in the Vatican, the official headquarters of the Catholic Church, to ask for the beatification and official canonization of the candidate.

After the plea is filed, the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints names a Bishop in charge of the diocese where the candidate lived or performed a miracle to investigate and gather documentation



A representation of Saint Anthony of Padua who intercedes for some Christians when they have lost some article as he helps in finding it. Also a representation of Saint Rita who some Christians believe is the patron Saint of lost and impossible causes.



A representation of the healing miracle that occurred with the intercession of Charbel Makhlof, one of the elements that led to his canonization.

about the case. The latter Bishop then submits a report to the Congregation supporting the case or not. The Congregation examines the documents sent and any eventual supplementary documentation carefully and proceeds to a vote. When the case has the approval of the majority of the members, the Head of the Congregation submits his report and the result of the vote to the Pope who decides whether to proceed with the beatification or canonization. The Pope then celebrates Mass to sanctify the candidate, allowing the Church to honor him and ask for his intercession. This is how the Catholics embody sanctification by God in a person who has lived Christian virtues in a special way.

The Orthodox Church does not impose the performance of miracles for sanctification. It rather examines closely the life of the Saint and his writings if he has any, some time after his death. Most Saints in the Orthodox Church have been Glorified about one hundred years after their eternal sleep. The issue of sanctification and glorification of Saints in the Armenian Orthodox Church has been on the agenda of the Church since the 15th century. Among some of the Armenian Saints who have appeared since the 15th century we mention the following instances: Saint Krikor the Illuminator, Saint Mesrop Mashtots, and Saint Hagop.

Marian Holy Days

When the Church celebrates the sacraments of Christ¹⁵ around the year, it also honors Virgin Mary with great love; 'Mary, mother of Jesus Christ' is intrinsically linked with the Salvation Act of her Son. In Mary the Church looks up to the fruit of Redemption (Second Vatican Council, Liturgy, no 102 and 103). The Holidays related to the Virgin go along with those of Jesus Christ just like the mother went along with her son in His Salvation Mission and His life. The faithful have come to realize this truth very early, which is why there have been many Holidays related to Virgin Mary in the East first, and then in the West. There is a Holiday related to the Virgin in almost every month:

In October is Our Lady of the Rosary; in November and December there are the Annunciation to Mary and the Visitation on the Sundays prior to Christmas to prepare for this Glorious Holiday. After Christmas is the Solemnity of Mary, in January is Our Lady of Crops; on February 2, is the Presentation of the Lord and the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin. On May 15, is Our Lady of Harvest, on July 16, is Our Lady of Mount Carmel; on August 15, is the Assumption and Our Lady of the Vine; and on September 8 is the Birth of Mary.

The source of these Holidays is varied since some are drawn from the Bible such as the Annunciation to Mary and some are based on Christian tradition such as Christmas. Some were determined by the Church since they are at the heart of its dogma such as Assumption Day. Some Holidays have been imposed by the Christian piety such as Our Lady of the Rosary. Some have an agricultural Eucharistic dimension such as Our Lady of Crops



on January 15, Our Lady of Harvest on May 15, and Our Lady of the Vine on August 15, all of which are related to wheat and grapes, bread and wine that turn into the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. All these Feast Days place the faithful within the life frame of Virgin Mary to honor her and follow in her footsteps.

The Feast Day of the Mother of God (Theotokos) was first started in the Fifth Century after the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus. The old Marian ceremony that spread in local Churches in honor of Virgin Mary then spread to all the Churches after the various Ecumenical Councils was the 'Dormition of the Theotokos' or the remembrance of her death on August 15. This Holiday started around her tomb in Jerusalem then spread to other Churches. The 'Dormition of the Theotokos' is a major Marian Feast Day in Eastern Churches

¹⁵ The sacraments of Christ: signs of an unseen truth that indicates the presence of Christ in a congregation.



even in the Nestorian Church. It is preceded by a fasting period of one or two weeks to prepare for the celebrations.

In the Maronite Church, this Feast Day has a special rank since it is celebrated by the Patriarch who holds Mass in the presence of the major clerical members and the faithful Christians.

Father Eliano depicts the celebration of the Assumption Day in Qannubin on August 15, 1580: 'On the eve of the Holiday, people would flock to Qannubin from various regions. The Patriarch and those present would look on from the roof of the monastery to the people flocking in. Churches

would toll their bells; peasants would light fires as a sign of joy. Fire shots would be heard as well as chants of happiness! On the day of the Feast, Mass would be celebrated in the presence of the Bishops, clergymen, and the people."

The Armenian Orthodox Church honors Virgin Mary throughout the year and most specifically on the yearly Feast Day, i.e. the closest Sunday to August 15. At the end of Mass held for this occasion, grapes that have been blessed are handed out to the faithful. Old Armenian traditions include not having any grapes other than after the Assumption and the blessing of grapes in the Church.



The rite of grape blessing is particular to the Armenian Orthodox Church on Assumption, in August.

Saint Maron's Day on February 9 (February 14 in the Orthodox Church)

He was born in A.D. 340 in Qurush, north east of Antioch. He was of Aramaic origin; his language and liturgy were Syriac. He retired in Qurush, on top of an arid mountain. He converted an atheist temple and dedicated it to the worship of the One God. He would spend the nights invoking God, kneeling, prostrating to Him, and meditating. He would preach and guide visitors and bring comfort to the bereaved.

Maroun was an ascetic who exercised mortifications, in open sky, with only a small tent as shelter which he used but very little. He secluded himself in tight spaces going out only to send time working the land as a self mortification.

God gave him the gift of healing the sick. He became famous and people flocked to him from all regions. He sought not only to cure the physical ailments from which people suffered, but also the sickness of souls. He renounced worldly fame yet he became famous for his pious acts and his sainthood.

Many were the monks around him as his reputation grew. He placed them first in individual cells and hermitages. Then he established monasteries and set out rules guiding the monks towards perfection. Monasteries multiplied namely in the north of Syria, so much that Theodoret rejoiced at having them in his diocese.

Saint Maroun died c. 410. He was about seventy. His students followed the teachings of the



Chalcedonian Ecumenical Council in 451 and spread these teachings in their milieu. In this, they were faithful to the teachings of their father and guide, Saint Maroun. Many in the region became monks and followed Saint Maroun; they set up the 'Maronite Order' in the green plains of Syria first and then moved to Mount Lebanon in the Seventh Century carrying with them the faith of their fathers and preserving their rites, and kept on stressing their strong attachment to a unified Church.

All Saints' Day

On this Holiday, all Saints are honored, may they be known or not, in Catholic and Orthodox Churches. For the Catholic Church, it is on November 1st, for the Maronite Church it is on the Sunday of the Righteous and Just as part of the remembrances prior to Lent. The Orthodox Churches celebrate this day on the first Sunday after Pentecost since they consider that sanctity is the fruit of the Holy Spirit filling in the hearts of the faithful. The Armenian Orthodox Church has consecrated one day whose date is moveable in the Armenian calendar during the month of November to honor all Saints.

All Souls' Day

On this day Catholic and Orthodox Christians offer their prayers and charity deeds so that the souls of the faithful departed may rest in peace. For the Catholic Church this day is celebrated on November 2. For the Maronite Church, it is on the Sunday of the faithful departed which starts Carnival week. For the Orthodox it is on the Saturday that precedes Meat fare Sunday and the Saturday that precedes Pentecost. The Armenian Orthodox Church considers all Mondays following Christmas, Easter, Transfiguration, Assumption, and the Exaltation of the Cross days on which visits are made to graves and Masses are celebrated so that the soul of the faithful departed may rest in peace.



Remembering Al-'A'immah al-Ma'sumin (The Infallible Imams) and Al-'Awliya' (the Trusted Ones)

Mawalid (pl. of *mawlid*) celebrations represent special occasions for the different Muslim communities. Other than the Mawlid of the Prophet, the Shiite Muslims celebrate the mawlid of Imams, for instance the birth of Imam Ali (A.S.), the birth of Fatima al-Zahra' (A.S.), daughter of the Prophet (PBUH), the birth of Imam Mahdi who, who for Shiites was born and was concealed and will reappear at a time known by God alone and will spread justice and peace on earth. Sunni Sufis celebrate the birth of sufi *awliya'* like al-Sayyid Ahmad Badawi, Abdul-Qadir al-Jilani, Ahmad Naqshabandi... These celebrations sometimes include pilgrimages (for males and females) to the shrines and memorial tombs of these Imams, 'Awliya', and *Salihin* (the Righteous) to perform *Hadra*, group invocation and chanting in which the presence of God is felt, or to take the spiritual blessing (*baraka*) and ask for God's forgiveness of sins. These pilgrimages may include major popular crowds namely in Sufi and Shiite Islam.

The Most Notable Trusted Sheikhs and Ahl al-'Irfan for Unitarian Druze

The Emir Abdallah Tannukhi (A.D. 1392 - 1479)

He is the Emir Jamal-Din Ibn Abdallah Ibn Alamul-Din Sulayman Tannukhi. He was born in the village of 'Abay (Caza of 'Aley). He was known to be knowledgeable and righteous. He served people wherever he lived. The Emir, al-Sayyid, quickly realized the many aspects of deterioration that were seen in the social environment especially as concerns spirituality. This deterioration concerned in some aspects the belief itself, in other aspects the behavior in the religious path, as well as it touched the social situation. With bright intelligence and an illuminated brain, he realized that this situation needed in-depth reform. This would start with the purification of the soul from the imperfections which resulted from the practice of rites without due attention to the accountability of the soul and without endeavor to look for the essence of meaning and its manifestation in the word. The Emir al-Sayyid wanted to free the soul from inner hidden idols. He underlined the need to prepare oneself for the way before seeking more knowledge. He refuted the corrupt alien beliefs that had spread with the regression of the movement of the intellect (Al-'Aql) to understand the aim of teachings. He highlighted the fact that the core of *tawhid* (unification) is not the many invocations of God or His emulation or in being emotionally moved. The core of *tawhid* is in what stays in the soul, namely nourishment from knowledge, which is like oil to the lamp of discernment lighting up

[Entrance to the mazar (mausoleum) of Emir Abdallah Tannukhi (May God Sanctify His Secret), 'Abay.]



the inside and making it immune from apparent and hidden evil corruption. The works of the Emir al-Sayyid (commentaries, epistles, linguistic interpretations (*tafsir*), and his biography) have all helped restore the heritage of *tawhid* in a new and unique shape, that renewed the *fiqhi* (related to jurisprudence), cultural, and even philosophical understanding of what is esoteric, in accordance with the historical context, and with mainstream Islamic Shari'ah. He also wrote what is similar to a visionary prospect within interpretative texts in compliance with all the Abrahamic tradition as to its specific spirituality. The basis of reconciliation, for him, was cultural and behavioral towards a more global participation and realization of full humanity in the very being of *al-muwahhid* (the Unitarian) amidst his society, not in seclusion, but rather among people who are, in the end, the 'field of study' as to observance and embracement of what is right. When the Emir al-Sayyid, died, a great mausoleum was built upon his grave in 'Abay. The Unitarian Druze as well as others go on pilgrimage to the latter mausoleum. Ascetics and people who have made a vow spend days there in prayer and invocation of God.

Sheikh Zayn al-Din Abdul Ghaffar Taqiyy al-Din
(A.D. 1495 - 1558)

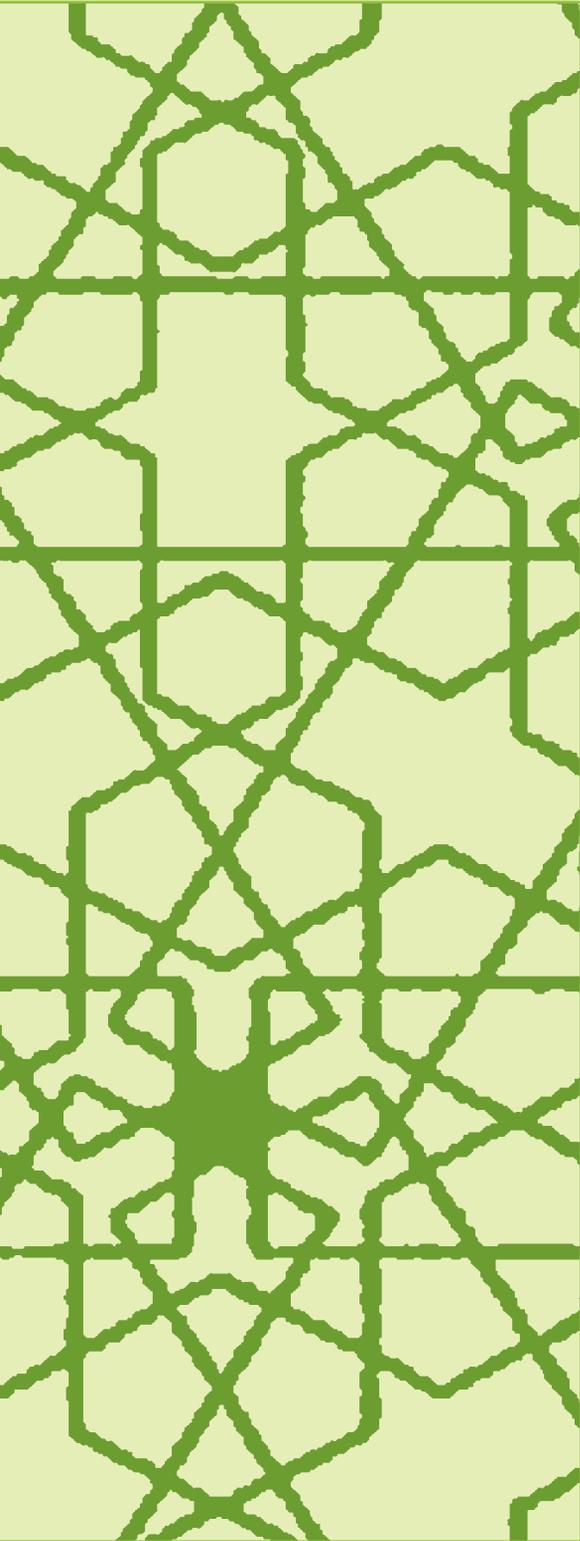
He was born in B'aqlin and died in Kfarmatta where he was buried. He studied the commentaries of al-Sayyid Tannukhi. He became one of the major ascetics of his time. He was somewhat of a Sheikh 'Aql (one of the Knowledgeable Initiates) since he spread knowledge among the people of his time. He never wavered in his commitment to his religious duties. Yet, one day, he was hit with a sharp crisis of conscience. He was overcome by tremendous concern as to whether his endeavor might only be exoteric. He wanted to perceive certainty in his whole being. This is why he went on worshipping God with more effort to clear his

intention from any flaw. He persevered in his endeavor until 'wisdom flooded his tongue with goodness and knowledge'. His mausoleum in Kfarmatta became a pilgrimage site to pray, invoke God, and ask for his *baraka* (spiritual blessing).

The Virtuous Sheikh Muhammad Abu Hilal
(A.D. 1578 - 1640)

He was born in the village of Sha'irah (Wadi al-Taym). He was raised an orphan by his mother. So intent was he on acquiring knowledge and science that he made his own board and started learning the alphabet letters on his own. He would ask literate people around him until he managed to learn how to read and write. When he became a true ascetic, he headed to Damascus where he learnt the method of the Emir al-Sayyid al Tannukhi.

Subsequently, it was made clear that he wanted with the acquired knowledge to build his own way in asceticism and devoutness based on firm scientific bases. He sought enlightenment from true Hadith, *Tafsir* (exegesis), and *Ma'thurat* (texts from tradition), besides his total compliance with the science of the Emir al-Sayyid. The Virtuous Sheikh left some writings which aimed at shedding light upon the exoteric and esoteric basics of the spiritual pattern that can help the ones that follow this way into heeding the hidden evils which hinder the seeker from good discernment and deeds (*Husn al-Tadbir*) and true self-realization (*Sihhat al-tahqiq*). His major work is 'Sharh al-Khisa!'. He also has many poems full of meaning on the love of God, expressing longing for and devotion to Him. He recommended – for he was most modest and feared God – that no mausoleum be built for him after his death. Yet, his tomb in the village of 'Ayn 'Ata (Caza of Rashayya) has turned into a pilgrimage site that people visit in order to fulfill a vow, or to receive *baraka* (spiritual blessing), or pray.



Common Prophets to Both Religions

In both Christianity and Islam there are common figures, whose name may differ from one religion to another, yet whose biography is practically the same. The presence of these figures is a symbol that the two religions are close and that there is continuity between religions. Job who is known for his patience, and John or Yahya son of Zachariah, Elizabeth the barren, Saint Georges or al-Khudr, are all names of Prophets or figures that Christians and Muslims recognize and honor based on their traditions and customs.

John the Baptist (Yahya, A.S.)

Christians believe that John was born in the Jewish town of Ayn Karim six months before the birth of Jesus. He is the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth. He was filled with the Holy Spirit while still in his mother's womb. He was called 'a prophet of God' because he 'will go ahead of the Lord to get everything ready for him' (Luke 1: 15 and 76). Luke adds that 'as John grew up, God's spirit gave him great power' (Luke 1: 80). He headed to the desert since he was a young man. "John wore clothes made of camel's hair. He had a leather strap around his waist and ate grasshoppers and wild honey". (Matthew 3:4). He went out of the desert and started preaching the Kingdom of God and calling for repentance. He made it clear that he was not the Messiah and said to all; 'What did you go out into the desert to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet'. (Matthew 11: 7 - 14). He was a nuisance to the people, the regime and public order. He scolded the King, Herod Antipas who had married Herodias, the wife of his brother, Herod Philip, who was still alive. The king arrested him and imprisoned him in one of his dungeons. Herod once again submitted to Herodias' lust for revenge, the day he got drunk and was taken by the dancing of her daughter, and he swore to give her whatever she wanted. So she asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. The king was upset but did not want to turn her down so he ordered a guard to bring him the head of the Baptist. "When John's followers learned that he had been killed, they took his body and put it in a tomb'. (Marc 6: 17 - 29)

Muslims see in Yahya (A.S.) a Prophet of God sent by Him to the Prophet Zachariah after much prayer although he was too old and his wife was barren. God made him a Prophet and bestowed upon him wisdom as he was still young. He was depicted as obedient to his parents and was not an oppressor or rebellious. He was the first to be named Yahya.



The Prophet Elijah or Ilyas, A.S.

The Prophet Elijah was from the village of Tishbih in the land of Gilead. He lived in the Ninth Century B.C. He was a hermit who did not fear kings nor tyrants.

The king Ahab persisted with his wife, Isabelle, in doing evil in the sight of the Lord. God sent him Elijah to tell him that there would be no rain or dew other than upon his saying. His prophecy was fulfilled for there was a dreadful drought for three years and six months. Elijah stayed by the brook of Cherith, east of the Jordan, drinking from it. God had ordered ravens to feed him until the brook went dry.

The drought lasted. God ordered Elijah to go off to Sarepta, near Sidon where he saw a pagan widow gathering wood and she welcomed him. The Prophet promised she would have enough flour and oil and his promise was miraculously kept as she managed to feed him, herself and her son. Some time later, the widow's son dies but the Prophet Elijah prayed to God who heard his prayer and the widow's boy was brought back to life.

Elijah met with the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel. He asked them to bring an ox, prepare an altar for sacrifice and pray their gods so that they may bring fire upon the altar. They prayed but nothing happened. Elijah ridiculed them. He prepared an altar for God and he prayed to show to the people of Israel that He is the true God. God answered Elijah's prayers and accepted his sacrifice with light that fell from the sky igniting

the altar and the wood on it, the stones and the ground. Elijah seized the priests of Baal and killed them near the river Qayshun. Elijah fled and hid in Mount Horeb. There, he hears God's voice as a light calm breeze calling him and asking him to return to his land to defend what is right.

After a life of struggle and testimony to God and His law, he approached the river Jordan with his disciple Elisha. A chariot of fire appears and Elijah is lifted up to heaven in a whirlwind. As Elijah is lifted up, his mantle falls to the ground and Elisha picks it up. This was circa B.C. 880 (Kings 1: 17 - 19).

In the Gospels, in the description of the Transfiguration, the Apostles Peter, Jacob, and John, saw Moses and Elijah next to Jesus Christ in glory. In this appearance, Elijah is generally seen as a symbol of the prophets and Moses as a symbol of the law, to witness to for the divinely announced 'Son of God'.

Elijah is for Muslims a Prophet sent by God to a people that worshipped idols namely the deity Baal. Ilyas pleaded with the people not to forsake God. They rejected him and tried to kill him so God sent famine and drought upon them until only the faithful remained with him.



Job (Ayyub), A.S.

Job for Christians is a righteous man whose character is described in the Book of Job, in the Old Testament. He raises the persistent question everyone brings up: Why is there good and evil?

Job was a man blessed with much wealth. Yet, one day, he was blighted; he lost all his money and his land. He lost his children and he became ill. He considered himself a righteous and good man, and was unable to understand why God was punishing him so he might rebel against God. His friends tried to convince him that he had sinned since he was being punished. But Job refused to accept the charges and added his cry to that of all those who suffer.

In a debate with God, he finally recognized that he could not fathom the meaning of God but he had to be silent before Him. An Arabic expression "Patience of Ayyub" (*Ya Sabr Ayyub*) makes symbolic of the virtue of patience. As a result of Job's patience with his blight, and his remitting himself to God's will, God gave him health, wealth, family, and consideration. The question that remains is: why evil and undeserved pain?

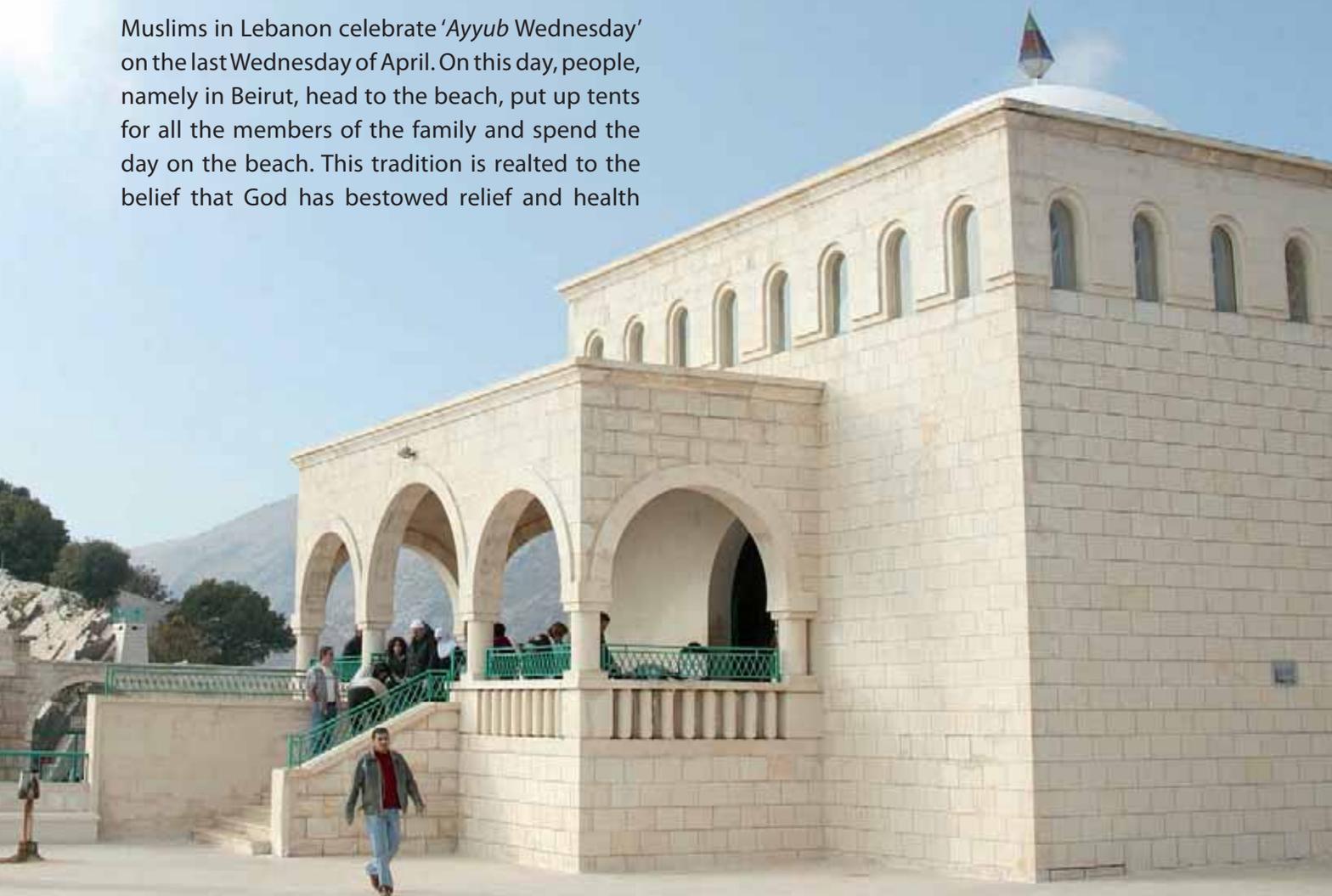
The Church consecrates a day in Passion Week for him, Holy Wednesday or 'urbu'a 'Ayyub. It occurs in Passion Week prior to Easter and is for pondering the suffering of this figure that is an omen of the Passion of the Christ. In some Lebanese regions, women darken their eyelids with *kohl* as they believe it will keep away eye diseases.



As for Muslims, he is a Prophet of God. He was blighted with disease and poverty after a life of good fortune, opulence, and health. Many relatives and friends abandoned him. But he showed great patience with his blight until God allowed him to be healed especially after crying out to God and saying: "Evil has touched me, and You are the most merciful of those who show mercy." (Sura: The Prophets (21), Verse 82). It is to be noted that Job's illness was not shameful or repulsive for he is an infallible Prophet (*ma'sum*).

Muslims in Lebanon celebrate 'Ayyub Wednesday' on the last Wednesday of April. On this day, people, namely in Beirut, head to the beach, put up tents for all the members of the family and spend the day on the beach. This tradition is related to the belief that God has bestowed relief and health

upon Job after seven years of illness, as God asked him to bathe himself in the sea and receive seven waves to be healed. And so he did and was cured. This is why people bathe with their clothes on that day to be blessed with the water that healed Job. This is where the common saying in Arabic comes from: 'Water in April revives people.' On the eve of this day, women stay up to prepare a common pastry known as 'Mfattaka' which is known to require a lot of patience to prepare in remembrance of Job's patience with his suffering and illness.



Saint Georges/ Al-Khidr

- For Christians

'He is the martyr whose name means worker of the land'. Sources agree that he was born in A.D. 280 but disagree as to the place of his birth, which might be Lydda in Palestine, or Phrygia in Pamphilia, or Cappadocia. George was born to a noble Christian family. His father died so his mother brought him up with Christian beliefs. He applied for a career as a soldier at the service of King Diocletian. The king admired his courage and promoted him to the rank of Tribune. He became known for his courage. But Diocletian persecuted Christians. He issued an edict in Nicomedia against them. George objected and tore the Emperor's edict publically. The pagans then arrested him and put him through various torture sessions: they put him in the stocks, tied him to an untamed horse, and they plunged him into boiling water. But God



saved him from all of this. When King Diocletian saw the martyr drowned in a sea of blood and not complaining or groaning from pain, he felt sorry that he should lose him so he allowed him to enter the pagans' temple. Pagans led George to the temple of Apollo and the king ordered him to kneel to the idols promising to forgive him. George came near the idol of Apollo and crossed himself calling the name of God, the One and Unique. All idols tumbled on the floor breaking into pieces. The king and all those present were stunned. One pagan priest convinced the king that George's deeds were witchcraft and sorcery. As a result, George was crucified by order of the king. On April 23 (A.D. 303) he became a martyr at the age of twenty-three.

- His Legend

The roots of this legend are to be found in paganism and relate to the incident of the dragon and the daughter of the king. It was related to many cities, namely Beirut. It is hereafter narrated in short:

George, the Roman officer was one day taken with his troop to Beirut. There had appeared in the sea of this city a great dragon that fed on people. The king of the city and his ministers had agreed that every once in a while, they would offer him a sheep and a girl to be chosen by draw. One day the draw fell upon the king's daughter, which caused upheaval in the city. The king and his people walked behind her to the sea crying. As soon as she arrived before the dragon, she saw George, the officer on horseback; holding his lance in his right hand, he gave the dragon a severe pierce killing it. The people rejoiced and came to the officer to thank him. The king offered to offer his daughter in marriage but he said he was only fulfilling his religious duty. Other stories are told that end with

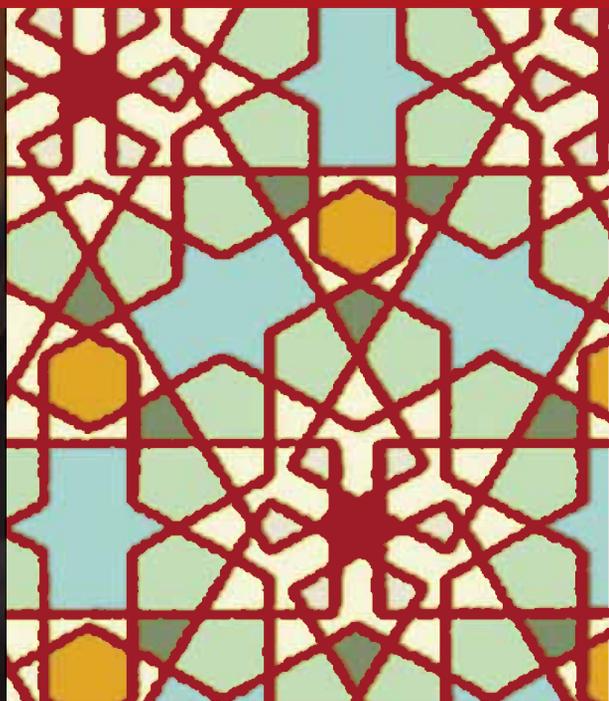
George's marriage with the girl, some relate the incidents to a lake in Libya.

- For Muslims

Muslims call him 'Al-Khidr'. They consider him the patron of sailors, the drowning, and a harbinger of spring, which is why he is called 'Al-Khidr' (the Green bringer). He is for Muslims one of the greatest 'Awliya' (The Trusted Ones) since it is said in the Glorious Koran that God imparted him with the mission of leadership that had been imparted to Moses. Sufis also honor him greatly. For some researchers, his name corresponds to that of the Prophet Elijah. Muslims believe that he intercedes for the drowning and the travellers in the desert. Elijah is the master of all seas. Both, Elijah and George are immortal since they have drunk from the fountain of eternity. In some accounts, Elijah and George are brothers. In some others, *Khidr* (George) is a young man in love with a young girl – in the legend, Elijah is the girl – whom he promises to meet on earth. Some believe that the soul of the secret character who finds the fountain of life and drinks from it shall be immortal. It has been given to Elijah first and then to George.

The Druze consider George to be a courageous hero. Their Emirs and Sheikhs obliged Christians at the time of feudalism to build churches and monasteries and to name them after him or after other great heroes. Another researcher links Saint George with Saint Elias (Elijah): the term Jirjis means 'the ones who works the land', and the one who works the land makes it green, whereby his name 'Al-Khidr'. 'Elijah' means 'Yahweh is my God'. Elijah defeated the priests of Baal, which means barrenness. So 'Il' is the God of fertility in terms of earth as he covers it with green and Elijah is 'al-Khidr' just like George.

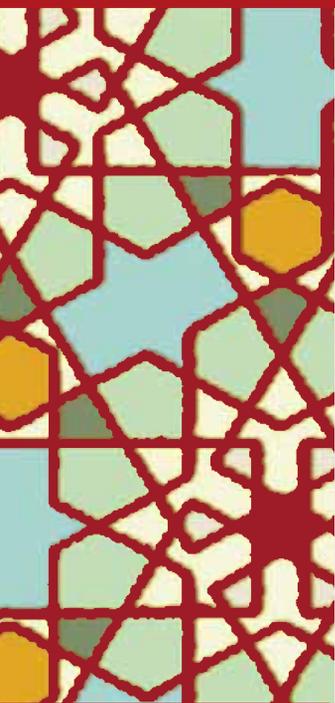




The Faithful and Time

Many people, willingly or not, refuse to acknowledge the passing of time that leads to death. They refuse a common time arduously organized. They prefer their own personal internal rhythm and a way of living in which they control time and their own selves to link the fleeting moment with eternity.

The faithful live every moment in time in the presence of God who awaits man's free response to His blessings. Man should bear testimony to this presence in full consciousness, and have a new approach to time.



Birth

Bearing children is a married couple's main duty in Christianity and is considered as a blessing from God. When birth occurs, relatives ask their parish priest to bless the parents of the newborn. He answers their request and says a special prayer for the newborn, next to the hospital bed or in the home. On the eighth day, the parents give their newborn a Christian name and entrust him to his patron Saint. When mother and child can go to church (traditionally after forty days), the priest receives them at the door of the church and says a special prayer for both mother and child. He asks for the blessing of the child, his growth in understanding and sanctity, and his protection against evil forces. Christianity considers boys and girls equal since birth. It recognizes their right to scientific and religious education, health and medical care, and their parents' love.

In Islam too, the Glorious Koran focuses on equality in human value between male and female new born children. '...your Lord Who created you from a single

soul' (Sura: Women (4), Verse 1). 'O mankind, We created you male and female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may come to know one another. The noblest among you in God's sight are the most pious.'(Sura: The Chambers (49), Verse 13). God has given girls and boys to those who long for them. In pre-Islamic traditions, Arabs used to distinguish between newborn males and newborn females and would prefer the former. The Glorious Koran condemned this: 'Yet, when one of them is brought tidings of an infant girl, his face turns dark, suppressing his vexation.'

(Sura: The Bees, Verse 58). The Koran

also condemned the habit of

burying alive, new born

girls in some tribes

and in some parts:

'When the

new born girl,

buried alive,

is asked For

what crime she

was murdered'

(Sura: Rolling

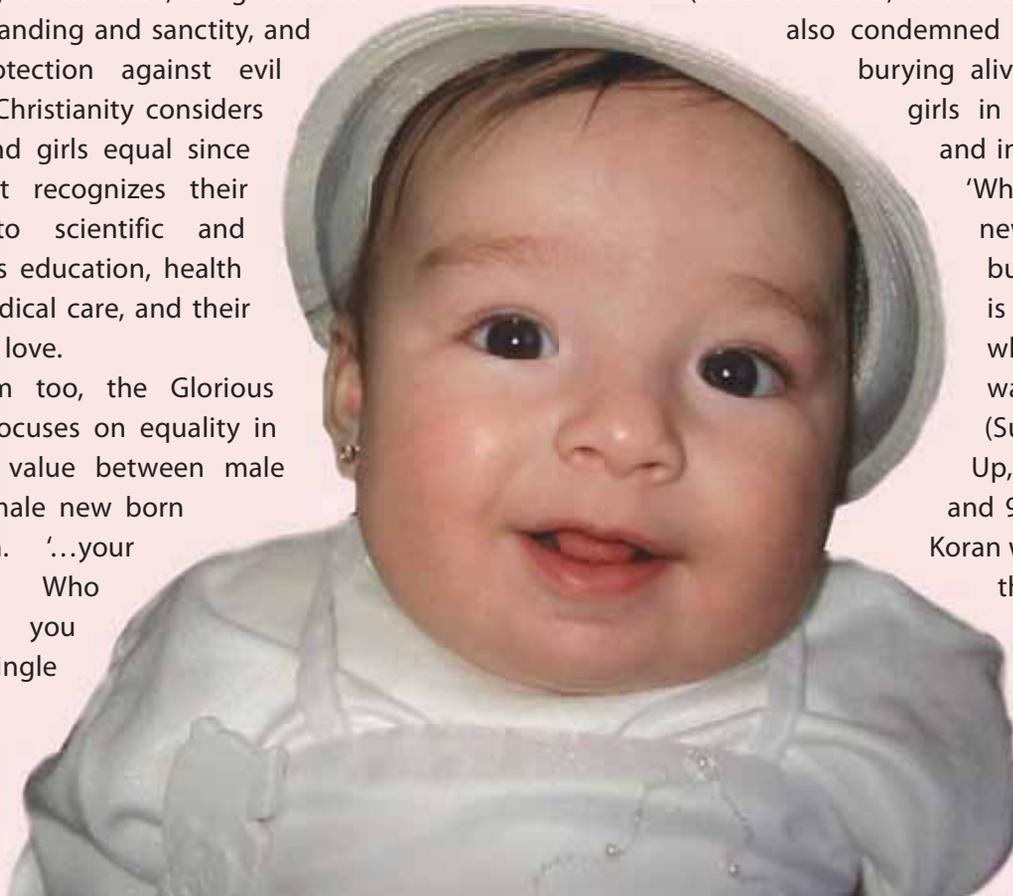
Up, Verses 8

and 9). In this the

Koran was based on

the oneness of

creation.



Entering Religion In Christianity

The Baptism's Sacrament

Baptism is the beginning of life in Church and the door through which one is admitted to the rest of other Sacraments. After the child is sealed with the Holy Cross, the godparents (a godparent is the one who presents a child to be baptized and shares the responsibility of this child's Christian upbringing, and his confirmation fulfilling the entailed duties) and the parents declare their rejection of Satan and profess their faith in the Holy Trinity and in the Church. The water of baptism is then blessed and the forehead of the baptized is then anointed with Holy Chrism, which is the Sacred Myron with which the baptized becomes one of the lights of Christ.

The Holy Chrism also symbolizes the strengthening of the baptized in his battle against the forces of evil. The main rite in baptism is the complete immersion of the baptized thrice or the pouring of water over the baptized with the celebrant saying: '[Child's name] I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit for eternal life.'



Byzantine Churches immerse the whole body of the baptized thrice, first the head and then the rest of the body. Catholic Churches pour water thrice on the head only.

Before being immersed in the water of baptism, the baptized removes his outer clothes as a sign that he leaves behind the person he was. After baptism, he dresses in white to express the new state or the new person he has become. In addition, some rites include putting some salt on the tongue of the baptized as a symbol that he will become the salt of the earth able to give new meaning to existence. At the end of baptism, all those present carry lit candles and walk in procession in the Church. All receive white sugar-coated almonds (dragées).

Baptism may be celebrated any day of the week. The godparent must be baptized and a confirmed Christian fulfilling the entailed duties. He must vow to uphold the Christian education of the baptized should the child be orphaned. Baptism is necessary for Salvation. Yet, those who search for the truth and act in accordance with God's will as they know it, without knowing the Bible, may reach Salvation in their implicit longing for Baptism. This is what is called 'baptism of desire'.

Confirmation Or The Sacrament of Anointment with the sacred Chrism (Myron)

The Sacred Chrism (Myron)

The Sacred Chrism or Myron is oil that has been mixed with various perfumes and that symbolizes the grace-bestowing gifts of the Holy Spirit. The rite of blessing Myron occurs during baptism, confirmation and ordination of priests,

sanctification of churches, altars, and bells. It is sweet-smelling, good-tasting oil. With it, the baptized and confirmed carry the sweet aroma of Christ to spread it around them with their good deeds. The Armenian Orthodox Church uses the Sacred Myron in all its religious rites.

This anointment means that those asking to be baptized are confirmed in their professed faith and in their 'knowledge of God'.

In Eastern Churches the Sacrament of confirmation or the anointment with Sacred Myron is performed right after baptism as the baptized is sealed with the Sacred Myron, invoking the Holy Spirit. This sacrament is given once in a lifetime because it seals man indelibly and marks him as 'Christ's own' commissioned to act and speak accordingly to this profession of faith.

Anointment with the Sacred Myron on the forehead expresses the nature of Baptism: 'the sweet aroma of faith', and 'the seal and gift of the Holy Spirit'.



Anointment of the forehead, ears, nostrils, eyes, hands and feet with Sacred Myron in the rite of Confirmation which is conferred after Baptism.

In addition, anointment with the Sacred Myron on the forehead thrice in the name of the Holy Trinity crosswise actually indicates what the confirmed has reached through his baptism: he has become a follower of Christ as he is encompassed by Him becoming a witness to Him carrying His aroma to spread it through deeds and sayings.

In some churches, the bishop or priest designated by him confirms a baptized adolescent who moves forward to embrace him. In this case, confirmation is usually given at Mass (or a gathering of worship in Protestant Churches) after the Biblical sermon. This is how the confirmed is admitted to the local community of faith.

In Catholic and Orthodox Churches, after the statement of belief or Credo, the godparent of the baptismal candidate places his right hand on his shoulder and moves forward with him to the Bishop or the priest who immerses his right thumb in Sacred Myron then places his right hand on the head of the baptismal candidate and signs him crosswise. The baptized then gets strength and courage to confirm his belief and to bear the misfortunes of life patiently. The baptized is anointed with the Sacred Myron and the grace of the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon him just like it was bestowed upon Jesus Christ when He was baptized in the River Jordan.

In a number of churches especially in Protestant churches, teenagers that are to be baptized go through a special training session in Christian creed. In the celebration ritual of the occasion, the Pastor reads to those present the names of the baptismal candidates who then profess their faith by reading the Credo and pledge to faithfully

fulfill the entailed duties. The Pastor then makes the Confirmation prayer, gives them the right of fellowship, and declares them new members of the Church welcoming them to the Eucharist.

Unction of the Sick

In addition to the oil of baptism and the oil of Myron the Church uses oil in the Sacrament of anointment of the sick. It heals the sick from their physical, spiritual, and psychological ills. It is only used in extreme cases when the patient is about to die.

Note: The oil aforementioned is from olive oil and is consecrated by the Patriarch in a special rite on Holy Thursday.





Communion

The newly baptized take part in the Eucharist as was the case when the faithful who believed in Christ were baptized in the early times of Christianity and as is the case today in the Orthodox Church. At the time, people were baptized, confirmed, and would receive Holy Communion on the same day. Communion of baptized children requires a decision that the Maronite and some Catholic Churches have not taken yet. Communion is given to adult baptized people after they have been prepared through a program at school and in the parish.

For Catholics, preparation for First Communion is based on raising the awareness of grown children who have started being responsible and conscious of their acts. Institutions and parents seize this opportunity to celebrate a new and special phase in the child's life. They attempt to remember this occasion by handing out gifts that mark the date of the First Communion and the name of the candidate. Parents invite relatives and friends to share their joy of seeing their child reach maturity.

The ceremony held in the parish church when children receive their First Communion from the Eucharist Sacrament is the First Communion celebration.

In Protestant Churches, First Communion occurs right after Confirmation and after that the confirmed has gone through a session on Christian Belief. The Latin Church has imposed conditions to allow the child to receive First Communion. These conditions are as follows:

- That he is capable of understanding what the Eucharist represents so he knows the difference between normal bread and the Holy Bread, the Body of Christ, and that he should want to know more about Jesus Christ and his teachings.
- That he should know also that the Church is the body of the Christ so he loves it and wishes to live with it.
- That he should be reconciled with God having his blessing and forgiveness for his sins.
- That he should not eat at least one hour prior to Communion.



Celebration of First Communion occurs in groups in Catholic Churches. Children dress in white to symbolize purity of their hearts. They receive, for the first time in their lives the Eucharist at a Mass attended by their parents.

In Islam

Birth

Islam does not impose special ceremonies for birth and newborns. The Prophet (PBUH) said: “every child is born with a natural belief in God and an inborn inclination to worship Him alone called in Arabic the ‘*Fitra*’”. His father and mother are responsible for his good moral and religious upbringing so that he is capable of facing the many challenges in life and integrate his environment and society. With the birth of a newborn, the parents ought to carry out a number of things:

- The father should carry the newborn immediately after his birth and recites the Islamic call to Prayer (*adhan*) in his right ear, then recites the *iqama* (that announces the beginning of prayer) in his left ear so that the first thing he hears is the mention of God and His unicinity.
- The naming of the male child should be momentary – as long as seven days sometimes with names such as ‘Abd Allah’ or ‘Muhammad’ since it is recommended to call one a servant of God or call one by the name of the Prophet. This gives time to find the appropriate name. A child has the right to be properly named by his parents.
- The hair of the newborn is to be cut on the seventh day and the weight of the hair in silver ought to be given as alms (*sadaqah*) to the needy.
- The male newborn ought to be circumcised upon his birth.
- ‘*Aqiqah* (offering) should be offered as sacrifice for the newborn. A sheep – or the like depending on the means – is bought

and slaughtered. The meat is offered to the poor neighbors or cooked and a meal is offered for the loved ones, provided the parents do not eat from it. It is a sacrifice and alms of hope that the newborn should be preserved [against any harm].

- Children ought to be taught from an early age the meaning of *Al-Shahadatayn* (the twin testimony of faith in Islam) and taught how to recite them and recite the blessed Opening Sura (Fatiha), otherwise known as the Sura of praise.
- Children ought to be trained to pray before becoming of age so that when they reach the age of responsibility (*sinn al-taklif*) they commit to performing prayer. Girls reach *sinn al-taklif* when they are eight and boys when they are thirteen.
- Popular traditions have it that neighbors offer gifts to the newborn. In some Islamic institutions a yearly celebration is held for girls upon their reaching *sinn al-taklif* and their wearing a *hijab* (veil).

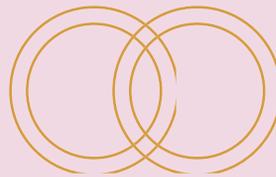
Circumcision (Khitān)

Circumcision is an old tradition carried out by Arabs and other Semitic people and is mentioned in the Islamic Sources as going back to the father of Prophets, Abraham. The root of the word means ‘to cut’ and usually the male newborn is preferably circumcised in the first month after his birth with the removal of some of the foreskin from the male organ thus protecting him against bacteria and other causes of infection.

Marriage and Related Matters

Marriage is a social frame to uniting a man and a woman since humans feel, upon becoming of age, the need to love and to be loved in return. This love may evolve and cause the man and the woman to enter a commitment within marriage.

Marriage in the Christian religion and in the Muslim religion is a sine qua non condition to have children. Although the concept may differ between the two religions, there remains a sort of agreement between a man and a woman to live under the same roof, to have children, and to be father and mother. Traditions and customs vary from one religion to another as concerns marriage which may be preceded by a period called engagement.



In Christianity

Matrimony in the Christian religion has special characteristics: union and the rejection of polygamy; it is based theologically on the teachings of the New Testament, and socially on equality between man and woman. Its religious symbol is in the unity between Christ and the Church which is one. Christian matrimony cannot be broken, therefore it strictly denies divorce since the latter separates what God has united. Christian matrimony is characterized by the duty to have children and any refusal of this duty sets marriage adrift from its special gift, i.e. children, and deprives the married couple from the participation with God in parenthood.

Marriage requires preparation, which is sometimes an engagement, and is celebrated in a public marriage ceremony where the couple makes public vows in the church in the presence of a religious dignitary delegated for this purpose, of witnesses, and of the faithful community.

Betrothal

Betrothal in the liturgical sense is the rite of blessing the rings before a subsequent formal marriage vow. Usually, a ceremony is held in the house of the fiancée with many guests. The future bride and bridegroom exchange the pledge by mutual consent then the parents of the fiancé offer her presents and a dowry.

After the Betrothal, the affianced get to know each other, but do not live under the same roof. They prepare for marriage as they become acquainted with the entailed religious and civil duties, and they prepare their common project in the Church and in society. After they come to the certainty of their feelings of a lifetime of mutual faithful love they set a date for the wedding ceremony and its place. They agree on the witnesses to their official vows.



After the future bride and bridegroom have worn the rings in the right ring fingers, it is customary that the parents of the fiancé help the fiancée to wear the jewels that the fiancé has offered her.





The Wedding Ceremony (The Crowns)

The Betrothal rite focuses on the rings; the marriage rite focuses on the crowns. In the Eastern tradition the marriage rite was given the name of the main element in it, the placing of crowns on the head of the bride and that of the bridegroom. It was thus called 'the service of the crowning' or 'the rite of the crowning'. The crowns are blessed with prayer. As they are placed on the head of the bride and the groom, prayers are said and prayers are also said

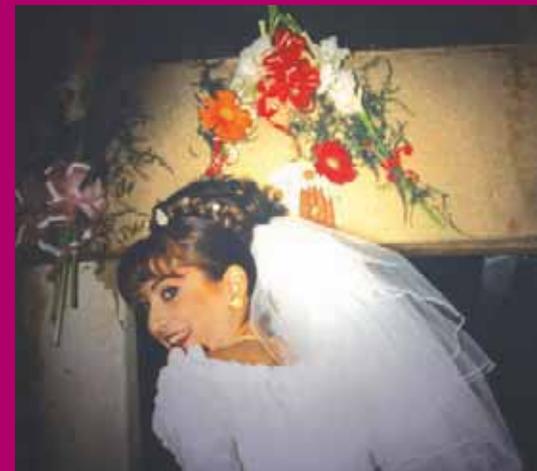
when the crowns are removed from their heads. In the Byzantine liturgy, the Priest exchanges the crowns of the bride and the groom thrice. The bride and groom as well as the witnesses walk in procession behind the Priest around the altar with their crowns on. This meaning of this procession is conveyed in the Chaldean liturgy that ends the marriage rite by building the chamber of the bride and groom. Procession and building mean the moving of the bride from her parents' home to that of the groom in a night procession lit by lanterns, at the rhythm of songs and hymns, and





with close relatives as mentioned by Jesus Christ in the parable of the Ten Virgins. Coptic liturgy is currently the only one to include anointment of the bride and groom. This anointment can only be understood by comparing it with the anointment of kings and the Levis who were anointed before their crowning. Crowns are made with the flowers of the season or with branches of laurel or olive trees or made of metal. Crowns are placed on the head either to mean someone is eminent or consecrated or to mean he is victorious. John Chrysostom gives the crown in marriage another

meaning: 'The crown is placed on the head of the spouses as a sign of their victory. They head to the harbor of matrimony as they won a victory over lust.' Before the beginning of the ceremony, the bride arrives to church with her father or guardian and she meets her groom who awaits her on the threshold of the church. They enter together with their witnesses as well as their relatives, friends and some children as honor attendants, accompanied by music and hymns. At the end of the ceremony, the bridal couple receives congratulations from everyone present.



The groom carries his bride before entering their conjugal home so that she may stick yeast above the main entrance of this home asking for blessing and affluence in their new marital home.

Annulment of Marriage and Divorce

Divorce is the legal termination of marriage while the spouses are alive. The Christian religion refuses divorce ab initio since marriage is a commitment of the spouses before God to be faithful to each other for all their lives. Christianity calls upon the spouses to legally stay faithful to their exchanged worded vows until the end of their lives. This is why marriages are called indissoluble.

Yet, the Church recognizes that error and failure are human. Therefore, there are cases in which separation of the spouses is justified and inevitable. This is why the Catholic Church respects the painful decision of those who are forced to ask for separation. However, it affirms the continuation of the marital bond legally undertaken. Orthodox Churches as well as Protestant and Armenian Orthodox Churches say that they sometimes agree upon the dissolution of the marital bond and consider that it is a lesser evil than disagreements and conflict amidst the family. As a result, they agree to marry those that have an annulment of their first marriage and to legally give them the Sacraments of the Church.

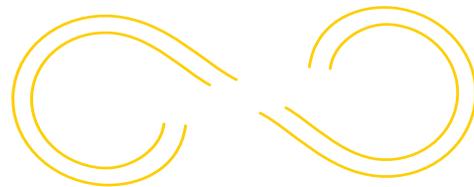
On the other hand, the Catholic Church recognizes its right to declare the complete annulment of marriage should one of the spouses ask for this from the ecclesiastical tribunal and should one of the following reasons prove to be true prior to the celebration of the wedding ceremony:

First: the lack of requirements to make the marriage right, such as: age, insanity, etc.

Second: the fact that there was coercion to enter into marriage, the fact that the spouses are not emotionally mature, the fact that there is sexual impotence, homosexuality, the refusal to have children or the refusal of marital life, all of which mean that the core requirements of marital life are lacking.

After the church declares the annulment of a marriage, the contracting parties are given a Declaration of Nullity and are free to marry again in Church.

Protestant Churches do not consider marriage as a Holy Sacrament but the spouses ask for the blessing of God for their common life project at a Church ceremony presided by an ordained Pastor. Divorce is allowed after the attempts of reconciliation have proved a failure and common marital life is impossible. The divorcees are allowed to ask for the blessing in another marriage.



In Islam

It is recommended in Islam that a man and a woman marry since marriage allows the containment of lust, perpetuates human life, and stabilizes social life. Marriage based on love and mercy is considered as one of the Signs of God as He said: 'Among His wonders is that He created for you, from among yourselves, spouses with whom to find comfort, and instilled between you love and mercy. In these are signs for a people who ponder and reflect.' (Sura: The Byzantines (30), Verse 21). Islam encourages the youth who have reached the right age to marry, should they have the moral and financial conditions to enter this commitment. The relations of love and mercy are based on divine Law and on the laws of man, i.e. the establishment of a public and contractual marriage between a man and a woman who want to start a family.

Betrothal

Prior to marriage there is sometimes an engagement period during which the affianced get to know each other. This engagement is an old tradition meant to allow a boy and a girl to get acquainted publicly. Social traditions related to engagement vary since for religious families it only occurs by virtue of a contract. But it is sometimes done without a contract and does not have any effects related to Shari'ah or to the law since it is merely a promise to marry and can be broken should the betrothed deem it necessary. In any case, the betrothed do not have the right to have sexual intercourse without a contract. It is socially preferable for the engagement not to last too long and for the affianced to agree, without external pressure, to a commitment through a contract. The fiancé customarily offers his fiancée a gift at a small ceremony during which Sura 'The Opening' (Fatiha) is recited in the hope of success and support from God (*tasdid*).





The Marriage Contract

Marriage in Islam is a contract based on mutual consent between the two parties: the husband and wife. A man intending to marry should be certain that he can be able to fulfill the rights of a wife. The main basis of marriage is the declaration (*tasrih*), i.e. that marriage be accepted orally so that the contract be made by saying: 'I have accepted the marriage'. The father is the only guardian (*wali*) of a girl who has not been married before. Marriage cannot be made without his consent. The guardianship (*wilayah*) of the father does not mean that he should force his daughter into marrying whoever he wants without her consent and approval. His guardianship is legally annulled in case he should forbid her to marry a man suitable for her by Shari'ah and by common convention. The father's guardianship is also annulled should his daughter marry for the second time. No relative – cousin, uncle on her mother's side or on her father's side, brother – of the woman can be her guardian other than her father. The Hanafi School of jurisprudence (*madhhab*) allows a girl to marry without her guardian's approval. Other schools give a judge the right to marry a girl with the one she has chosen should her guardian give arbitrary refusal. The man offers his bride a *mahr*, a gift offered upon marriage. *Mahr* may be a *mu'akhar* (deferred) amount which complicates divorce procedures for the man. Should he initiate divorce, then the dowry is the wife's right that the man must fulfill before divorce, which is why this is called deferred (*mu'akhar*) *mahr*. The time to pay this amount is determined either upon divorce or upon the death of one of the spouses, and this is called in the contract, the nearer term ('*aqrab al-'ajalayn*).

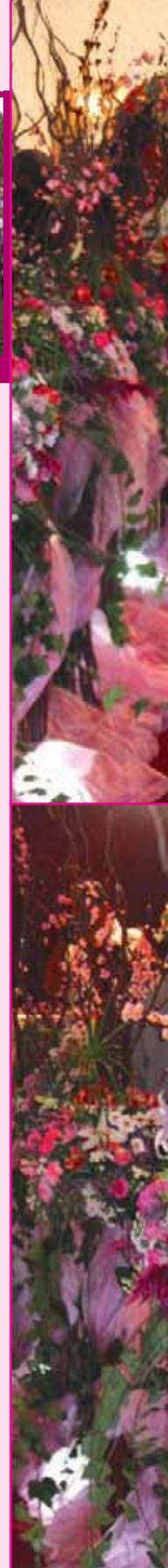
Celebrations of the wedding traditionally go on for days. They are held in the bride's house for women before the contract is signed. Traditionally, the wedding ceremony is divided into two parts: one for men and another for women. In the men's part, the groom is carried in a procession with drums and pipes. The bride is carried in a procession from the women's part to her groom. She enters the ceremony room with shrill cries of joy. The wedding ceremony may start with readings from the Koran for blessing then with Prophetic eulogy (*mada'ih*). The religious dignitary highlights the spiritual meaning of marriage emanating from life and optimism, and he clarifies the relationship between the husband and his wife. When the ceremony is over, the bridal couple is carried in one last procession to their conjugal home.



Faqihs (experts in Islamic law) frown upon extravagant ceremonies or extravagant *mahr* amounts. But the Koranic text says that the bride may ask for anything she wants, and whatever she asks for will be hers alone. The man may not do her injustice by taking *mahr* away from her. God has said: 'Give women their dowry (*sadaqah*), a free offering (*nihlah*). And if they willingly offer you any of it, then consume it in peace of mind and wholesomeness.' (Sura: Women(4), Verse 4). *Sadaqah* is the dowry, and the free offering (*nihlah*) means that there should be nothing in exchange. *Nihlah* is not the word for dowry; it is all what is given without exchange. The Verse ends a habit that dates back to pre-Islamic times when the father would take his daughter's dowry. Islam ended this habit, and the dowry became the right of the woman alone unless she gives up this dowry to her father or any one else willingly.

For the Mowahidoon (Unitarian) Druze Community, marriage is based on mutual consent and agreement between the betrothed. No coercion should be exerted on any of them. The *Muwahhid* is to make an effort (*'ijtihad*) to choose a wife who is pious, composed, and of good origins and a good family. This is also what a girl should look for when choosing since this choice has a great impact on the upbringing of the children and their righteousness.

An engaged male is eligible for marriage upon being eighteen of age, and the girl upon turning seventeen. The girl's parents ought to enquire about the fiancé and tell that to their daughter giving her advice leaving the final decision to her. A girl should not be engaged to two persons at the same time or in a divorce waiting period or in mourning. Muwahidoon Sheikhs do not approve of clamor at marriage ceremonies. The guests must be honored with what is appropriate for the occasion along with remembrance of God and *'ishhar* (making the marriage public).





Polygamy

The Koran allows polygamy, i.e. for one man to have more than one wife upon the condition of being financially able and of treating them fairly and equally. More recent experts in Islamic Law see that the Koran has imposed some terms upon polygyny to occur only in exceptional cases such as the inability to have children or the existence of some debilitating disease, or in some cases after a war when there are too many women for too few men. Experts in Islamic Law consider that the first wife is wronged when her husband marries another, a second wife. This is why they allow the first wife to stipulate in the marriage contract that if this were to happen, she may initiate divorce.

For Unitarian Druze, marriages are monogamous for they insist on the *tafsir* (interpretation) of the Glorious Koranic Verse: 'but if you fear you will not be fair to them all, then only one' (Sura: Women (4), Verse 3), and His saying: 'You will not be able to act equitably with your women, even if you apply yourself to do so.' (Sura: Women (4), Verse 129).

Divorce

Islamic Shari'ah considers the marriage contract final, which is why it has no term. Initially it is meant to be perpetuated since it aims at starting a family. Yet, the Shari'ah admits the possibility of divorce should the marriage prove impossible to maintain because of irreconcilable differences between the two parties or if the husband continuously mistreats his wife. In expression of how much Shari'ah is reluctant to grant divorce is the Prophetic Saying: 'The most hateful permissible thing (*'abghad al-halal*) in the sight of God is divorce'. A judge does not grant divorce merely because of disagreement or a complaint from one of the spouses against the other. The Koran states that two arbiters, one on the woman's side, and the other on the husband's side are delegated to try and reconcile the parties: 'If you fear dissension between a married couple, send forth an arbiter from his family and an arbiter from her family. If they desire reconciliation, God will bring them together.' (Sura: Women (4), Verse 35).

Divorce is the right of man. But women also have the right to file for divorce should it be stipulated in the marriage contract. She may petition a judge for divorce in cases of mistreatment or for inability to spend on her (*'infaq*), or if she was kept from having her legal rights. The woman may impose that the marriage contract stipulate she be her husband's wakil (agent) for her divorce. And should he agree, she can grant herself divorce as agreed between the two parties. In some cases, a woman may break the marriage contract. Social and economic changes in Lebanon and elsewhere have influenced matters of marriage and divorce. It used to be common for one man to have several wives; this has decreased a lot in the last few decades. There used to be few

divorce cases especially in the rural areas; they have increased a lot lately especially in urban areas. Many amendments have been made to Personal Statutes in the Arab countries in order to bring more equality to women on the one hand and to meet the challenges of modern times as concerns family matters. God has imposed many restrictions upon divorce so that the husband may not deem it easy. Among these restrictions is the need to give the wife her full rights upon divorce. Proper divorce procedure is in the presence of two fair witnesses who hear the divorce formula. Divorce should not occur if a woman is going through her monthly menstrual cycle or after sexual intercourse; the end of the month must come before there can be divorce. These conditions actually give the husband time to think after his anger has subsided and not to use the words of divorce in anger or haste. Among the procedures foreseen by Islam to reduce the cases of divorce are family arbiters, i.e. delegating a member in the wife's family and one in the husband's family to try and reconcile the two parties before divorce is finalized. Should this not work, and divorce happens, Islam has foreseen a compulsory waiting period (*'iddah*), which may be as long as three months during which the husband should go on providing for his wife and cannot drive her out of the conjugal home should the wife want to remain in it. It is a last chance to keep the marital relation; should there be sexual intercourse during this time, or the premises of an encounter, divorce is annulled. It is also annulled should the two parties agree upon that, in that case it is called retracted divorce.



Death

Death is in fact the greatest mystery in human existence. Death ends human life on this Earth and we are all sure to die one day. Intellectuals give this end a humanly logical explanation based on the principle that any composite being is bound to disintegrate. Any material being is bound to dissolve and vanish. The explanation of death given by Christianity is related to two events: the first is the creation of Adam and the other is the death of Christ and His Resurrection from the grave victorious over death. Islam clearly reminds man that there will come a day when he is placed under earth. God has said in the Koran: 'Every soul shall taste death' (Sura: The House of 'Umran (3), Verse 185). 'Then you shall be returned to the realm of the Invisible and the Visible, and He shall inform you of what you used to do.' (Sura: Congregational Prayer (62), Verse 8).

Death in Christianity

Death ends life in its earthly form, and introduces the human being in another kind of life (in spirit). The monistic perception of man, which is visible in some texts, considers death as reposition in a sort of coma until the day of resurrection. The dualistic perception of man on the other hand views the soul as having an independent life from the body. Yet, this life remains incomplete until the soul is reunited with the body again on the general resurrection.

The Righteous go to the 'dwelling of light and rest' whereas the sinners go to 'sheol'. This is where the dead await the day of general resurrection. The righteous await it in joy and glorification whereas the sinners are in torment and fear. The faithful never despair since they count on the prayers of the church and on the mercy of God to have access to the Kingdom of God on the Day of Judgment. The life of man is divided into three stages: the first is on Earth, the second is between death and resurrection; both these stages prepare for the third in which the fate of man is decided either in the Kingdom of God or in hell far from it.

In the Book of Genesis, the account of the creation seems to indicate that God made Adam to his image and that Adam was not perishable at first. Yet after Adam committed Sin, violating God's order, wickedness entered human nature which became subject to pain, disease, and death. Still, God promised to send man a Savior to redeem him from sin and from death. This is what truly happened with the victory of Christ over death and his Resurrection on the third day. He raised all those that repented and brought them to eternal life with Him. This is how with the blessing of Christ death takes a positive meaning for Christians: it becomes a call to eternal life that God addresses to man. The latter decides with his deeds on Earth of his eternal fate with Christ who has risen from the dead.





Praying Upon and Burying the Dead

In Christian creed, the death of the body does not lead to the entire vanishing of man. The resurrection of Christ has given the death of the faithful the meaning of a passage to eternal life with God. When a Christian dies the community of faithful meets around him to pay their final respects and pray for him. They bring consolation to his bereaved family and friends remembering Christ's promise of eternal life, which is at the heart of Christian belief.

The body is carried to Church where all those present take part in a funeral Mass remitting the deceased to the mercy of the Creator. They express their hope in meeting him, with God's Grace. Every Church has special prayers said by the priest and the faithful for the deceased before his burial.

The body is carried from the church to the cemetery where the priest blesses the tomb and the one who has finished his earthly journey. After the burial ceremony, people depart with the hope of resurrection.



Remembering the Dead

After the deceased is buried, his relatives and parents remember him at several occasions:

- On the third day, a funeral Mass is held and incense is burnt on the tomb.
- On the seventh or ninth day, a funeral mass is held and it marks the end of funeral prayers.
- On the fortieth day, a requiem is said remembering that the deceased passed away forty days ago.
- After six months, then a year... memorial Masses are held.

Parents may ask the priest to say special masses on Sundays and 'fast days' so that the dead may rest in peace.

The living do not only remember to have these masses, prayers, and incense burnt. They may give away the 'bread of mercy' (*marhamiyyah*) at the door of the church, either bread or wheat and sugar, or the like.

How do Christians remember the dead?

The Church remembers the dead in prayers almost constantly since they are considered as taking part in the prayer with the church even though their body is no longer here.

Saturdays are special days in the Orthodox Church to remember the dead, in remembrance of Holy Saturday or the Saturday when Christ went down to where the dead dwell before his Resurrection. Saturday as such is a day that is made for remembrance since it is a day of 'rest' and a day of prayer. On it, the living remember the dead and pray so that they may 'rest' in peace for eternity. Remembering the dead in the Maronite liturgy is on the week prior to Lent known as pre-Lenten week. Three weeks before Lent there are three Sundays for the remembrance of the dead: the first is for Deceased Priests, the second is for the Righteous and Just, and the third is for the Faithful Departed.

Other occasions to remember the dead are when receiving communion or before it. An old tradition was to visit the dead with the Eucharist so that it may intercede for him on Judgment Day. Traditionally, Christians would be buried by the Church or even in the Church so that the shadow of the Eucharist would pass over them and overflow them with mercy and grace. At the end of Mass the priest and the faithful would head to the cemetery to sprinkle it with water and quench the thirst of the dead singing for Christ. After that, the living would hand out bread (*marhamiyyat*) so that the souls of the dead may rest in peace. Everybody would repeat: 'God rest their soul' and mass might end with lunch so that everybody would ask God to have mercy upon the dead.



Mourning

Paul the Apostle said: 'Grieve not like those who have no hope' (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Paying tribute to the dead is not by wailing or lamenting or wearing black, but rather by praying and acting out of mercy and love in remembrance of them. The early Christians would wear white upon the death of someone expressing their faith in resurrection from the dead. At present time, the relatives and parents of the deceased wear black for a mourning period and refrain from manifestations of joy. No engagements or weddings are held during mourning periods other than for major necessity in which case the wedding is held quietly without any music or singing. Sadness prevails in the hearts for a long time, but modern times have made it necessary to shorten the time of mourning of the bereaved in order to return to work. Relatives make up for this by repeated prayers so that the soul of the deceased may rest in peace by God's side. Many make donations to charity, finding in relieving others consolation and hope for themselves.

Death in Islam

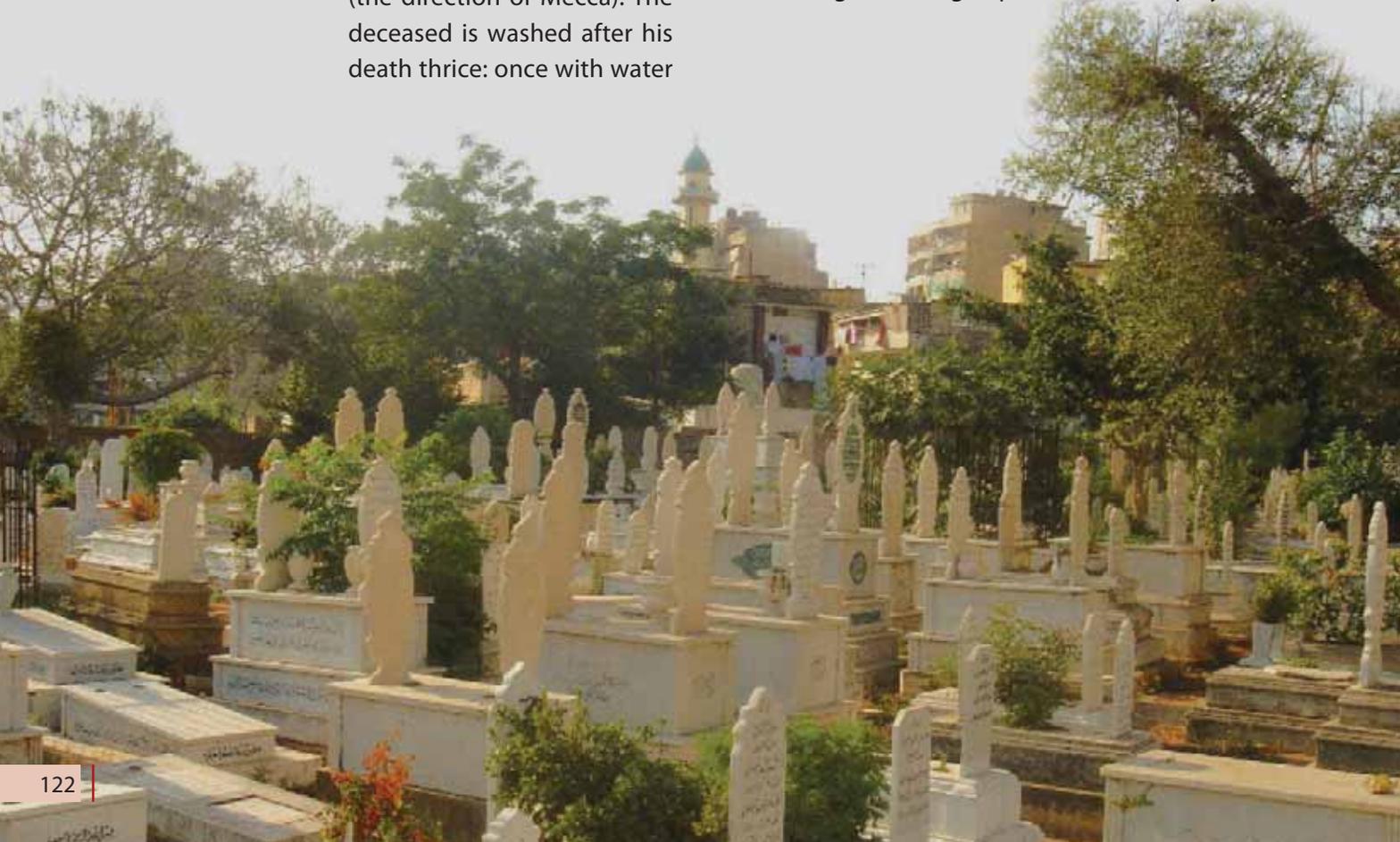


Traditions and customs mix with legal religious norms in bidding the dead farewell in the Muslim religion. Shari'ah encourages the hasty burial of the deceased so those who die at night are buried at night and those who die during the day are buried in day time unless it is absolutely necessary to put off the burial.

It is a legal duty to place the dying towards the *qibla* (the direction of Mecca). The deceased is washed after his death thrice: once with water

mixed with *sidr* (nabk leaves), once with water mixed with camphor and one last time with pure water. The head and neck are washed first, then the right side of the body, then the left side. After washing and shrouding the corpse or before, camphor is placed on the seven places in the body where prostration is made, i.e. the forehead, the palms, the knees, and the big toes. Then the body is shrouded with three pieces of purified cloth which should necessarily cover the whole body. A male should wash the deceased if he is a male and if it is a woman then a woman washes her.

After the deceased has been washed and shrouded, he is carried as such or in a coffin to the Mosque for prayer after either the noon prayed (*dhuhr*) or the afternoon prayer (*'asr*). Prayer for the dead is different than the rest of the prayers since there is no kneeling or bowing or prostration. The prayer is



said while standing so that people do not think that the prostration is for the dead and not for God.

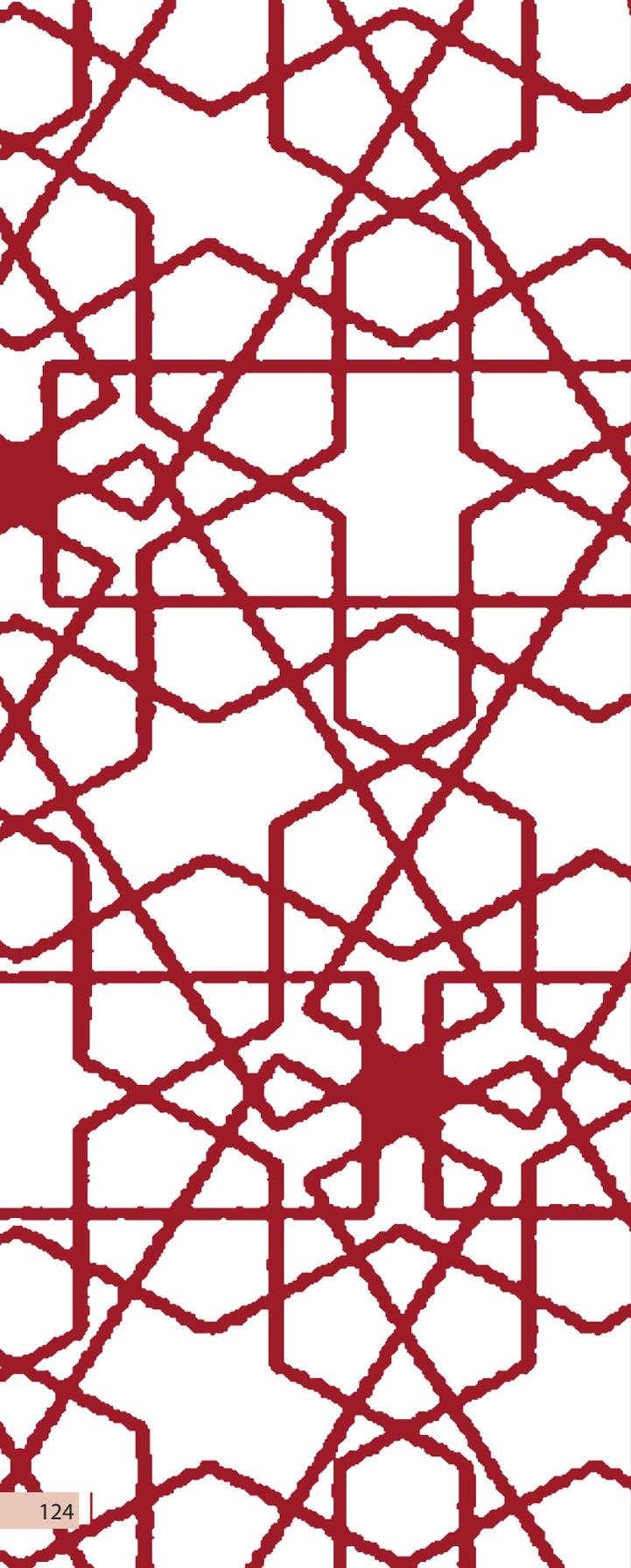
Prayer is said in four *takbir* (saying: God is great) – or five, depending on the legal School (*madhhab*). The two *shahadah* (the twin testimony of faith in Islam) are mentioned after the first *takbir* and the Prayer on the Prophet (*Salat ala-l-Nabi* (PBUH)) after the second *takbir*. Invocation (*du'a'*) for the worshippers is said after the third *takbir*, and Invocation (*du'a'*) for the dead is said after the fourth *takbir*. In the Mouwahidoon Druze Community, the prayer is concluded with the fifth *takbir*. The deceased is in front of the prayers and his head is to their right.

After prayer, the deceased is taken to the graveyard where he is buried in his coffin and covered with earth. The famous phrase '*wuuriya al-thara*' (literally 'buried in the earth') is not figurative, it is what truly happens.

Mourning is related to many traditions and habits. The recommendation of Shari'ah is for mourning not to last more than three days, which is why people pay their respects to the bereaved parents before. The wife who has lost her husband must go into a waiting period (*'iddah*) of four months and ten days. She can go out of her home during this time, wearing whatever she wants (not necessarily black) provided she does not wear make-up or jewelry. Some traditions have it that condolences are paid after a week and after forty days and the Koran is recited on the grave. Muslims visit the graves of their deceased loved ones on Holidays and occasions to recite The Opening Sura (Fatiha) and invoke God, in remembrance and consideration (*'i'tibar*).



One Sheikh leads the prayer for the dead in the Muwahidoon Druze Community accompanied by five other Sheikhs.



Adoption and Sponsoring of Orphans

Every child deserves special care from his parents first and from the society as well. All children whether born in or out of wedlock have the right to social protection in order to grow and thrive. Children who have not had proper care from their family or guardians must have proper protection from society.

Sponsoring Orphans

An orphan is someone who has lost one or both his parents and needs emotional or material care or both. Religiously and conventionally, Arabs and Muslims have great concern for orphans when the latter are still very young. They also find them work or help them to marry when they grow up. The Koran mentions that the Prophet (PBUH) was an orphan of both parents: 'Did He not find you an orphan, And sheltered you? And found you erring, and guided you? And found you dependent, And enriched you?' (Sura: Prime of the Morning (93), Verse 6). He asks the Prophet and his followers to take care of orphans and those in need: 'The orphan you must not aggrieve, And the beggar you must not revile, And your Lord's blessing proclaim.' (Sura: Prime of Morning (93), Verse 11). Experts in Islamic Law recommend that orphans be kept amidst their families should this be possible for emotional and educational reasons.

In the past, there have been major *Waqf* institutions (religious endowment) for orphans. Some institutions for orphans have been set up with the donations of people. The Prophet (PBUH) has said: 'I and he who would sponsor an orphan are in the heaven like these two' and the Prophet closed in both his forefinger and his middle finger. This indicates that the Prophet (PBUH) encourages the sponsorship of orphans and the caring for them to protect them against perdition. Islam has encouraged people to have mercy upon orphans and has forbidden the usurping of their money or their rights. Anyone who does that shall be inflicted with the most severe sanctions: 'They who swallow the substance of the orphan wrongfully, shall swallow down only fire into their bellies, and shall burn in the flame!' (Sura: The Women (4), Verse 10)

Orphanages do not only provide orphans with financial and emotional needs, but they also ensure schooling, technical training to help boys and girls to face the hardships of life and compensate for the loss of one or both parents.

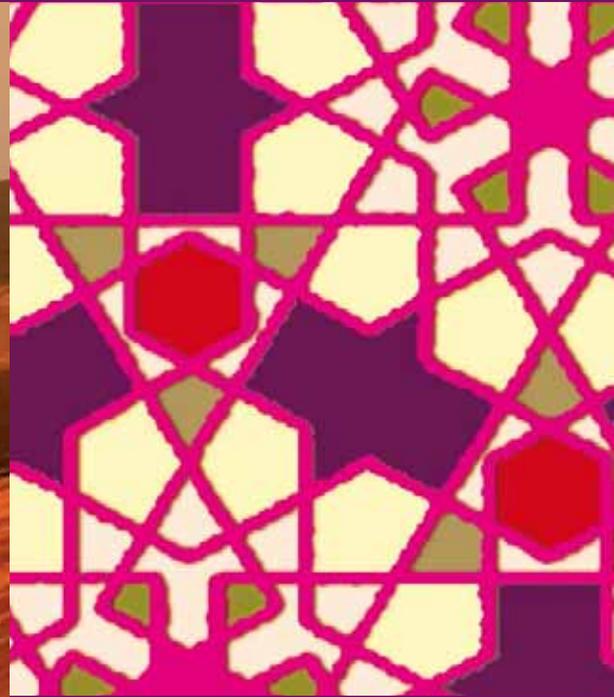
Another social issue is that of children whose parents are not known and are called in the books of the experts in Islamic Law, 'foundling' (*laqit*). The Koran does not recognize adoption: 'So call them by their fathers' names: this is more fair with God. If you do not know who their fathers are, then they are your brothers in faith and your clients.' (Sura: The Confederate Troops (33), Verse 5). The Koran forbids adoption for it entails the loss and mixing up of descendancy, and is a violation of the rights of a child and of his dignity. A system has been ratified in Lebanon and other Arab and Islamic countries to sponsor the foundling so that

they have the same care as orphans do, not just as concerns education and upbringing but also as concerns their naming and the rights of children as foreseen in Islam and in international treaties.

Adoption

Some married couples may repeatedly try to have children but to no avail despite the progress made in this field. On the other hand, many are the children who have been deprived of the presence of their parents for various reasons. Some lost their father as they were still little and some have been abandoned by their parents for forceful reasons. Christians have found in adoption a solution to both problems. With adoption, every child can have a home and parents to protect him while many married couples have the chance to adopt a child. Adoption meets the married couple's emotional needs, but it always occurs in the child's interest.

There are some special legal procedures related to adoption allowing the adopted child to become the married couple's legal child with all the rights and duties a son/daughter would have. Some people trade with children exploiting the matter of adoption for their own interest. This issue has increased as there is no clear law to regulate this matter in Lebanon taking into account all religious legislations.

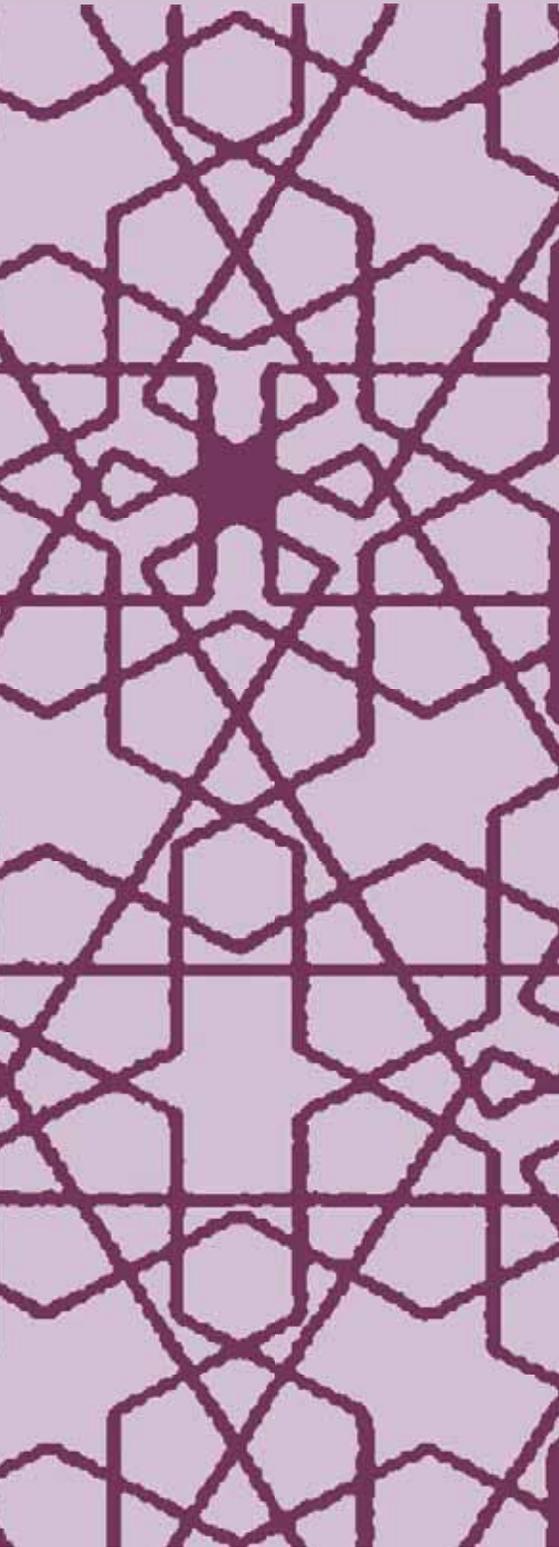


Rituals and Acts of Worship



The religious system includes five main components: deity, sacred texts, rituals and acts of worship, a moral system, and the religious institution.

Rituals are one of the main aspects of religious commitment. Through them, people try to give concrete expression to what they feel with their senses, to a core whose discernment goes beyond their limited capacities. Although rituals and acts of worship are based on form, they remain people's means to express their bond with God (the Mighty and the Majestic).



Prayer

Prayer (Salāt) from the Arabic root sila, i.e. the bond between man and God, is the very basis of both Christianity and Islam, but it does not have the exact same meaning in both religions. Salat (prayer) is a daily religious duty (*farida*) in Islam since it is one of the pillars of Islamic religion whereas in Christianity it is the individual's or the community's way of expression to God and it may have various forms.



In Christianity

Prayer is lifting the spirit to God to talk to Him with confidence and love, glorifying Him, worshipping Him, and thanking Him for His blessings. God calls upon everyone to pray; at first He it is Who seeks man, which makes man able to seek God.

Types of Prayer

- The prayer of Blessing (*salat al Baraka*) is man's answer to God's many gifts.
- Prayer through Glorification, praise and worship of God.
- Prayer of demand (petition): 'But seek first his kingdom...' (Matthew 6:33) or propitiation (Genesis 18: 1633-).
- Prayer of Gratitude for God's graces and recognizing his blessings.

Ways of Praying

There are many ways to pray. Each one can choose the way that best suits him/her. This does not mean that prayer is restricted to an internal or a concrete wish. When prayer is liturgical, the Church's official prayer, it must be communal.

When prayer is individual it is either oral, and using pre-set words: Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be to God, etc., or meditative, using the Bible or liturgical texts or spiritual writings. It is about listening intently to God's Word within the quietude of the spirit. Prayer is accompanied by physical movements and gestures such as the lifting of the hands to invoke God, or bowing, kneeling, or prostrating oneself as a sign of submission and humbleness, or standing to take part in the Resurrection of the Lord, or being seated to express peace in His presence.

Times of Prayer

Liturgical prayer is spread out on seven hours a day to indicate that Christ always prayed. The Faithful can pray individually at any time of the day because the faithful are asked to live a life of meditation as they work. All the events of the day are offered to Christ. Prayer marks even the most common events of the day.

The Subject of Prayer

The subject of prayer that is preferred is the life of Jesus Christ namely His Passion and His resurrection. Psalms are a masterpiece of prayer in the Old Testament. They cover different time periods in history and the presence of man, reminding of God's word already fulfilled, encouraging people to hope for the coming of Christ. The Gospels Books are full of prayers of Christ be they when He was alone or in His heart. The prayer of Christ is a loving answer, until the Cross, to God's will. His prayer is an expression of complete faith that God will answer. In the New Testament, Our Father or Pater Noster is the prayer of the Church above all other prayers, because the Church learnt it from Christ Himself. It sums up the Old and New Testament. Pater Noster is also the prayer of Church above all others as it said by the Church ever since its creation. It is a part of the ferial office and is said when celebrating the Sacramentz of Christian upbringing: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Most Christian honorings enrich prayer: the Holy Trinity, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Holy Eucharist, Holy Spirit extreme honoring of the Holy Virgin Mary, the honoring of St Joseph, the guardian angels, and the Saints.



In Islam

Salat al-Farida ***(Obligatory Prayer)***

Prayer for Muslims is a great bond between the Creator and the created, the Worshipped and the worshipper. Islam is not complete other than with prayer. It is one of the pillars of Islam in addition to fasting, *hajj* (pilgrimage) and *zakat* (almsgiving to the poor), after the twin declaration of faith in Islam (*shahada*). For whoever preserves prayer, it will be for him light and guide and save him on the Day of Resurrection.

Muslims are commanded to perform *salat* five times a day as specified by Muslim law: dawn prayer is two *rak'at* before sunrise; noon prayer is four *rak'at*; afternoon is four *rak'at*; (right after) sunset is three *rak'ats*; dusk, or evening prayer, is four *rak'at*. A *rak'ah* starts by standing. The Opening Sura is read as well as one of the short Sura (publicly for evening prayer and in one's heart in day prayers). Then the one praying kneels



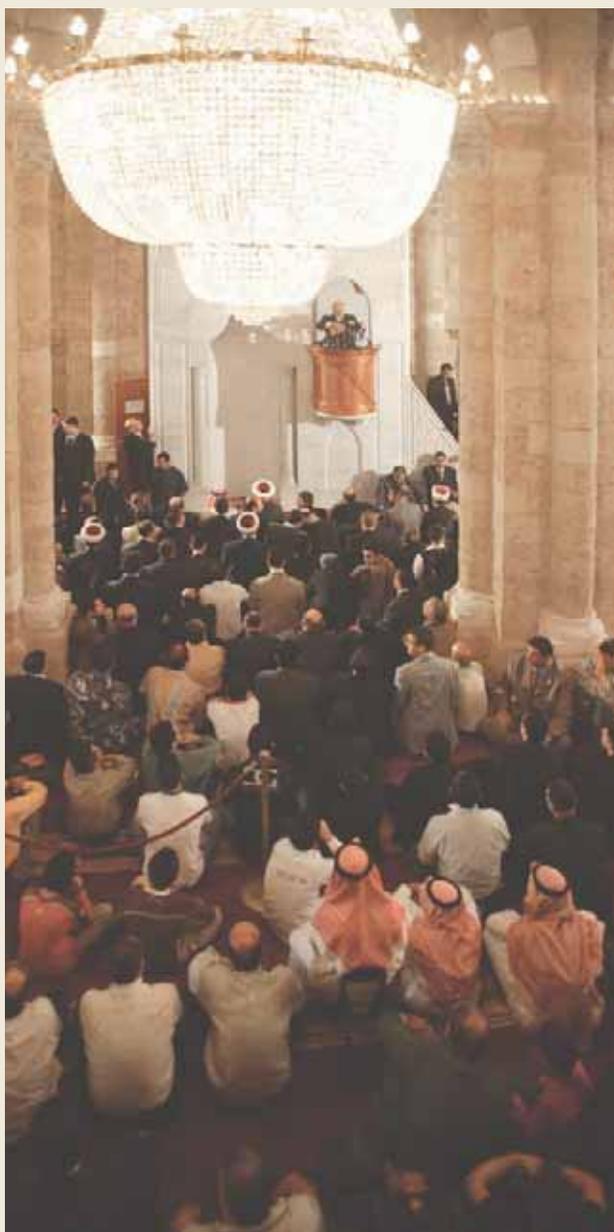


Other Prayers Friday Prayer

(*ruku'* position) and mentions the name of God, then, the one praying stands straight again (the *qiyam* position), then prostrates (*sujud position*) mentioning the name of God as well. *Salat* (prayer) starts with *al-niyya* (intention) and *takbir* (saying that God is Great, *Allahu Akbar*), and ends with *taslim* (saying *As-Salamu 'alaykum*, peace be with you, while turning the head to the right then to the left). All five prayers are said individually or in congregation at the Mosque. They are preceded or followed by two *rak'ats* following the *Sunna*, example, of the Prophet (PBUH).

Friday prayer (instead of noon prayer) is only Congregational in the congregational Mosque, which is the main mosque in a town or city. Some Schools of jurisprudence (*madhhab*) consider the presence of forty people at Friday prayer necessary for it to be valid. After announcing the time of prayer through *adhan* (call for prayer), the *khatib* (preacher) takes the stand and says two *khutba* (sermons) with a short interval between them. In both the *khatib* enjoins to do what is good or right, and forbids what is evil or wrong ('*amr bil ma'ruf wa-nahi 'an al-munkar*), and preaches good morals. He may also speak about public matters. Then he leaves the stand after the second *khutba* and leads the two *rak'a* prayer.





Salat al-'Idayn

(Prayer of the two 'Id)

They are the prayers for 'Id al-Fitr and 'Id al-Adha. They used to be said outside mosques since great numbers of people would attend right after sunrise. They are now held in congregational mosques. Both these prayers are of two *rak'at*, performed without *'adhan* (call for prayer) or *'iqamah* (second call to prayer). In the first *qiyam* there are seven *takbirat* (Allah Akbar) and five in the second *qiyam*. In both *rak'ah* Sura 'The Opening' is recited publicly, followed by the Sura 'The Highest' (87) in the first *rak'a* and Sura 'The Overspreading Pall'(88) in the second *rak'a*. This is followed by a *khutba* (sermon) by the Imam who speaks about the meaning of the 'Id. The 'Id prayer is not obligatory (*farida*) as are the five daily prayers.

Funeral Prayer or Salat al-Janaza

The coffin of the deceased is placed in front of the praying people. The Imam stands in front and those who want to pray stand behind him. The prayer contains a *du'a'* (invocation) in the heart for the deceased and the rest of the people. In it are four Takbirat or five according to the School of Jurisprudence (*madhab*).

Salat al-'Istisqa' (for raining)

Prayer for Rain is said in times of drought and dryness; people go out in the open and invoke God (the Mighty and the Majestic) asking him for mercy and beseeching Him for rain.

Salat al-'Ayat

Salat al-'Ayat (Prayer connected to God's Signs) is done when a solar eclipse occurs, so it is called the Prayer of the Solar Eclipse, or when a lunar eclipse happens so it is called Prayer of the Lunar Eclipse. It is also said when natural disasters that scare people occur. It was done by the Prophet (PBUH). In it people ask for God's Mercy, calling for His help from suffering; it is a *du'a'* for empowerment (*tamkin*) in difficult times, seeking God's protection in times of crisis.



***Salat al-Nawafil* (Optional Prayer)**

Al-Nafila is what is additional. Some prayers are called '*nafila*' [optional prayer] because they are additional to the obligatory prayers (*farida*). There are many *Salat al-Nawafil* some of which are irregular (*ghayr ratibah*) and related to an event or a case such as *Salat al-Shukr* (prayer of gratitude) to express thanks when a blessing is given to one. Some are regular (*ratibah*), i.e. related to night and day. They are a number of *rak'at* done before obligatory prayers or after. In most *nawafil* prayers, each two *rak'at* are done separately with the exception of a few.





Holy Mass for Christians (See Sunday on p. 31)

Mass for Catholics and Orthodox is the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharist is given by the Priest in commemoration of the sacrifice of the Cross for the Glory of God and the Salvation of people.

Mass was given several denominations in the past: Breaking of Bread (First Century), the Holy Eucharist (Second Century), Holy Communion (Third Century), Assembly (from the Fourth to the Seventh Century for the Greeks). Today, other denominations are used namely: the Holy Sacrifice, Sacred Sacraments, and Holy Liturgy.

At the Last Supper, Christ left His disciples a token of his love so as never to depart from them. He offered the Eucharist as a remembrance of His death and Resurrection.

The Eucharist is the source and zenith of Christian life. Other Sacraments and all apostolic activities are related to the Eucharist and find their aim and their sequence in it. It includes all the spiritual goodness of the Church, i.e. Christ himself, Who is the Resurrection for the Church.





In Eucharistic prayer, with the strength of the words, 'This is my body' 'and this cup is my blood'; with the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the substance of bread becomes the substance of the body of Jesus and the substance of wine becomes the substance of His blood. This is the Transubstantiation.

There are some differences between Christian communities namely as to the bread prepared for sanctification. Some communities sanctify leavened bread others unleavened bread. Yet, all believe that the bread and wine transubstantiate into the body and blood of Christ. Some Protestants give bread and wine a symbolic meaning.

Communion develops the bond of the faithful with Christ; it purifies them from their sins, and integrates them more in the Church. It unifies them with all Christians and gives them a token of the coming Glory.





Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is a practice that leads man out of his regular life to a foreign environment so that he may repent and return to God. His motivation is that life on earth is but a journey at the end of which he will meet God. Whoever goes on pilgrimage feels or rather believes that at the end of the pilgrimage he is as close as can be to God. Some pilgrims go as far as wishing to die on their pilgrimage to meet God right then.



Pilgrimage in Christianity

Christians believe that the utmost pilgrimage is when they head to the Holy Land in which Christ lived:

- Bethlehem where Christ was born and where the Magi coming from Persia knelt before him and offered him presents.
- Nazareth where the Archangel Gabriel announced to Virgin Mary that God has chosen her to be the Mother of His Son and where Christ spent His childhood.
- The River Jordan where Christ was baptized by John the Baptist.
- Galilee and Judea as well as regions in Sidon and Tyr where Christ journeyed, taught, and performed miracles namely the Cana Miracle.
- Jerusalem, where Christ went to the temple of Solomon and spent His last days, was crucified on Mount Calvary, buried, and rose from the dead on the third day. After His Resurrection, he kept appearing to His disciples for forty days and from it he ascended to heaven. The Holy Spirit descended on the disciples in an attic in Jerusalem.

In addition to the Holy Land, there are today many Christian pilgrimage places in the world such as Rome, Lourdes, Our Lady of Fatima, Ephesus...

Man feels that the pilgrimage he makes to a holy place to express his love of God, his repentance and his thanksgiving, makes him stronger spiritually. Some pilgrims believe that their prayers are sooner answered in some holy places. This is why they cross thousands of kilometers to offer their prayers to God in a specific place.

Pilgrimage usually occurs in organized religious groups so that the pilgrims receive in-depth spiritual guidance in the light of the social evolution and based on the pilgrims' growing needs. In pilgrimages, people from various countries and various societies mingle, gathered as they are by the same creed and the same religious identity. This is why Christians believe that pilgrimage nourishes the belief by asking for repentance in person and in group, by giving all of one's time to prayer, and by strengthening brotherly ties. Pilgrims walk in the steps of Christ notwithstanding physical fatigue.





Hajj in Islam (Pilgrimage)

Hajj is one of the pillars of Islam. It is about heading to Mecca for tawaf (circumambulation) around the Kaaba, going back and forth between Al-Safa and Al-Marwa, and standing in vigil (*wuquf*) on Mount 'Arafah on the ninth day of Dhu-l-Hijjah. This pilgrimage should be carried out at least once in a lifetime by all able-bodied Muslims who can afford to do so, be they men or women. Should one not be able to carry out the pilgrimage, it is not imposed on him for God said in the Glorious Koran: 'Incumbent upon mankind from God is pilgrimage to the Sanctuary; whoever can make his way to it.' (Sura: The House of 'Imran (3), Verse 97).

The right time for Hajj starts in Shawwal, through Dhu-l-Qi'dah, and ending on the ninth of Dhu-l-Hijjah. But people often go to Hajj in the beginning of Dhu-l-Hijjah. Hajj starts with Ihram (putting on white, seam-less, and stitch-less, loose-fitting clothing) at a specific distance from Mecca in a place called Miqat. Pilgrims who are all dressed in white then perform *tawaf* (circumambulation) around the Kaaba in one simple outfit, the simplicity of which reminds people that they are all poor, in need of God.



Tawaf is to circumambulate the Kaaba seven times during which Muslims remember the Prophet Abraham who built Kaaba. Kaaba is a slightly elevated square structure which is covered with



The black stone in Kaabah. Muslims touch it during pilgrimage for baraka / blessing.

a *kiswa* (Kaaba covering) manufactured in special factories and changed every year or every several years. In it is the Black Stone that Muslims touch for spiritual virtue. The Kaaba was rebuilt several times throughout Islamic history because of occasional floods. The Glorious Koran has named the Kaaba 'Al-Masjid al-Haram'. Prayer does not occur in it like in all other mosques but rather around it; *tawaf* is carried out around it during Hajj and 'Umra. The Kaaba is surrounded with the highest sanctity for Muslims, expressed in the fact that Muslims all around the world turn to it during their five daily

prayers. In addition, *tawaf* is related to submission to God and to what He orders Muslims to do. After *tawaf*, Muslims go back and forth between Al-Safa and Al-Marwa, two small hills in Mecca. In doing this, Muslims remember the wife of the Prophet Abraham (A.S.) when she was looking for water to quench her infant's thirst. She went back and forth between Al-Safa and Al-Marwa, until she found that a spring of water had sprouted from the earth. This spring is now known as Zamzam and still has running water.



Pilgrims remain in Mecca until the eighth of Dhu-l-Hijjah. Then they proceed to Mina where they stay for the rest of the day. At dawn, pilgrims head to Mount Arafah where they stand in contemplative vigil (*Wuquf*) the whole night. They head to Muzdalifah where they spend the night. In the morning, they go to *al-Mash'ar al-Haram* (Kaaba) then from there they return to Mina where they throw, upon dawn, stones (*jamrat*) in three places; this is called Stoning of the Devil (*rajm al-shaytan*). It represents the resistance of Prophet Abraham (A.S.) to Satan's temptations – when Satan told him not to obey God, and when Satan appeared to Abraham's wife, as they both stoned Satan in this very spot. By stoning Satan, pilgrims shun and fight Satan and his temptations; they get rid of their wrongdoings; they pledge to obey God after the pilgrimage.

Pilgrim then make a sacrifice and shave his head. During all the *hajj* namely during *tawaf*, Muslims keep repeating the following *talbiyah*: "I respond to Your call O God, I respond to Your call, You have no partner, I respond to Your call. All praise and blessing are for You, all sovereignty is for You, and You have no partner with you". At the end, pilgrim returns to al-Bayt al-Haram (Kaaba) for a Farewell *tawaf*, also known as *Tawaf al-ifadah*. It is also seven *Tawafs* (circumambulation) as an expression of utmost respect to al-Bayt (Kaaba).

Then pilgrims can remove their *'Ihram* dress. Most go before visiting Mecca or after the visit to Medina to pray in the Prophet's Mosque (PBUH). In *Hajj* is a bond with the Father of all Prophets, Abraham (A.S.), the builder of Kaaba and the first to visit it on pilgrimage. *Hajj* is also about meeting with the largest number of Muslims from around the Islamic world.

The philosophy of *Hajj* rests in a number of things namely establishing a bond among Muslims and getting them acquainted during this gathering which is a sort of international congress. In it is the opportunity for cultural and commercial exchange among other things. One of its most important aspects is that the sacrifices that are made are distributed to the poor be they residents or pilgrims. Any additional meat is gathered and placed in boxes to be distributed to poor countries around the world. Most acts pilgrims carry out have moral dimensions; for instance, when pilgrims throw stones (*rajm*) they ponder upon their own selves, their fancies and their evil temptations. The same may be said when offering sacrifices and other *Hajj* related acts.

Habits related to *Hajj* vary from one country to another. In some countries the locals give the pilgrims what they need to carry out *Hajj* and contribute to paying their expenses. The pilgrims carry return gifts. A pilgrim or someone who intends to go on *Hajj* visits his friends and acquaintances to ask for their forgiveness should he have harmed them or not been kind to them. This is how *Hajj* becomes a time to overcome differences that may otherwise prove difficult to solve. Another habit is for a pilgrim to write his will before traveling as though he was traveling to God not knowing whether he would come back or not. Some of these habits may come from the difficulties of the journey in the past yet they still exist nowadays for they have socially positive effects.

The Return of Pilgrims

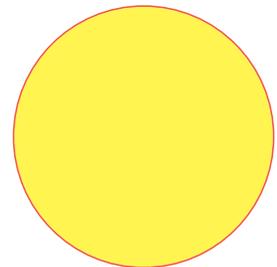
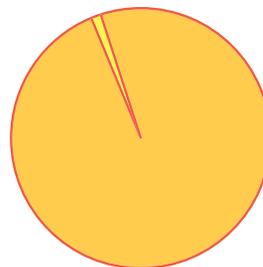
The Prophet (PBUH) mentioned that the return of pilgrims having carried out *farida* (religious duty) – to be granted pardon for their sins and misdeeds and return as their mother had brought them to life as concerns sins – is a happy return for them and for their friends and relatives. The latter prepare for this return with *Hajj* decoration to express their happiness. They say: '*Hajj mabrur was sa'i mashkur*' (May your Hajj be accepted into the Grace of God and your endeavor thanked).



Zakat

Zakat (almsgiving) is a pillar of Islam, a *farida* (religious duty) through which people show their solidarity and cooperation on the basis of mutual respect. It aims at helping the needy. Originally, *Zakat* was imposed on some agricultural products such as wheat, barley, dates, and raisins. It was also imposed on cattle such as camels, cows, and sheep. It was also imposed on gold and silver currencies. It was determined as one tenth or half of one tenth of certain types of harvest or cattle annually. After this, some *faqih* (experts in Islamic Law) imposed on all Muslims that they pay annually a part of their money, in the beginning or in the end of the year, i.e. 2.5% of their income should they have more than the minimum necessary for them. *Zakat* induces the giver to give more generously; it preserves what is necessary to an individual's needs and strengthens the bonds of brotherhood among people. It is then a guarantee to preserve society from social differences and unemployment. It purifies the hearts of the poor from envy and hatred.

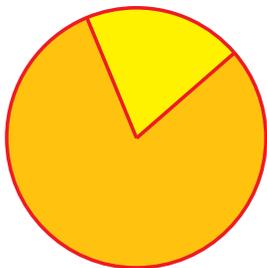
The Glorious Koran shows the aim of *Zakat* since it determines where and whom it is to be given to – needy and poor people, wayfarers, the indebted, those in bondage (at the time of slavery), and in the cause of God.



Khums

Khums (Fifth) for Shiites is a financial obligation that one must pay on some resources he has. For instance, should one find in his land a treasure, or should one search for and find minerals in one's land and should one extract and sell these minerals in a way that one's income should increase; or if one dived in the sea and took out some minerals or gem stones; or in cases of illicit money that is mixed with one's own money and one should not know the amount of *haram* (illicit) money and the amounts' rightful owner is unknown to return the money, in such cases, Muslims have to pay a fifth (*khums*) of the money in order to be able to dispose of the rest. In addition, Shiite Muslims have to pay a fifth (*khums*) of their benefits in commerce or industry or agriculture after having kept their yearly expenses, as well as the fifth of their savings.

These amounts gathered as *Khums* are spent on the poor and the needy or are used to build charity institutions and projects that might be socially useful, or any other righteous project. Therefore, paying *Khums* nowadays is one of the main forms of social solidarity.



Types of Du'a'

The concept of *du'a'* (invocation) in Islam is concurrent with that of prayer in Christianity. *Du'a'* in Islam is a personal supplication of God to ask for something or ask for protection against something. *Du'a'* is addressed only to God since He manages the universe and acts as He wishes in it. God can hear any *du'a'*, and Islam encourages Muslims to supplicate (address *du'a'* to) God and resort to Him. Muslims believe that God may answer in this life or on Judgment Day. Muslims raise their hands during *du'a'* to mean that the one they pray, God, is above all others. Some books have gathered the types of *du'a'* by days of the week, months, places, and difficult conditions that man might face and feel the need to call upon God.

Du'a' is a state of dialogue with God or of grievances to Him, in times of need and in times of opulence. *Du'a'* leaves a great spiritual effect on the worshipper when the latter is alone with God. He asks of Him all what he is ashamed to ask of others for this earthly life and beyond. *Du'a'* does not have a specific time; Muslims believe that the doors of the sky are open to those that make *du'a'* night and day. Yet, there are special holy days and nights for Muslims such as Friday eve among others, yearly occasions such as Holidays and their eves, Nurf min Sha'ban (Middle of Sha'ban), and Laylat al-Qadr (Night of Power). In Islamic heritage, there is a series of special *du'a's* considered as literary masterpieces worth reading if only for literary taste. They are a special literary genre with distinctive features from other genres such as eulogy or love poems or elegy. One main characteristic of this *du'a'* is that it is genuine and generous on feelings for God that cannot be found in any other literary genre.

Repentance

The word 'repentance' in Christianity is a translation of the Greek word 'metanoia' which indicates internal change and return to God in the New Testament for Christians. Repentance is necessary to enter the Kingdom of God: 'Repent for the Kingdom of God is near' (Matthew 3:2 and Acts 3:19) or to enter Faith and accept Baptism (Apostles 2:38). In the sacraments of repentance the sinner shows his repentance to the priest, the servant of the sacraments, so that he may get, through his ministry, forgiveness from Christ, for God alone can forgive sins. After His Resurrection, Christ gave His disciples and their successors, openly, the power to forgive sins, thus founding the Sacrament of Reconciliation (John 20:22 - 23). This Sacrament is called the Sacrament of repentance since the virtue of repentance is about returning to God wholeheartedly, seeking forgiveness through contrition, meaning firmly not to commit sin any more. In this preparation, the Sacrament of absolution must be given. This preparation is not enough without returning to the Sacrament. With this Sacrament and through the ministry of the Church set up by God, sins are forgiven after Baptism and the sinner enters Church. The repentant must make an act of contrition with the firm resolve not to commit sin any more, confessing all sins and promising to expiate them. Confession helps clear one's conscience and fight off evil tendencies. It allows Christ to heal the conscience and allows one to move on with spiritual life. The effects of this Sacrament are that the penitent's sins are forgiven; he reconciles with God, and the Church; and his

deadly sins and the eternal damnation that they entail are absolved. The penitent's conscience is clear and at peace; he develops his spiritual strength for his spiritual mission as a Christian. After listening to the penitent's confession, the priest guides him and encourages him not to commit sin again, asking him to make an act of penance that might strengthen his belief so that he does not sin again. He also gives him counseling as to his every day life because repentance should be regular in order to change the mentality and acquire the method and spirit of Christ. When the priest absolves the penitent from all his sins 'in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit' he bids him farewell wishing him peace. The confidentiality of all statements made by penitents during the course of confession is absolute. The priest is never to reveal these confessions to anyone.

In the Armenian Orthodox Church, the faithful make a collective confession during Mass. The deacon reads a list of the sins that the faithful might commit in their daily lives. The faithful ask for God's forgiveness of their sins through the ministry of the Priest. In Protestant Churches, the penitent confesses his sins to God asking for forgiveness. The Pastor assures the penitent his sins will be forgiven if based on genuine repentance, confession to God, and asking for forgiveness. He then gives the penitent some useful advice for his spiritual life and to protect him against temptation and against falling into it again. The one accepting forgiveness also forgives, thus confession brings about reconciliation, between brothers who were divided by sin.

Food: What is Allowed and What is Forbidden

In all religions, including the Christian and Muslim religions, the faithful ought to pay attention to their health. They must have specific food diets to keep fit and be ready to work, since the body is 'a temple where the Holy Spirit lives' (1 Corinthians 6: 19).

In the Christian religion no law forbids a particular kind of food upon the condition that it not be harmful. Christ said in the Gosple: 'Pay attention and try to understand what I mean. The food that you put into your mouth does not make you unclean and unfit to worship God. The bad words that come out of your mouth are what make you unclean.' (Matthew 15: 10 - 12). The Acts of the Apostles certify through Apostle Peter's vision, the absence of forbidden food (Acts 10:15). In Peter's first Letter to the Corinthians it is said: '...when you buy meat in the market, go ahead and eat it. Keep your conscience clear by not asking where the meat came from. The Scriptures say. "The earth and everything in it belong to the Lord." If an unbeliever invites you to dinner, and you want to go, then go. Eat whatever you are served. Do not cause a problem for someone's conscience by asking where the food came from.' (1 Corinthians 10: 25- 27). Christians make the sign of the Cross before and after eating saying a small prayer in which they ask the Lord to bless their food before they eat it. Then they thank Him for the food they are about to eat. Just like in Christianity, in Islam too, it is recommended to mention the name of God when eating and to thank Him after the meal.

In Islamic religion, the Koran forbids (*yuharrim*) the drinking of wine and gambling as well as sacrifice other than in the name of God: 'O believer, wine and gambling, idols and divining arrows are an abhorrence, the work of Satan. So keep away from it, that you may prevail.' (Sura: The Table (5), Verse

90). In pre-Islamic times, Arabs would get drunk but Islam did not forbid them from drinking wine at first, since it was an old tradition. It was said in the Glorious Koran: 'O believers, do not come near to prayer when you are drunk' (Sura: Women(4), Verse 43). Then, there occurred a fight between the Companions of the Prophet who lost their minds because of drinking thus leading to a conflict among tribes and other problems. As a result, there came the Verse: 'They ask you about wine and gambling. Say: "In them both lies grave sin, though some benefit, to mankind. But their sin is more grave than their benefit"' (Sura: The Cow (2), Verse 219 [Sic.]). Finally, wine was absolutely forbidden (*haram*) as it was considered impurity (*danas*) for the mind and the spirit.

As to food, Islam forbids (*yuharrim*) the eating of an animal's testicles or genital organ, its glands, eye pupils, gall bladder, and its spinal cord; it also forbids the drinking of its blood. Poultry liver and spleen can be eaten. Muslims cannot eat animals that were not slaughtered, i.e. that died of a disease, or were in a trauma; they cannot eat predators. It was said in the Glorious Koran: 'Forbidden to you are: carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and that which is consecrated to other than God; also the flesh of animals strangled, killed violently, killed by a fall, gored to death, mangled by wild beasts – except what you can ritually sacrifice.' (Sura: The Table (5), Verse 3). Muslims refrain – traditionally, but not based on Shari'ah – from eating horse meat. To have *Halal* meat (slaughtered in the ritual method) one must first mention the name of God, then slaughter the animal that is lying on the floor on its left side, its head towards Mecca. First the arteries in the neck are cut – the breathing tracts, then the esophagus – the digestive system. The blood of the animal is drained before it is given to be eaten.



Nashid, Hymns, and Tajwid

Music accompanies man throughout his life to bring joy, communication, and a positive environment. Many children, youngsters, and elderly take on musical instruction to induce creativity and diversity. In this diversity, one finds a special and distinguished type of music which enables believers to reflect spiritually and perform liturgical religious practices.

Christianity encourages public religious hymn-singing in which words have an essential place and make hymn-singing an integral part of the solemn liturgy. Hymns are beautiful should they express meaningful prayer and facilitate the participation of the community in Holy Mass.



'Psaltika' is the special musical notation in Byzantine Churches

The 'Constitution on Sacred Liturgy' published by the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican includes a chapter, the sixth, about 'Sacred Music' to express its importance and its necessity (Articles 112 to 121): 'Therefore sacred music is to be considered the more holy in proportion as it is more closely connected with the liturgical action, whether it adds delight to prayer, fosters unity of minds, or confers greater solemnity upon the sacred rites... Accordingly, the sacred Council ... having regard to the purpose of sacred music, which is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful...' (Article 112).

There is no religious music in the Christian religion without a text and without an organized community to sing it. From there on, the stand of the Church as concerns musical instruments and their use in celebrations varies between those that forbid instruments completely – such as in Byzantine Churches – and those who favor the use of instruments – such as in Latin Church, some Eastern Churches and Protestant Churches.

Tajwid for Muslims, from the Arabic root '*jayyid*', meaning good and betterment, is a science which is about the emission points of the letters and the characteristics of the latter. The emission point of a letter is the sound it emits that distinguishes it from the rest.

Tajwid is in three ranks: *tartil* is slow and measured recitation of the Koran; *Hadr* is rapid recitation taking into account rules of pronunciation; *tadwir* is recitation at a moderate speed.

Tajwid is divided into scientific *tajwid* and practical *tajwid*. The former is linked with the emission points of the letters, their characteristics, and the provisions of *madd* (i.e. the prolongation and the extension of the sound), *waqf*, *maqtu'*, *mawsul*, *taskin*, *tanwin*, and so on.

As to practical *tajwid*, it is articulating every letter from its articulation point without changes or distortion, and giving each letter its rights and dues of characteristics.

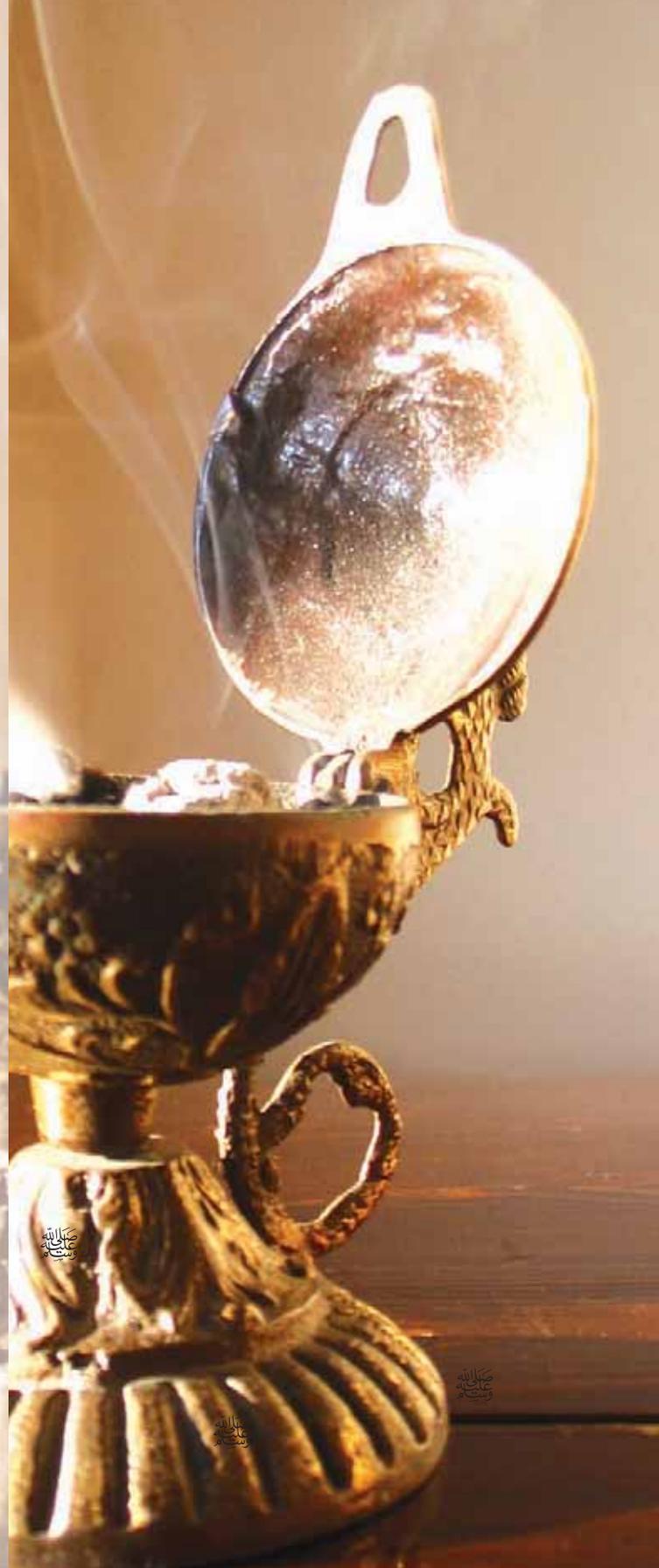
These include *jahr* (i.e. holding of breath when pronouncing a letter due to strength in its articulation point); *al-shaddah* [the stress] (i.e. holding of the running sound when pronouncing a letter to complete the stress on the articulation point); '*isti'la*' [elevation] (i.e. directing pressure of the tongue to the palate); '*istifal*' [dropping or lowering] (i.e. the tongue dropping to the bottom of the mouth when speaking); characteristics that are constant or characteristics that are occasional such as *tafkhim* (the letter pronounced with a hoarse voice) as a result of '*isti'la*' and *tarqiq* which is the result of '*istifal*'.

Tajwid is done for the Koran and Hadith; it was set up by Ulemas of *tajwid* and written down by Imams of *qira'a*.(reading)

Incense and Candles

Incense and Scent

Incense is gum resin extracted from various plants. It releases fragrant smoke when burnt. The burning of incense appeared in many very old religions that used incense to honor their gods. Jews used to burn incense every day on the altar of perfumes in the Temple of Jerusalem. Incense burning in the rituals of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is offered in honor of Christ who is present in the Eucharist, the Holy Bible, the Cross, the altar, the icons, the holy relics of Saints – on the one hand – the persons for whom Mass is celebrated, the faithful in the Church and the bodies who repose in a funeral mass – on the other. Liturgical texts distinguish between the material effect of incense and its effects on the spirit and the mind: as the priest uses natural incense with its material effects, the effects on the minds and hearts of the faithful are felt. The scent of incense burning in the censer mixes with that of the hearts of humanity and the sweet smelling love of God. The aim of incense is to remember and honor God, to feel closer to Him, to remember Virgin Mary, the Prophets, the Apostles, the Martyrs, and the Faithful Departed. It is also for expiation: being given pardon for misdeeds, and forgiveness for sins. In Islam, incense became famous for its sweet smell. Scent is recommended and incense is one means of spreading sweet smelling scent. Scent (Tib) is the sweet smell that Muslims date back to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who liked to use musk and other sweet smelling perfumes. It is said that whenever the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would shake hands with a boy he encountered, this boy would know he had encountered Muhammad (PBUH) from the sweet smell of his hand.

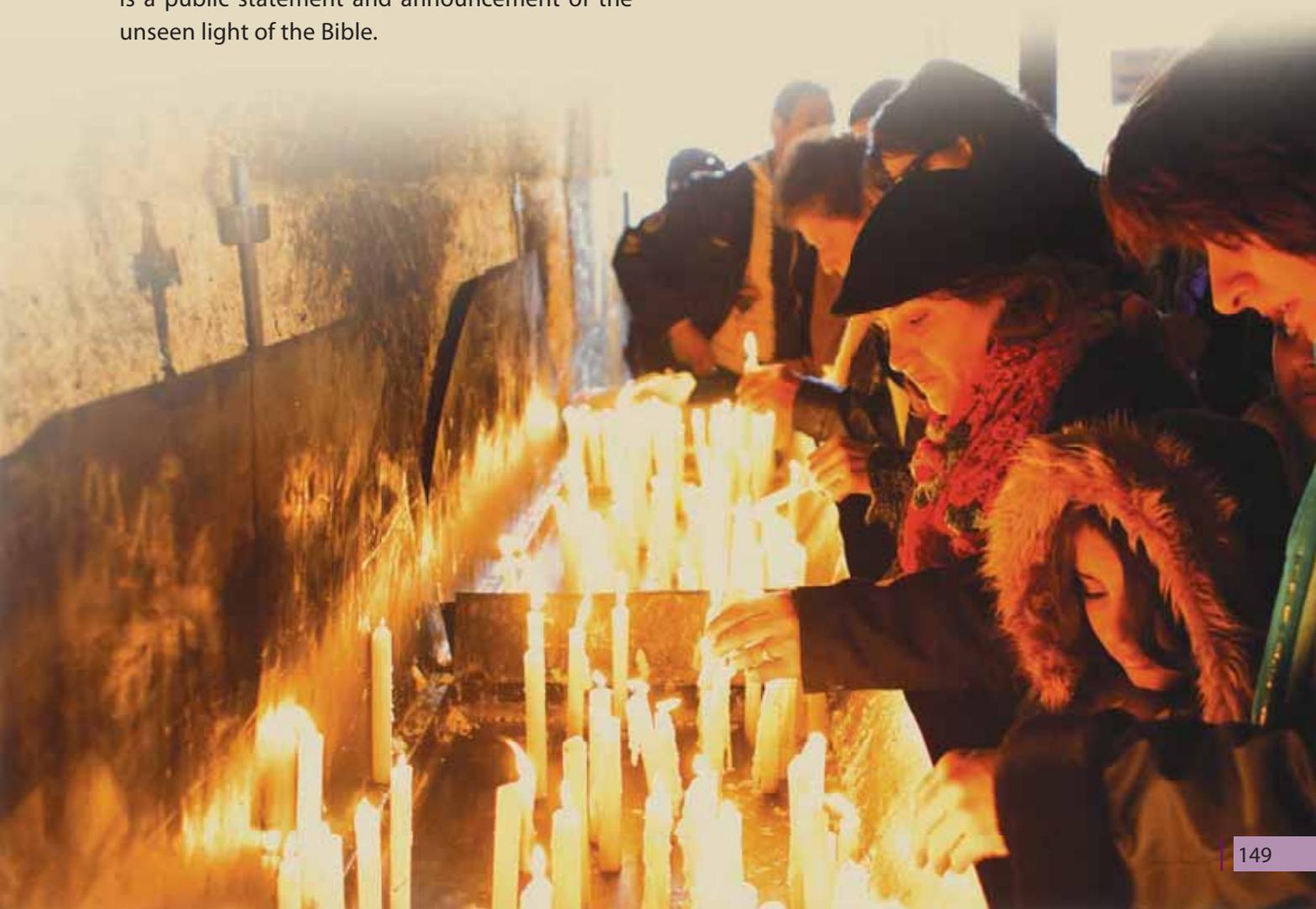


Candles

Candles are used quite often in Catholic and Orthodox Churches, during Mass, or in front of the altar, in front of the Holy icons of Saints, on the Eve of Easter, in processions, in Baptism, and around the body that reposes in a funeral Mass. Protestant Churches also use candles on different religious occasions.

In all Eastern Churches, candles are lit even if sun light fills the church. Light is not to dissipate darkness but to express joy, so that the seen light is a public statement and announcement of the unseen light of the Bible.

Two candles are lit in reference to Jews and the nations whose paths were lit by the teachings of Christ and a testimony that the one to be sacrificed on the altar is the Light of the World. Seven candles are lit because the spirit has seven talents and the Apostle John saw seven torches in the middle of which he saw the Son of Man. (Revelation 4:5).





Prayer Beads (Misbaha)

The use of prayer beads when praying and worshipping God is a very old practice that started in India around the Fifth Century B.C. It was used in Hinduism and Buddhism then by Christians and Muslims. Prayer beads are made into a string which might amount to more than two hundred beads based on each believer's tradition.

In Christianity

The Armenian Orthodox Church and Protestant Churches do not recognize the importance of the rosary. Other churches consider it a means to glorify God through prayer and words that differ between Catholic and Orthodox Churches. With the birth of monastic life in the East monks started to create ways to help them carry out the instruction of Apostle Paul in his first Letter to the Thessalonians: 'Pray without ceasing'. There are many types of rosaries depending on the church. In Orthodox Churches the rosary is made from black woolen thread. Black is the color of sadness and suffering; the rosary is used as a means of repentance for the faithful feel sad to have sinned and ask for God's Mercy. They ask Christ, lovingly, to have mercy on them because they have sinned.

Sadness becomes then a spring of joy and rest within Christ whose mercy and forgiveness flow over those who call His name.

The rosary is basically used to say 'the prayer of Jesus' or other prayers such as the prayer of the tax collector: 'God have mercy on me! I am such a sinner!' (Luke 18:13). It is also used in prayers addressed to the virgin Mary Mother of God: 'Most Holy Mother of God! Save us!' or 'Mary, Mother of God, pray for us!' Prayers may be said to the guardian angel or some saints by mentioning their name. Prayer may be said to ask for mercy upon someone, or for the repose of someone's soul.

In Catholic Churches, the rosary is made of five sets of successive beads; each set includes ten beads separated from the rest by one bigger bead. The chain is linked with a triangular icon instead of the fifth independent bead. From the third corner there emerges a small three-bead chain preceded and followed by a large bead and ends with a small cross. To recite the rosary, one must start by making the sign of the Cross and saying: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen'. Then one says the Apostles' Creed, the statement of Christian belief, and then with the bigger beads Lord's Prayer (Pater Noster). Then with the smaller beads one

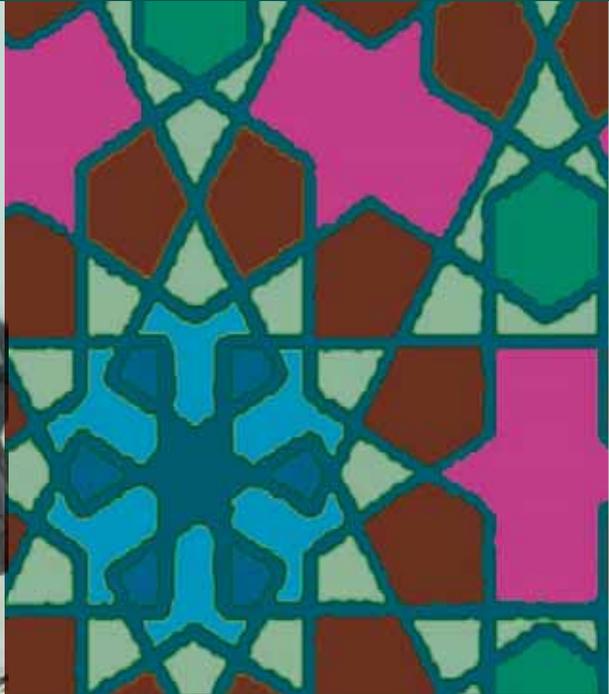


recites Hail Mary. At the end of the set, one says: 'GLORY BE to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.' In addition to the regular rosary mentioned, Catholic Churches also have the rosary of the Virgin Mary. It is a chain of four sets gathering two hundred times the 'Angelic Salutation'. When praying, one contemplates the role of Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Salvation. One shows solidarity with her in the mysteries of joy, light, sorrow, and glory. Reciting the rosary, individually or in community, is a spiritual practice within the reach of all the faithful whatever their age might be, whatever the circumstances. It combines common prayer, personal contemplation, and the Salvation that Christ offers all men.

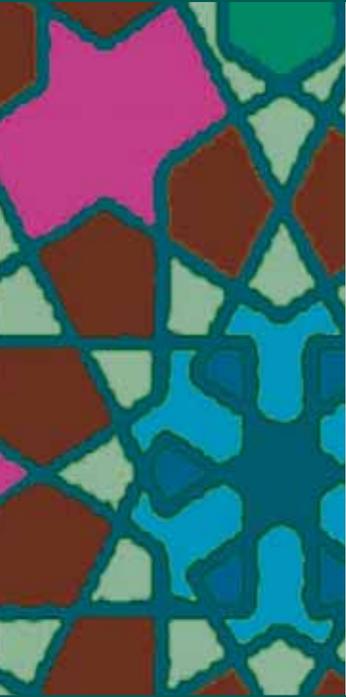
In Islam

Misbaha is an indication to tasbih in its linguistic composition. *Tasbih* for Muslims is saying '*Subhan Allah*,' i.e. glorifying God. But when *tasbih* is related to *masbaha* then it is *dikhr* of God, for instance the Muslim says '*adhkar* to remember God (SWT), such as: '*Subhan Allah*' (Glory be to God), '*Al Hamdu lil-*

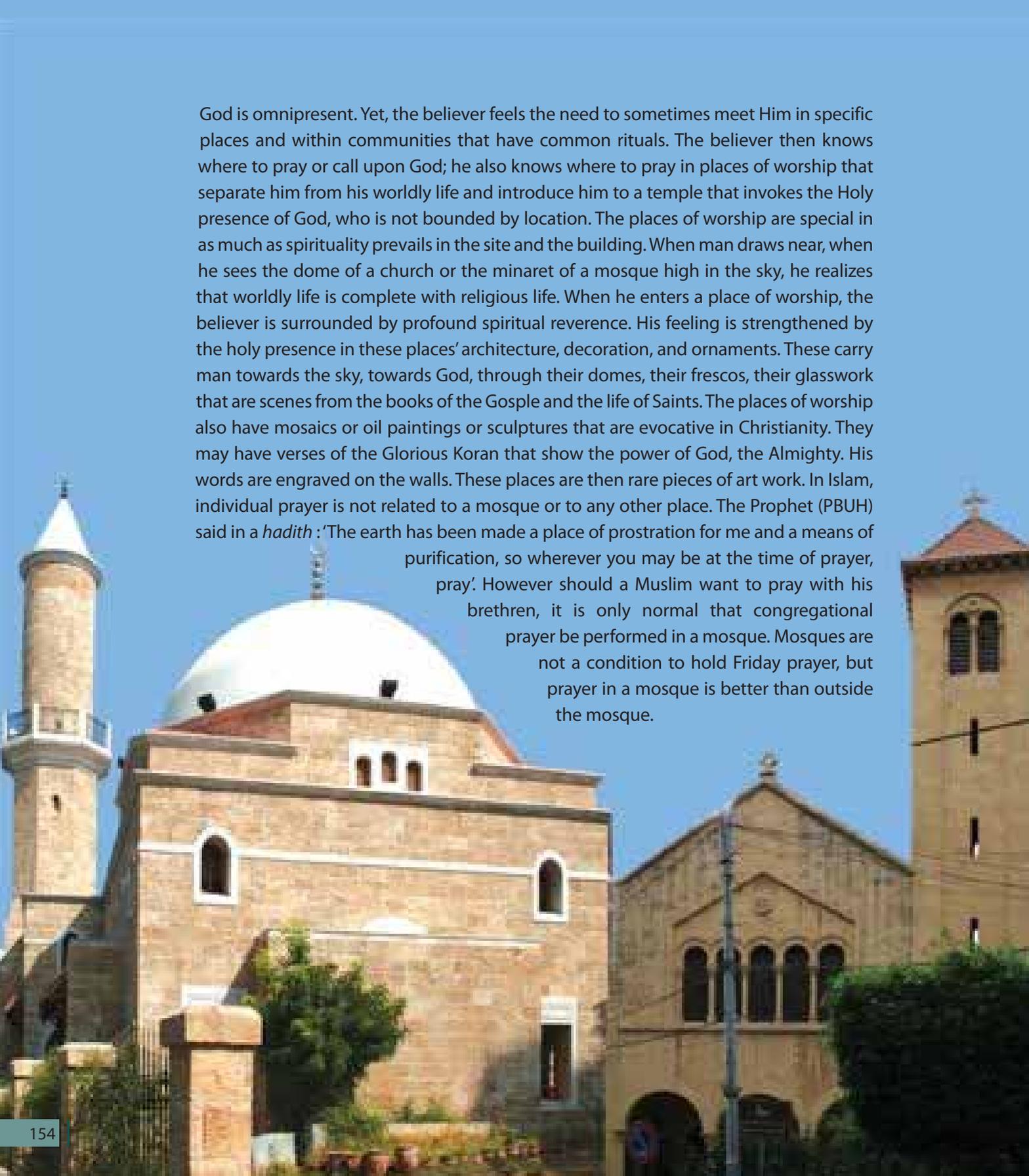
llah' (All thanks and praise be to God), '*La Ilah Illa Allah*' (There is no God but God) – '*Allah-u-Akbar*' (God is the Greatest) – among other *dhikr* that bring a Muslim closer to God (the Almighty and the Majestic). The Prophet (PBUH) used to perform *tasbih* on his right hand fingers and some of his Companions would actually use pebbles, which turned into a number of small stones in one thread, until it reached its current form nowadays. *Misbaha* is used on a number of *dhikr* the most important of which are *tasbihat al-Zahra*' (A.S.). It is about a reading after each prayer in which Muslims say '*Allah-u-Akbar*' (God is the Greatest) 34 times, and '*Al-Hamdu lil-Allah*' (All thanks and praise be to God) 33 times, and '*Subhan Allah*' (Glory be to God) 33 times. *Misbaha* is also used for *nidr* and *istighfar* (vows and asking God for forgiveness) related to a set number of repetition of the same expression. In some popular regions in Beirut and Damascus, women use a 'long' *misbaha* for *istighfar* a thousand times then pray on Muhammad (PBUH) a thousand times collectively and jointly in order to ask for something one really wants. Sufis also use *misbaha*, divide its beads with other beads having a different form. They call these beads *al-shahid* (witness), and between each two sets are gathered a specific number of beads depending on the *dhikr*.



Places of Worship



With joy and optimism, Christians asserted their belief in the presence of God everywhere. God's love, His Affection, and His Care to all creatures and most especially to mankind are expressed in the testimony of Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount. Wherever a Christian may be, he lives in the hands of God and under his Heavenly Father's Eye (Matthew 6: 25-34). He admits that his faith prompts him to knowingly and effectively answer God's call. Christians endeavor, with others, to build a world worthy of the love of God Almighty. In Islam, rituals, acts of worship, and occasions are related to specific times and periods in the year. In this same way, rituals, acts of worship, and occasions are related to specific places and specific environments. The five pillars of Islam are, after the twin declaration of faith (*Al-Shahadatayn*), Prayer (*Salat*), Almsgiving (*Zakat*), Fasting (*Sawm*), and Pilgrimage (*Hajj*). Two of these pillars—*Hajj* and *Salat*—are related to space. *Hajj* is related to the Kaaba in Mecca; *Salat* is related to mosques—although *Salat*, with the exception of Friday prayer, may be preformed outside mosque. Times of *Salat* are related to time as they are to space.



God is omnipresent. Yet, the believer feels the need to sometimes meet Him in specific places and within communities that have common rituals. The believer then knows where to pray or call upon God; he also knows where to pray in places of worship that separate him from his worldly life and introduce him to a temple that invokes the Holy presence of God, who is not bounded by location. The places of worship are special in as much as spirituality prevails in the site and the building. When man draws near, when he sees the dome of a church or the minaret of a mosque high in the sky, he realizes that worldly life is complete with religious life. When he enters a place of worship, the believer is surrounded by profound spiritual reverence. His feeling is strengthened by the holy presence in these places' architecture, decoration, and ornaments. These carry man towards the sky, towards God, through their domes, their frescos, their glasswork that are scenes from the books of the Gosple and the life of Saints. The places of worship also have mosaics or oil paintings or sculptures that are evocative in Christianity. They may have verses of the Glorious Koran that show the power of God, the Almighty. His words are engraved on the walls. These places are then rare pieces of art work. In Islam, individual prayer is not related to a mosque or to any other place. The Prophet (PBUH) said in a *hadith* : 'The earth has been made a place of prostration for me and a means of purification, so wherever you may be at the time of prayer, pray'. However should a Muslim want to pray with his brethren, it is only normal that congregational prayer be performed in a mosque. Mosques are not a condition to hold Friday prayer, but prayer in a mosque is better than outside the mosque.

Churches

Churches are built wherever Christian groups are found so that they may perform acts of worship in them. Christians head to churches in order to take part in liturgical rituals, Sacraments, to say prayers, psalms, and hymns to God; they also listen to the Gospel. They head to church on special visits, to pray, or to meditate.

After the Edict of Milan in A.D. 313 granting tolerance to Christians, Christian art appeared. Major churches were built by Emperor Constantine himself. The church had to choose an architectural shape for the Christians' place of worship.

Christians chose the Basilica¹⁶ as a place of gathering since it is large enough to include the altar and the congregation.

The liturgical definition of a basilica includes the following elements:

- The throne of the bishop and seats of the priests around him.
- A pulpit for reading and preaching.
- The altar.
- The baptistery.
- The crypt

A cathedral is the church of the Throne since the Latin word 'cathedra' means, literally, the throne.

¹⁶ Basilica is the name given in the first centuries of the Christian religion to churches that were not simply houses turned into places of worship. They were built in the shape of public buildings common in the Roman Empire. A Basilica is a large church different than a cathedral. The word 'basilica' is taken from '*basileus*', i.e. king.



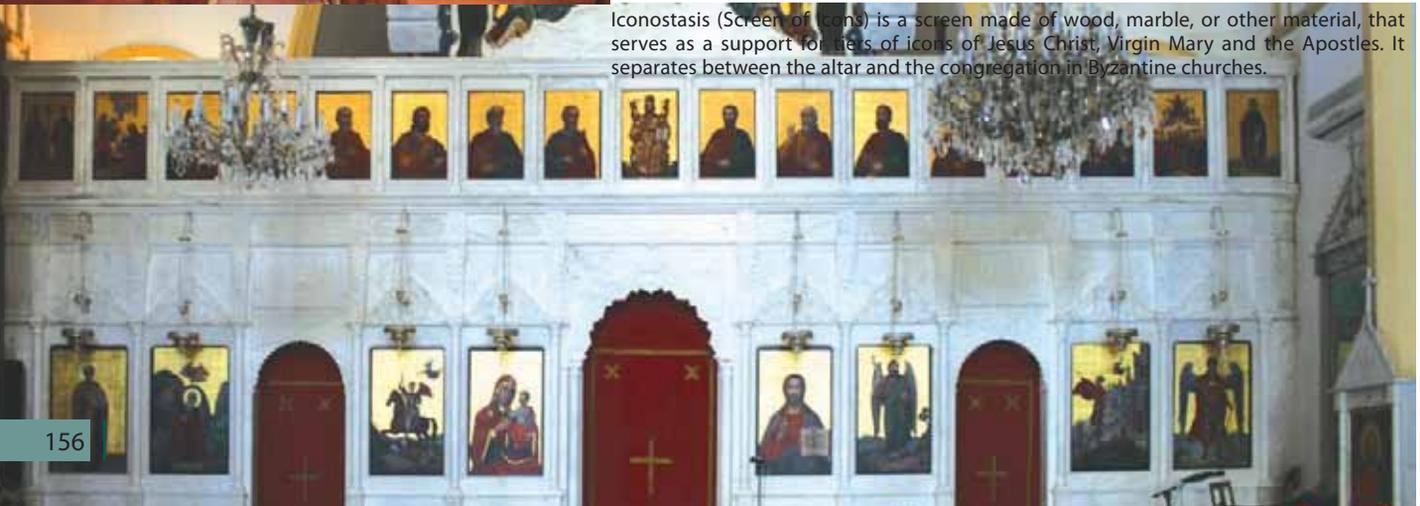


Parts of the church: denominations, shapes, and aim

- **Baptistry:** As there were more and more baptisms, and as baptism is linked with the Eucharist, baptismal fonts have been built inside the church or next to the church. Architecture and shapes are liturgical in reference to the Salvation. There is the round octagonal shape with a dome in the Roman tradition. The round shape is in reference to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and the octagon has a special symbol, since six is for the six days during which God created the world, seven is for the resting day, and eight is for the Resurrection of Christ for eternal life.
- **The Altar:** The altar is a table made of wood, marble, or stone. It is in the center of the church around which Christians gather to break the bread and to reenact what Christ did in the Last Supper, so that He may be remembered until His second coming. The altar is fixed beside the east wall or in its middle. Around it are the throne of the Bishop and seats of the priests, on the chancel, above which there is an arch supported by columns. The altar may be separated from the believers with a screen. This separation is known in the Byzantine rite as the 'iconostasis', i.e. the screen of icons. The altar symbolizes the manger where Christ was born, the mount where he taught



Iconostasis (Screen of Icons) is a screen made of wood, marble, or other material, that serves as a support for tiers of icons of Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary and the Apostles. It separates between the altar and the congregation in Byzantine churches.



- **Pulpit or lectern (bema):**

two pulpits are placed for the reading of prayer, the Scriptures, the teachings of the Fathers, the life of Martyrs and of Saints, and sermons.



- **The Confessional:**

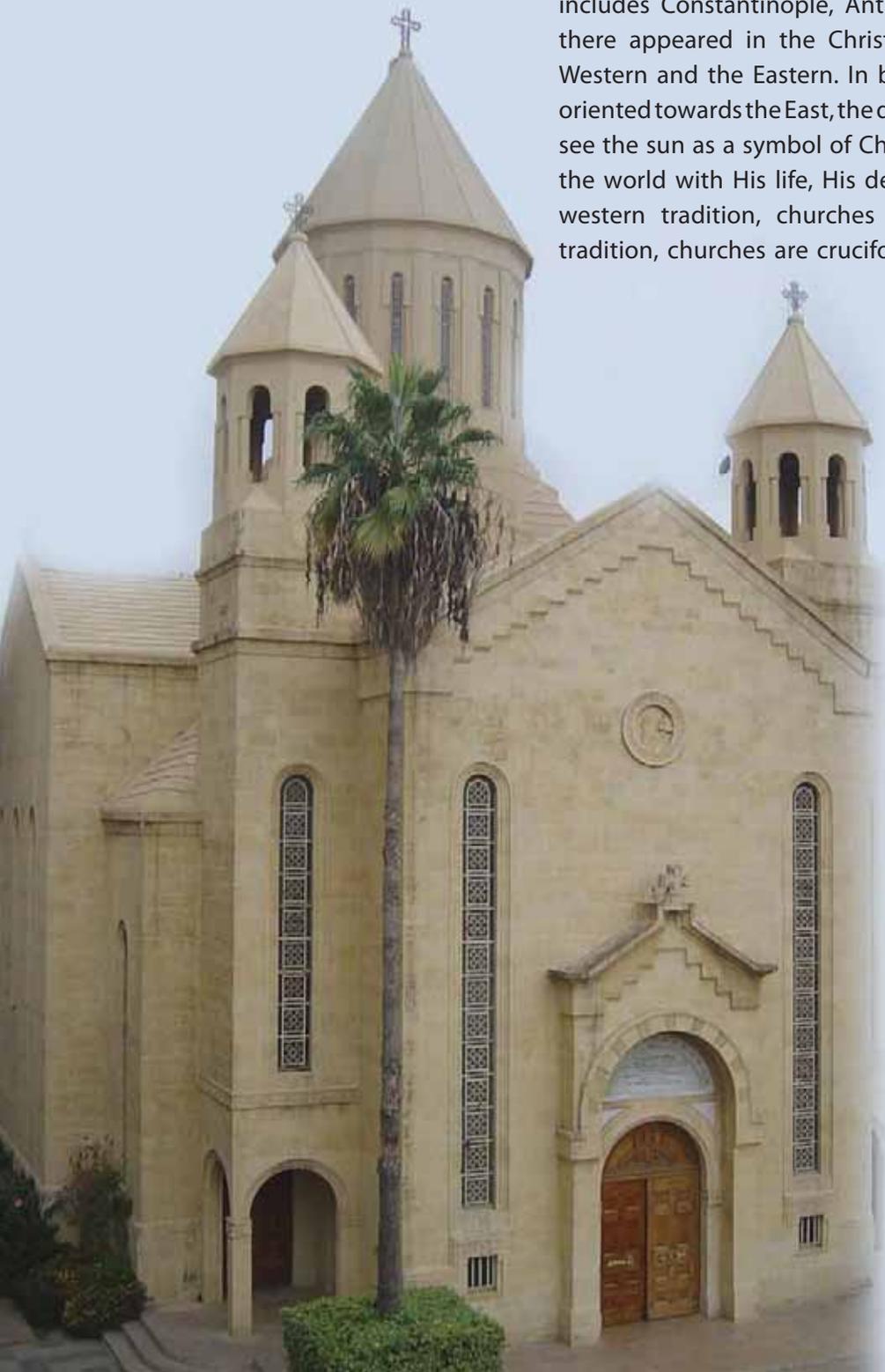
At first, baptism sufficed to erase previous sins. Then, when a group of penitents was formed in the Church, a specific place was allotted to them, as well as for the catechumens in the front of the church, for collective confession; the Byzantine rite still gives this sacrament. When the Sacrament of repentance became an act between the confessor and the penitent, there was a need for a special place where the two may be undisclosed to the congregation and where the secret of the confession may be kept. This is how the confessional was set up.



- In the church, to the right and left of the altar are two small altars; on the one to the right, the sacred sacraments are kept, i.e. the Eucharist; and on the one to the left, are the relics of Saints.



- After the division of the Roman Empire in the Fourth Century into a western part whose capital is Rome and an eastern part which includes Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria, there appeared in the Christian religion two traditions: the Western and the Eastern. In both these traditions, the apse is oriented towards the East, the direction of sunrise since Christians see the sun as a symbol of Christ who dispelled darkness from the world with His life, His death, and His resurrection. In the western tradition, churches are cruciform. In the eastern tradition, churches are cruciform or square with many domes. Armenian Orthodox churches have distinctive ornament, a round base, and conic domes. Protestant Reformation churches do not have any special form.

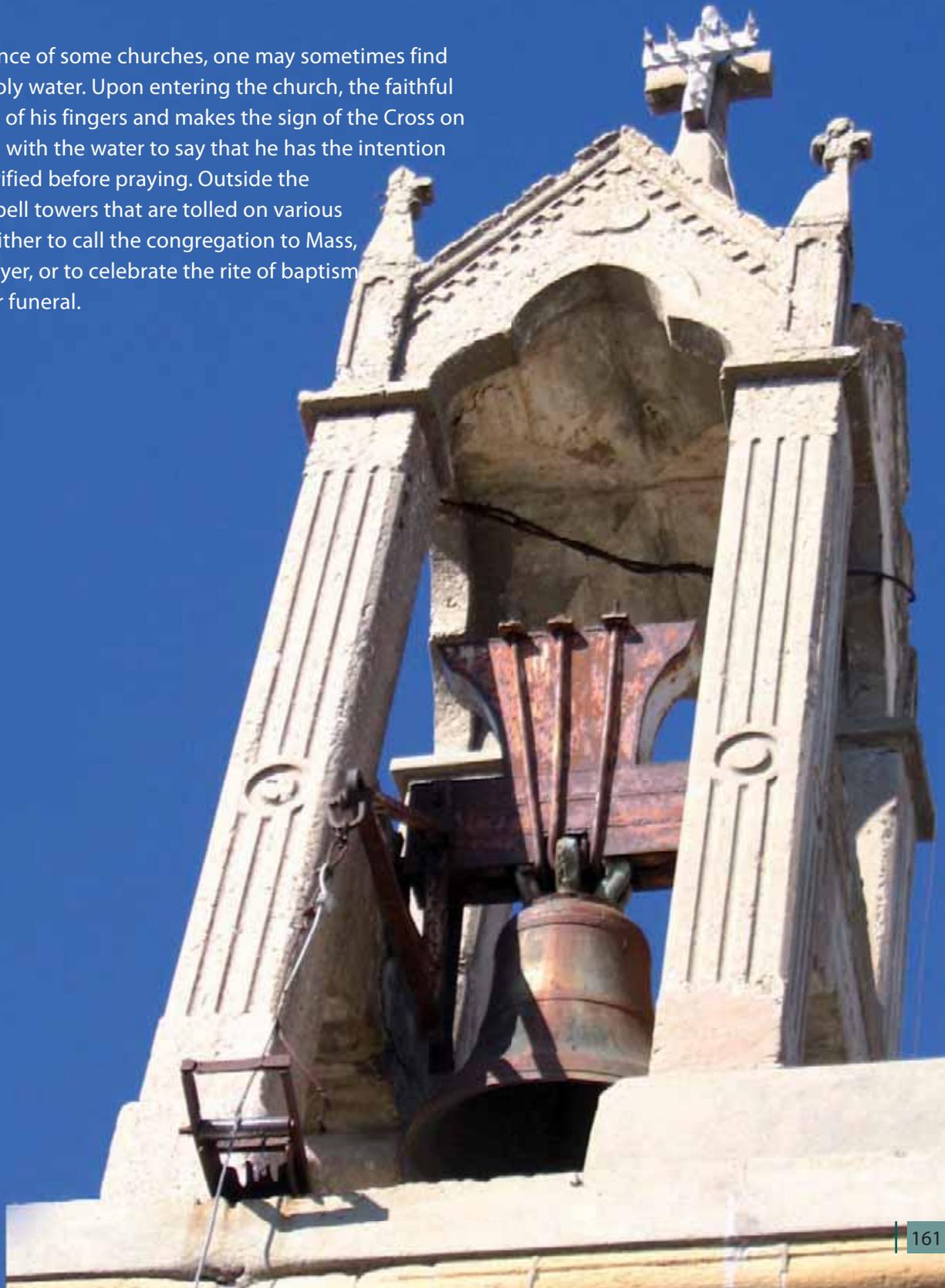




In both Catholic and Orthodox traditions, churches are built in the name of Christ the Redeemer or Virgin Mary or one of the Saints. Icons and statues are placed in the church. Windows and walls may be covered with mosaics or paintings inspired from both Testaments, the Old Testament, and especially the New. Paintings and mosaics depict the major stages of the life of Christ or scenes from the life of Saints. Protestant Churches are known for their simplicity; there are no paintings, icons, or statues in them. The Cross (without the Crucified) is placed in the apse and on the table of the Eucharist to help worshippers perform spiritual acts of worship without material forms. The aim is to avoid that these shapes become the subject of worship in popular practices. In Armenian Orthodox churches, one finds paintings of Virgin Mary, of Christ the Savior, of Armenian Saints, and in some Armenian Orthodox churches, one may find the relics of Armenian Saints.



At the entrance of some churches, one may sometimes find a basin of Holy water. Upon entering the church, the faithful dips the tips of his fingers and makes the sign of the Cross on his forehead with the water to say that he has the intention of being purified before praying. Outside the church are bell towers that are tolled on various occasions: either to call the congregation to Mass, or to say prayer, or to celebrate the rite of baptism, marriage, or funeral.

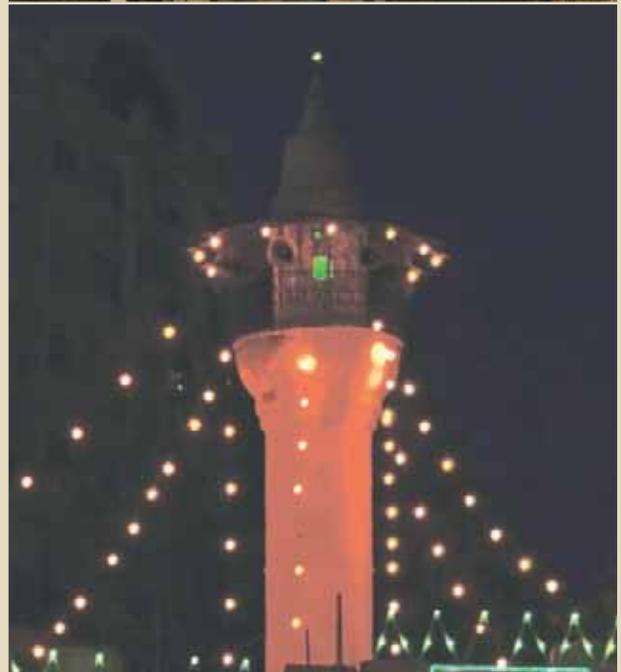
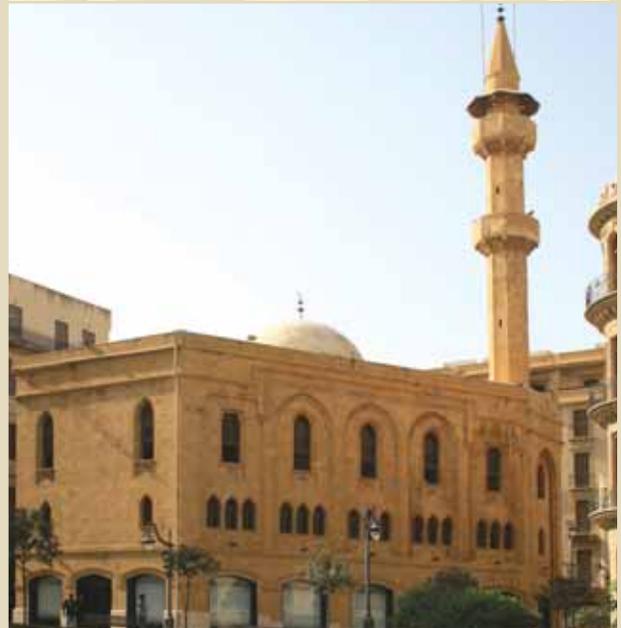




Mosques

The root of the word mosque (*masjid*) is in fact a place to prostrate (*sujud*). This is what is said in Sura: The Journey by Night (17), Verse 1: 'Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, to show him of Our wonders!' Al-Masjid Al-Haram in Mecca, i.e. the Kaaba, was a known construction but it had no equal when the Sura was revealed. The Prophet (PBUH) started, upon arriving to Medina in the summer of A.D. 622, to plan the construction of another mosque that stretched on about 800 square meters in area. The lower part of its walls was made of stone whereas the upper part was made of palm branches. He would preach leaning against the trunk of a tree; then a two-step stand was built for him. For sixteen months, Muslims turned to Jerusalem when praying, until the year A.D. 624, when the Kaaba became the Qibla (direction to which Muslims turn in prayer) as mentioned in the Verse: 'We have seen you turning your face from side to side in the heavens, So We will now turn you towards a direction that will please you: Turn your face towards the Sacred Mosque.' (Sura: The Cow(2), Verse 144).

Mosques are decorated with various ornaments in order to make them look neat and elegant, but without overdoing it. Decoration is recommended to show veneration to the mosque. Decoration is the completion of beauty, but it should not include gold, which is forbidden for various reasons. The use of gold is considered a squandering of money that should be spent on the poor and the needy or on building another mosque. Gold decoration also breaks the heart of the poor when they see it and the Prophet (PBUH) prohibited it.



A mosque includes nine parts or main components as per the traditional Islamic architectural style since the peak of Islamic Middle Ages (between the Tenth and the Sixteenth centuries A.D.). These parts are: prayer hall, *maqsurah*, *mihrab*, *sudda*, *minbar*, *sahn*, ablution area, dome, and minaret. The prayer hall is the main room to which those who pray enter; it is made of vertical halls and its walls are decorated with Koranic Verses, among others. This hall is the biggest part with the fewest columns so that believers may be able to perform their prayers in organized rows behind the Imam. There used to be in the middle of the prayer hall an enclosure, *al-maqsurah*, for the governor or the Emir. It was cancelled later on.

Sudda is the roofed gallery facing *mihrab* and *minbar*. It is sometimes a special place for women to pray. It is right above the main entrance of the mosque; the muezzin and believers climb to it from back stairs. The muezzin sees the movements of the Imam easily in order to repeat *takbir* after him for those who did not hear in the back halls of the mosque and in the *sahn*.

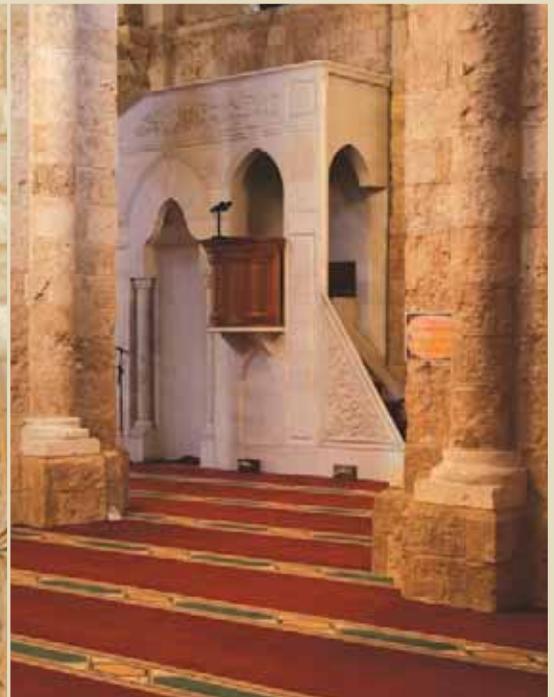
Sahn is the second part of the mosque before the prayer hall. It is a courtyard which is flanked by sides with arcades to bring shade. *Sahn* is sometimes used to plant a garden or for the ablution area and adjoining basins with carved domes and different



architectural patterns. To return to the prayer hall, the roof is a dome, which changed throughout the centuries from round to square to octagonal. Then came the Ottoman style known for its large dome surrounded by smaller ones. For indicating the *qibla*, the prayer hall includes a *mihrab* which is a niche in the wall in front of the hall to indicate the direction of the Kaaba. *Mihrabs* abound in decoration. In the front of the prayer hall next to *mihrab* is *al-minbar* to which the *khatib* climbs on

Friday, holidays, and occasions. The material used for *minbar* changed a lot from wood, to stone, to marble. All its shapes are full of various forms of decoration.

The minaret is a high tower to which the muezzin climbs to perform the call to prayer five times a day. The minaret may be round, square or octagonal. The first very high minaret was built by the Umayyads next to the Great Mosque of Damascus. Then came



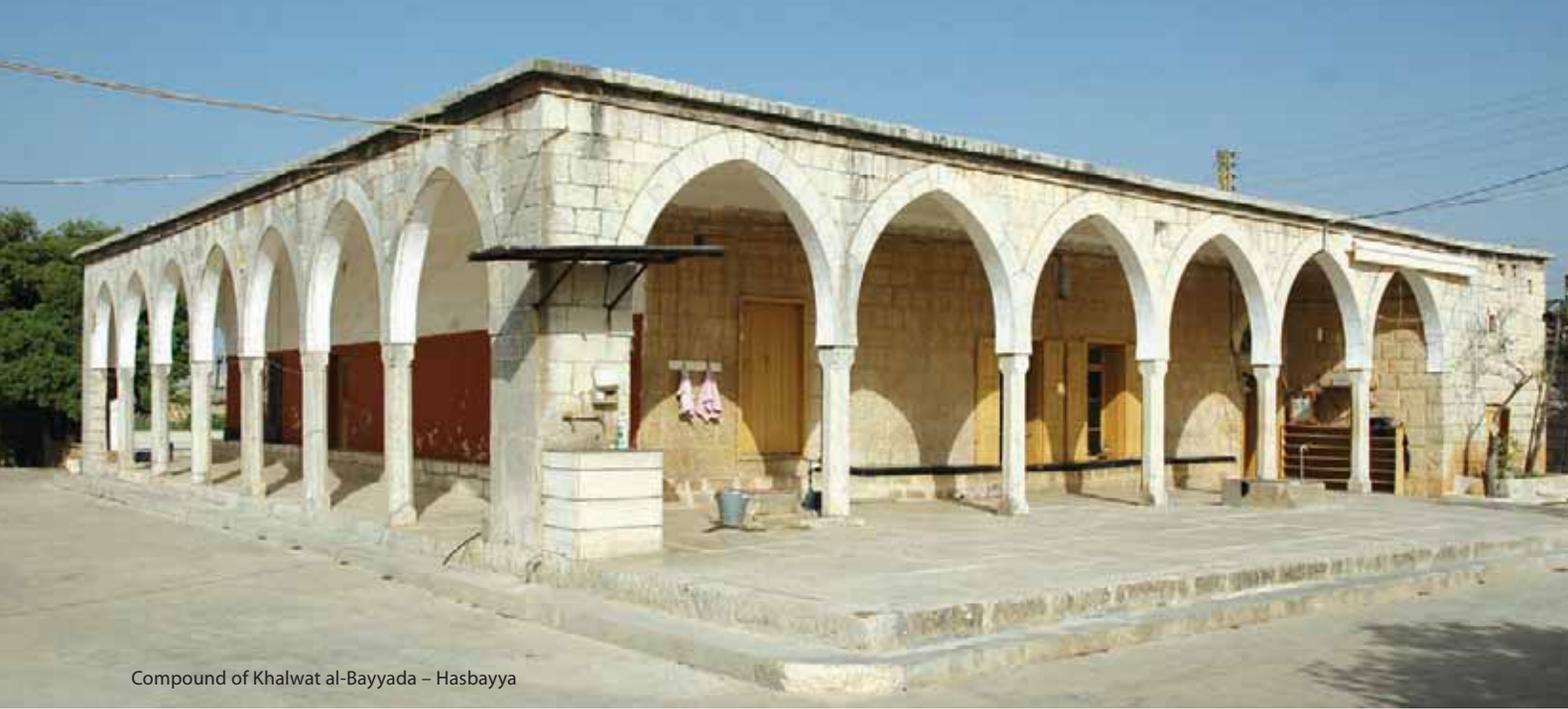
the minaret of the Dome of the Rock Mosque. Minarets in North Africa, Andalusia, and Damascus are mostly square. In Iraq, Egypt, Iran, and Anatolia, minarets are mostly spiral or cylindrical. Then there are the pencil-slim or rocket-like Ottoman minarets. The number of minarets can go from two, to four, to sometimes six.

Mosques were at first of two types: local mosques and the congregational mosque. The latter means the main mosque where the Friday prayer is held and is often the mosque of the town or the city. Neighborhood mosques are often used for the five daily prayers. Old schools of jurisprudence differ as to the possibility of having the congregational prayer in more than one mosque in the same city.

Mosques vary in their degree of reverence. The greatest in Islam is Al-Masjid al-Haram (Kaaba), the Prophet's Mosque in Medina, Al-Masjid al-'Aqsa in Jerusalem, and Quba' mosque next to Medina.

Throughout time, mosques have had many functions besides being the place where prayer is held. They have been used for teaching the Koran, Arab sciences and jurisprudence (*Fiqh*) before the foundation of autonomous *madrassa-s* (religious institutes) after the Twelfth Century.





Compound of Khalwat al-Bayyada – Hasbayya

Khalwat

Khalwat (Unitarian Druze houses of prayer) used by Druze are originally mosques. In the biography of the Emir al-Sayyid Abdallah Tannukhi, it is said that he ordered the construction of mosques in villages and the holding of sermons every Friday. Some mosques still attest to this, among which: the Fakhruddin 'Uthman Mosque in the center of Dayr al-Qamar; the Mosque of Qaa' in the Bekaa and Barani in Sidon, both built by Emir Fakhruddin the Second; the Mosque of Emir Mundhir ibn Sulayman Tannukhi built in Beirut adjacent to the area known as Bab Idriss. 'The path of Tawhid' for the Unitarian Druze has imposed a 'God-fearing' aspect to their places of worship known as 'Khalwat'. Its form for the Druze Knowledgeable Initiates ('*uqqal*) is not linked with an architecture heading towards the great outer sky, but rather related to 'the inner concept'. All attempts are made to surround this concept with quietude; it is enlightened and nourished with the core essence of meaning in order to have certainty of what God the Almighty commands through true human existence.

This is why *Khalwat* are found in remote places, far from the hustle and bustle – as urban flow has overcome most places without leaving any quiet, 'un-colonized' spot. The architecture of *Khalwat* is quite simple and limited to what is necessary for prayer that may fathom the depths of the soul and not the rest of the body, in the ultimate meaning of Tawhid.

The Druze initiates gather in *Khalwat* to study and to exercise the soul in the fields of meaning. People gather on Thursday evening, every week, on religious holidays (especially Adha, Fitr, Hegira New Year), and special occasions (the coming of delegations from other regions, or an invitation to discuss a matter of great importance, etc.). The major *khalwat* are: Al-Bayyada in Hasbayya, al-Qatalib in Shuf, and al-Zanbaqiyyah near Baruk.

Monasteries

The word 'monastery' indicates the buildings that started to appear in the early fourth century in which monks or nuns would live in community. They practiced common religious rituals and were submitted to special laws in their congregation. The monastery is headed by a Superior General. In Catholic Churches, the congregation of monks elects the Superior who is sometimes called abbot. In Orthodox churches, the Bishop of the diocese appoints the head of the monastery.

The building of monasteries thrived in Lebanon in the time of the Crusades and they included:

- **Crusaders' monasteries:** Crusaders built them with the local man power drawing inspiration from monasteries of Cistercians – following the Bourgogne School, in France. This art is in fact quite simple, with symmetrical measurements, barrel vaults, rib vaults, close pillars and decorated crowns; Balamand monastery is an example of these monasteries.
- **Local monasteries:** they are spread on mountain tops, in valleys, caves. They are small simple churches with a square outer appearance, decorated interior. In most times, they include wall decorations and decorated archways.

Each monastery includes lodging which is particularly simple and adequate for ascetics; it is called the fortress – forbidden to strangers outside the congregation that lives in the monastery. In every monastery, there is a church for the monks

and nuns to pray and celebrate the Eucharist; this church is open to all. An example of these monasteries is that of Our Lady of Ilij in Mayfuq. It is more like a peasant's home: the ground part includes a church and cellars that are next to the place where monks work. It is the perfect example of simplicity and down-to-earth monastic life for that special period of time.

From the Sixteenth Century to our days, churches and monasteries have spread throughout Lebanon. Their architecture depends on their liturgical rite and fits monastic life. Monasteries have acquired growing importance; their distinguishing features are as follows:

- elevated churches that are clearly visible;
- an internal courtyard with a fountain, a basin, or a well in the middle and is surrounded by halls;
- a lower floor for agriculture, cattle, and harvest;
- the first floor for monastic life.

These monasteries are very simply decorated, influenced as they are by oriental art with rib vaults. These monasteries include Our Lady of Tamish (Artemis), Hrash, Quzhayyah, Saint Elias Shuwayyah of the Greek Orthodox, Sayyidat al-Bisharah in Zar'aya, etc. The architecture of the church evolved in Lebanon so did its decoration with the growing social freedom; this evolution would slacken as the margin of freedom was reduced.

Ever since the early centuries in Christianity, there was a will to consecrate individual life to God by

following in the footsteps of Christ, leading a life of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Monks would go about individually preaching and bringing the Good News. Then they would meditate, and endure abstinence in the desert, which is why they were called 'The Desert Fathers.' After this individual ascetic and meditative life, they moved to communal life. In the fourth century, Saint Basil the Great (Basil of Caesarea) and Saint Bakhumeos had a great role in organizing hermits in groups. Those asking to follow in the footsteps of Christ started to gather and follow common rules organizing their communal lives, strengthening brotherly ties between those that have made public vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

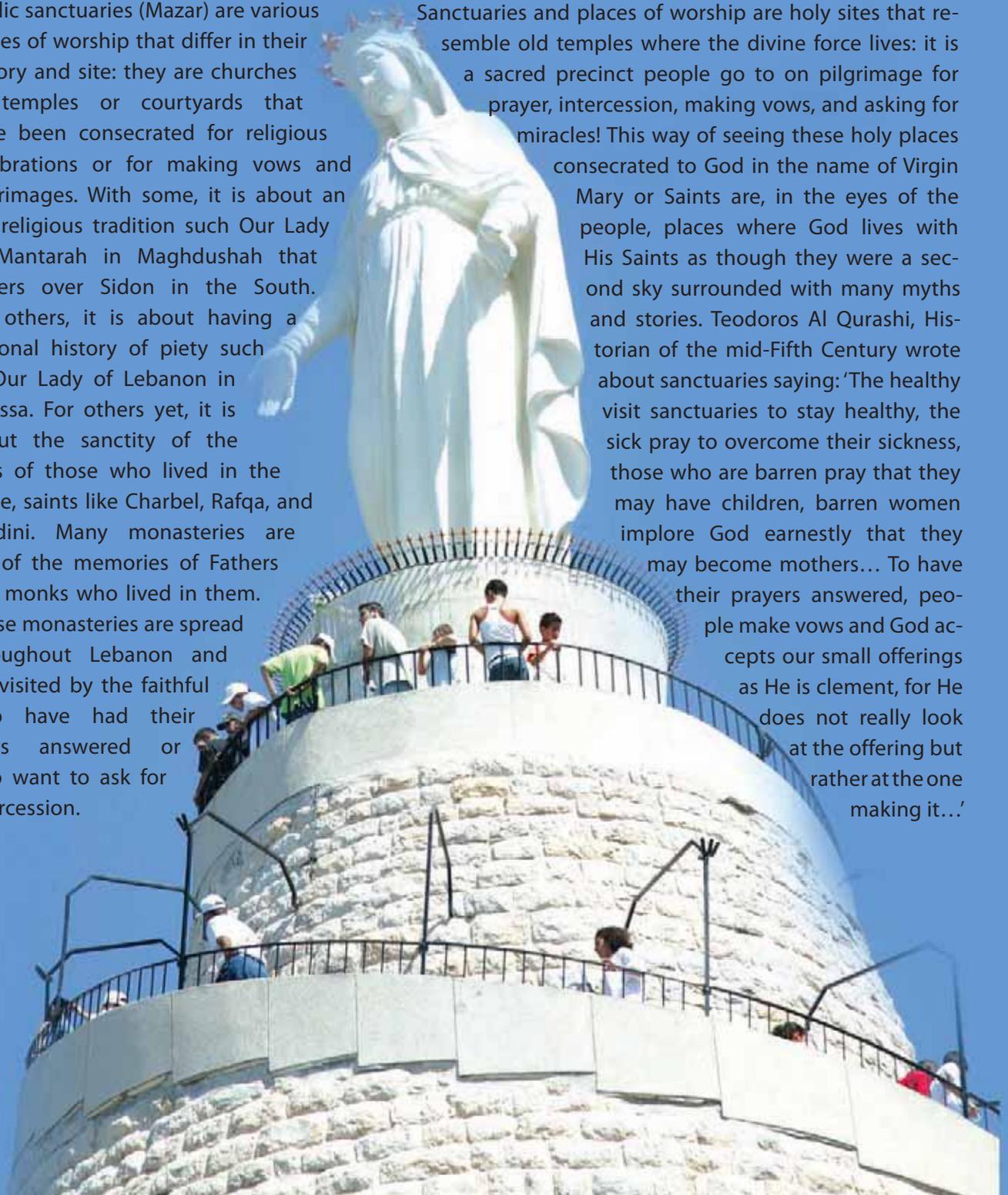
Monastic congregations multiplied and spread, contributing greatly to the thriving of societies on the economic, mental, and spiritual levels. Monks helped the needy and the sick around them; they taught people to read and write. They preserved libraries namely rare copies of books before the apparition of the printing press. In addition their activities included religious preaching, the holding of religious celebrations and prayers, the building of institutions for charity, social and teaching activities, and health care. Monastic congregations withheld many upheavals and went on throughout history. The monks' way of working with and for society varied, as they fortified monasteries or opened them to the world. Their vestments vary according to their congregation.



Public and Private Sanctuaries (Mazar) in Christianity

Public sanctuaries (Mazar) are various places of worship that differ in their history and site: they are churches or temples or courtyards that have been consecrated for religious celebrations or for making vows and pilgrimages. With some, it is about an old religious tradition such Our Lady of Mantarah in Maghdushah that towers over Sidon in the South. For others, it is about having a national history of piety such as Our Lady of Lebanon in Harissa. For others yet, it is about the sanctity of the lives of those who lived in the place, saints like Charbel, Rafqa, and Hardini. Many monasteries are full of the memories of Fathers and monks who lived in them. These monasteries are spread throughout Lebanon and are visited by the faithful who have had their vows answered or who want to ask for intercession.

Sanctuaries and places of worship are holy sites that resemble old temples where the divine force lives: it is a sacred precinct people go to on pilgrimage for prayer, intercession, making vows, and asking for miracles! This way of seeing these holy places consecrated to God in the name of Virgin Mary or Saints are, in the eyes of the people, places where God lives with His Saints as though they were a second sky surrounded with many myths and stories. Teodoros Al Qurashi, Historian of the mid-Fifth Century wrote about sanctuaries saying: 'The healthy visit sanctuaries to stay healthy, the sick pray to overcome their sickness, those who are barren pray that they may have children, barren women implore God earnestly that they may become mothers... To have their prayers answered, people make vows and God accepts our small offerings as He is clement, for He does not really look at the offering but rather at the one making it...'



Lebanon is full of sanctuaries in the name of Virgin Mary, among them are: Al-Saydah Church in Tyr (Saydah means Lady), Al-Saydah Church in Beirut, Al-Saydah Church in Byblos, Our Lady of Mnyatrah in Maghdushah, Our Lady Nuriyyah in Shikka, Our Lady of Yanuh, Al-Saydah Church in Qannubin, Our Lady of Bkirki, Our Lady of Lebanon, Our Lady of Ilij, etc.

In addition to public sanctuaries, there are private ones spread all over Lebanon. They are places of prayer and worship built in the form of small churches by an individual who expresses his thankfulness to God for His blessing, and to make prayer easier for others. Those who build such a sanctuary must ask for permission to hold mass in them.

There are also places of prayer restricted to some groups and one needs a special permission for these places to become public.

There are many small sanctuaries on the sides of streets built in sign of recognition after someone survived an accident or recovered from an illness.



Hermitages and Cells

Ascetics head to isolated places far from houses and people, to live in very hard living conditions. These places may be a cave or a tent or the top of a pillar.

History tells of one of the first Christian ascetics who lived ca. 250- 350, Saint Antonios (Saint Anthony the Great) who lived in the desert in Thebes, Upper Egypt. He was the first Christian ascetic to follow in the steps of Christ. An ascetic lives in seclusion following the example of Christ who often remained secluded in the desert to pray and fast. An ascetic dedicates his life to meditation, prayer and work. The life of ascetics started to become diverse when some of the students of ascetics started to live next to their spiritual teachers; this is how monastic communities were formed in some monasteries, in all countries. The ascetics of Mount Athos in Greece are currently the most famous in the world.

Other Places Related to Islamic Tradition

Musalla

The name of the place is from the verb '*salla*' (prayed). This denomination is used for any place – public or private – where prayer is performed such as a school room that is used only for prayer. The provisions of *Musalla* are different than those of a mosque: *waqf*, provisions of entry, the interdiction of turning the land of the mosque into *waqf* for any other place, the interdiction of turning a mosque into a place for another purpose, the necessity to preserve the purity (*tahara*) of the mosque, the interdiction for a woman in menstruation or the impure to enter a mosque, are all provisions for a mosque but not for *musalla*.

Madrassa

Madrassa-s became independent from the mosque in the Fifth Century A.H. (Twelfth Century A.D.). Sometimes, students pray in it. There is no minaret or minbar in it yet, some Mamluk sultans appointed *khatib-s* and imams in every *madrassa*. In Mamluk and Ottoman times, it became a tradition to build a mosque next to a *madrassa* (School) or vice-versa. They would be turned into a *waqf* to ensure their perpetuation.

Zawaya, Khawaniq, Rubut and Takaya

These are all various names in various languages and traditions based on where they appeared. They are, generally, places where ascetics and Sufis live for prayer and teaching. From these *khawaniq* (plural of the word 'khanqah') there came several major Sufi ways. In *zawaya* various courses in religious science are given.

Rubut is sometimes used as a fort on the sea side or on land for protection against the enemy. In internal Bilad al-Sham *rubut* remained a special building for Sufis and those who have devoted their lives for the worship of God (*mutajarridin*). The customs and traditions of *zawaya*, *khawaniq*, and *rubut* have faded away. But the buildings are still there in many Arab and Islamic countries, just like some of the *madrassa*.





The shrine of Imam Uza'i in Beirut: he was famous for his forgiveness and his advocacy of religious



Makam, Mazar, and Mashhad

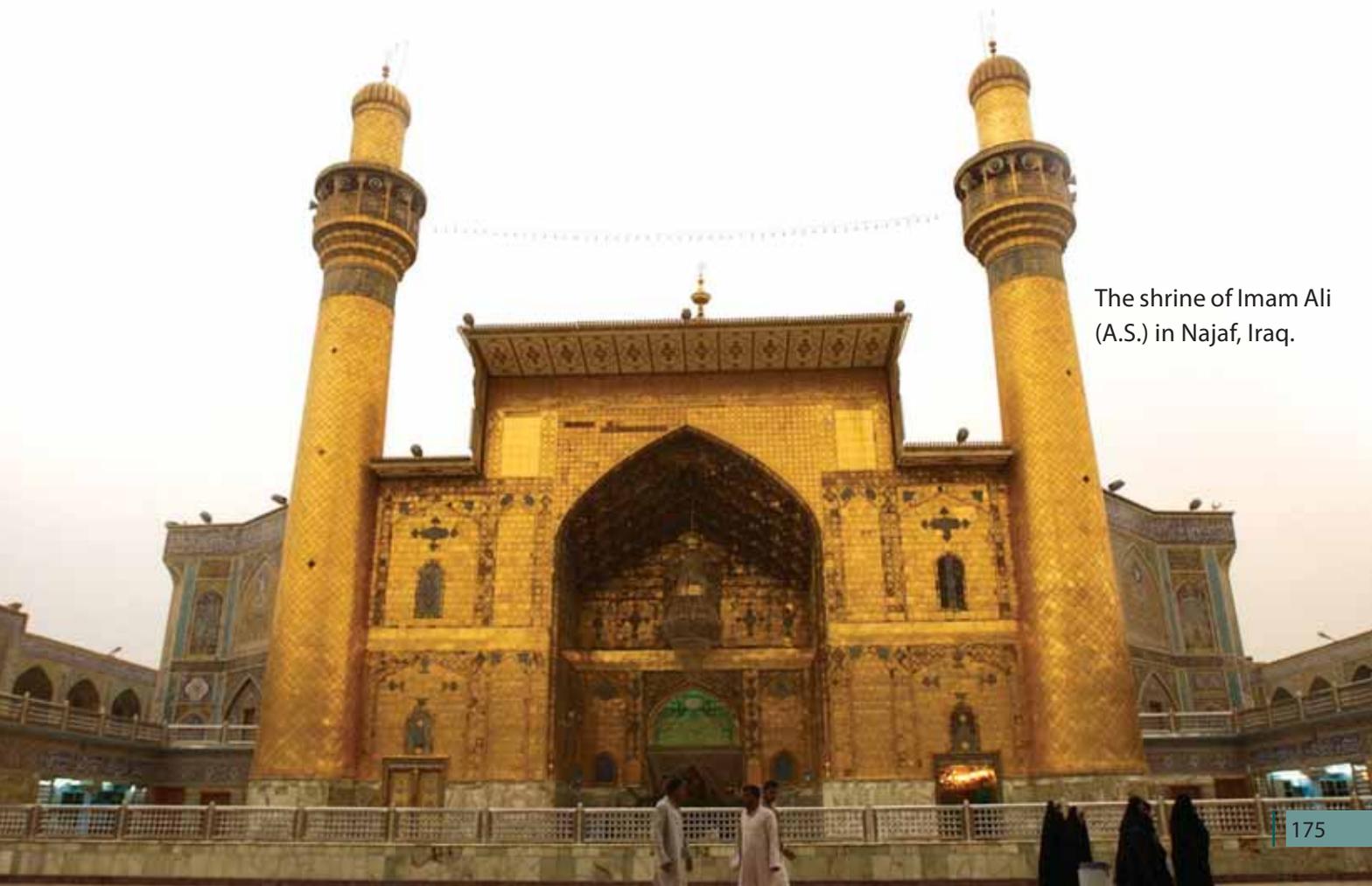
In Arab and Islamic countries, various terms are used to designate the place where the shrine of one of the Prophets, Imams, or *Awliya'* is. People visit these places to pray, ask for blessing, and hope their invocation is answered. They ask God to have mercy on those buried in the shrine. The sanctuary of Fatimah *al-Ma'sumah* (the Infallible) is in Qumm. The city of Mashhad was built around '*al-mashhad al-ridawi*' called after Imam Reza, where millions of people visit the shrine of the Imam every year.

Holy 'Atabat

The shrines of the Infallible Imams – members of the Family of the Prophet (PBUH) for Shiites, or their children – are known as Holy '*atabat*. They are found in several countries. In Iraq for instance, there is the shrine of Imam Ali (A.S.) in Najaf; the shrine of Imam Husayn (A.S.) and his brother 'Abbas as well as other martyrs in Karbala'. In Iran there is the shrine of Imam Reza (A.S.) in Mashhad, and the shrine of the sister of Imam Riza (A.S.) in Qumm. In Syria there is the shrine of al-Sayyidah Zaynab (A.S.) the sister of Imam Husayn (A.S.). In addition, there is one shrine in Egypt, said to

be that of al-Sayyidah Zaynab (A.S.). There used to be other shrines in Medina; they have been destroyed and there remains the shrine of the Prophet (PBUH) in the Prophet's Mosque.

Shiites visit these shrines to perform prayer and *du'a'* since they see these people as holy, because of their close ties to God, the fact that they call people to Him, linking people to Him, and being faithful in their worship to Him (S.W.T.).



The shrine of Imam Ali (A.S.) in Najaf, Iraq.



Husayniyyat

These are places that are used by Shiite Muslims for *ta'ziyah* on 'Ashura' and the commemoration of the martyr of Imam Husayn. They are now used on various social occasions namely for paying condolences. *Husayniyyat* have been built in most countries where Shiite Muslims live, especially Lebanon, Bahrain, Iran and Iraq. *Husayniyyat* are

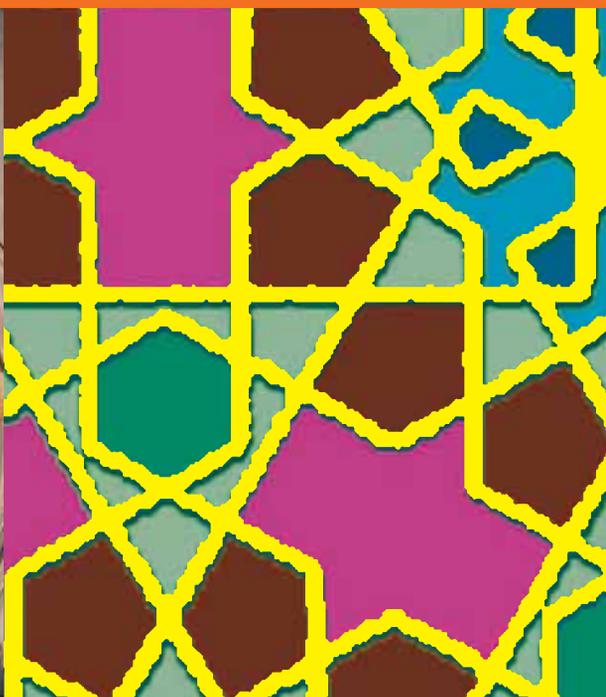
important in the rituals that are performed in them, but also for lodging guests coming from abroad. They are also used as a place to offer food and drink for the poor especially near the shrines of Imams (A.S.) in Iraq, Qumm, Mashhad, the sanctuary of Al-Sayyidah Zaynab (A.S.) in Damascus, among others.



Maqamat for Mouwahidoon (Unitarian) Druzes

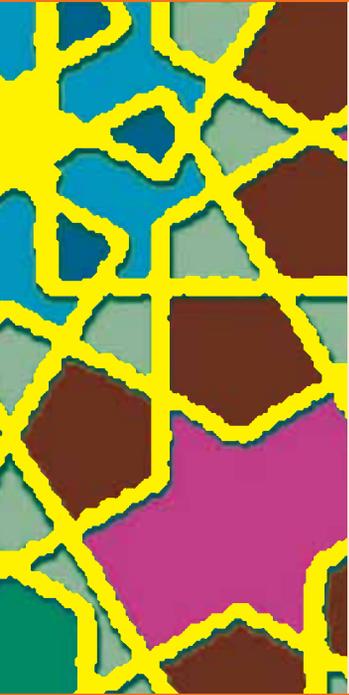
'Mazarat' (singular 'mazar') also known as 'Maqamat' (singular 'maqam') have been built by Mouwahidoon Druze in honor of the work of a Prophet or to have blessing (*istibrak*) from those who have had a life of worship and obedience. People make daily *ziyarat* (minor pilgrimages) to these places, which are also visited by crowds of Sheikhs from various regions and various parts on a yearly time specified for each. This occasion is called '*al-Ziyara*' (the visit). The brothers in religion meet each other in God with the blessing of the person in the shrine. Then they gather around their trusted Sheikhs to read *dhikr*. They remember the life of the person in the *mazar* and the lessons to be deduced and reflect upon the core spiritual meanings. They ponder on the current times in order to find assistance and help in their holy quest, and to preserve their pledge of faithfulness in *Tawhid* on the basis of '*amr bil ma'ruf wa-nahi 'an al-munkar* (enjoining what is good or right, and forbidding what is evil or wrong). Among the most important *ziyarat* whose date is determined by the trusted Sheikhs, spiritual references, and regional religious bodies are: *ziyarah* to the *maqam* of the Prophet Shu'ayb in Palestine, *maqam* of the Prophet 'Ayyub in Shuf, *maqam* of the Prophet Habil at the outskirts of Damascus; *mazar* of the Emir, al-Sayyid AbdAllah Tannukhi in 'Abay; *mazar* of al-Shaykh al- Fadil in Rashayya, among other *mazarat* and *khalwat* mostly shrines of trusted Sheikhs.

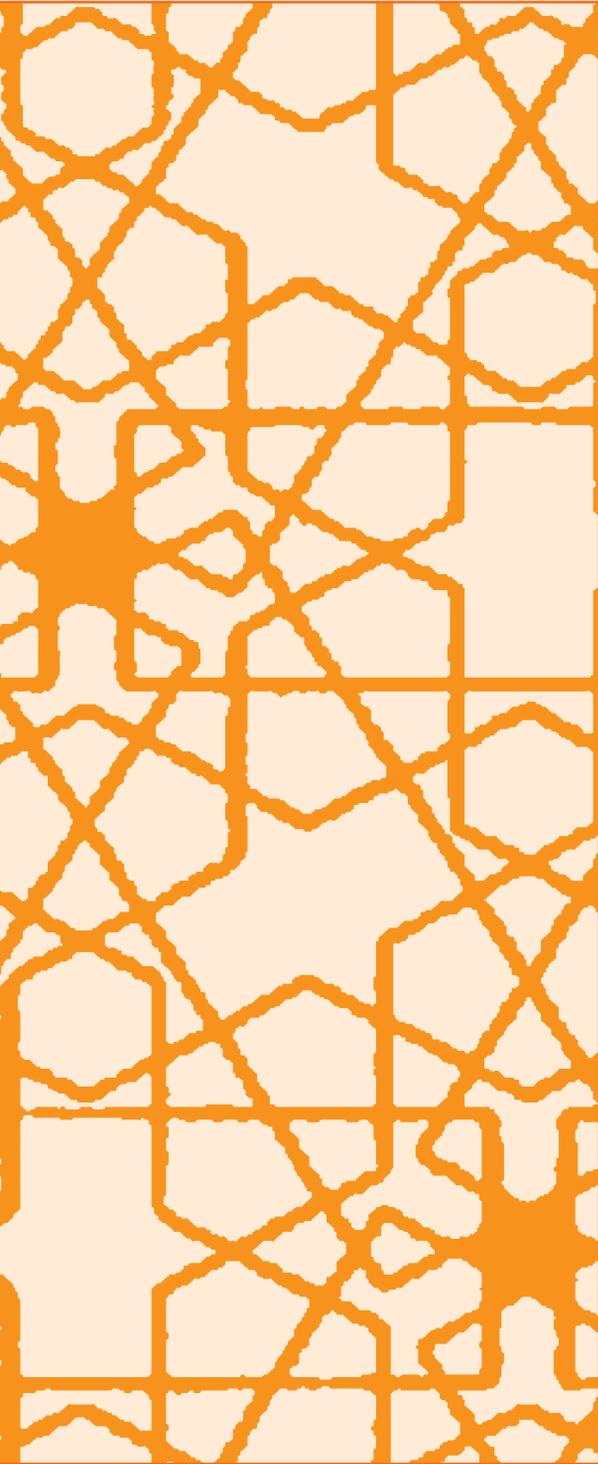




Customs and Traditions

Customs and traditions are not directly related to the core of religion. Rather they are an expression often influenced by culture and the communal environment. People express through these customs religious symbols and meaning and link their social behavior with their spiritual one.





Garments and Sundry

Clothes change with the change of time and place. They are linked with religion, customs and traditions. They evolve with social and intellectual progress and are somewhat linked with industrial, commercial, and artistic development. Religious dignitaries and soldiers are those who comply mostly in their clothes with the law, rules, and traditions.



Vestments and Sundry in Christianity

Vestments of Patriarchs, Bishops and Priests

In Catholic and Orthodox churches, priests are those who receive the priesthood Sacrament; they are the clerics. Some wear the official clerical vestment, which is the alb that covers the whole body from the neck to the feet. It is generally black but can also be brown, gray, blue, or white. The cover of the priests' heads varies according to their congregation. In Eastern Churches, priests often have beards and moustaches so do some priests in the West, namely in monastic congregations. They wear a cincture (belt) made of fabric around their waist.

Bishops and archbishops are the members of the clergy that are called to be the successors of the Twelve Apostles who accompanied Christ and who were blessed with the Holy Spirit. Geographically, bishops head a region in the Church called a diocese. They are assisted by priests who are at the service of parishioners. They usually wear an alb, cincture, and miter. They are free to dress in a regular color or in red. They carry a Cross around their necks; they wear the ecclesiastical ring in the middle finger of their right hand, symbol of their investiture. They carry in their hand the crosier.





Patriarchs are the spiritual heads of bishops, clerics, and faithful who are part of one rite that was formed in one large area, and whose members spread around the world. The vestments of patriarchs are not different than those of bishops, but in the Byzantine rite, they carry the Cross around their neck with an icon of Christ and of Virgin Mary. His Holiness the Catholicos, the highest spiritual dignitary and head of the Armenian Church, carries around his neck the Cross, an icon of Virgin Mary, and an eagle with two heads, surmounted by a royal crown and a cross as a symbol of the Orthodox authority. His

Holiness has a regional and international role that covers the Armenian Orthodox dioceses in the Middle-East and around the world.

The vestments mentioned above are official and traditional garments. They are sometimes replaced nowadays by a dark men's suit with a special collar, called a Roman collar or simply a men's suit with a Cross on the lapel of the jacket.

Pastors are the ministers (servants) of religion in Protestant Churches. They wear regular suits and sometimes add the Roman collar, or wear a



The eagle that the Armenian Orthodox Catholicos wears around his neck alongside an icon of Virgin Mary.



small Cross on the lapel of their jacket. There are no ecclesiastical ranks in Protestant churches as there are in Catholic and Orthodox Churches. A pastor is a prelate who has the right to teach the Word. Ranks are limited to tasks in the church.

Vestments worn by the celebrant during Mass and Sacraments are colored in Catholic and Orthodox Churches depending on the times and the Holidays. With these vestments, the celebrant is a living icon of Christ the King, the Pantocrator.

During Mass, the faithful meditate the stages of Salvation that occurred in the first coming of Christ in the light of his second coming, which the Church awaits.

In addition to the royal vestments worn by the priest during Mass, the Bishop wears a ring on his finger (as a symbol of authority), carries a crosier (symbol of investiture) and places a crown on his head (symbol of glory and dignity).



Monastic Habit: Gowns of Monks and Nuns

Christian monks and nuns have consecrated their lives to God by joining a monastic congregation and by making the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. As mentioned before, there are many monastic congregations and the monks and nuns' habits vary in color and in the number of garments depending on the congregation they belong to. Yet, all monks and nuns are ascetics and in public, wear the monastic habit which includes the following garments: a cassock that covers the whole body from neck to the feet; a leather belt at the waist; a scapular covering the shoulders, chest,

and back; a skullcap for monks called schema and a veil or coif for nuns. Most wear sandals on their bare feet. Some add to the mentioned garments a white belt made of rope with two knots at the end, or a rosary of Virgin Mary and others wear a small Cross around their neck.





Garments and Sundry in Islam

Islam does not impose any special outfit on Muslims or any special colors. It has just given general regulations as to modesty and decency. Some *faqih* (experts in Islamic Law) forbid any garments that may offend and dishonor the one wearing them; this is called the clothing of *shuhra* (extravagant clothes). Many religious Muslim women cover their whole body and their head in a way that only their face and hands are seen. The aim of this *hijab* is to protect Muslim women's virtue and honor since it drives away what makes them a pure object of pleasure by hiding their charm and allure. Muslims consider that *hijab* safeguards their society against corruption and perdition. *Hijab* and decency are required not only in social life, but also when performing *salat* since *salat* is unacceptable should the woman's body not be covered save her face and hands. Decency for Muslim men is in men not showing the part between their navel and their knees since this is a violation of the traditional Muslim decency. In addition, some people have developed special traditions and customs. For instance, each Sufi way has special clothes, shirts, and banners for occasions. It is recommended in Islam to wear rings, but these should not be made of gold for men but can be gold or silver for women. In some religious texts, it was said that it is better to have carnelian, turquoise or pearl rings.

Garments of Sheikhs and Ulemas

Sheikhs and Ulemas who lead prayer, judges and Muftis, all wear turbans (*'amama*) and loose *jubba*. Most have beards. Those among them who are *Sayyid* always wear black turbans (*'ama'im*, plural of *'amama*). *Sayyids* are Shiite Muslims who are descendents of the Prophet (PBUH) whereas non Shiite Muslims who are descendents of the Prophet (PBUH) are called *Sharifs*.

'Uqqal (the Knowledgeable Initiates)

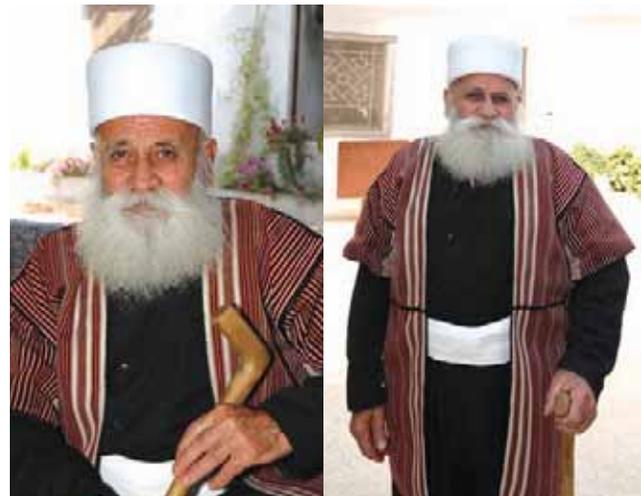
Unitarian Druze Sheikhs are called "*uqqal*" (the Knowledgeable Initiates) since *farida* (religious duty) is for them to use commit (in Arabic *ya'qilu*, hence '*uqqal*') themselves to turn away from all that is forbidden in the religious law and turn towards all what is extolled (*hamid*). They are the ones who comply with *fara'id* (all religious duties) and acts of worship. They endeavor to grasp the depths of the provisions of their religious school (*madhhab*) and the sciences of religion. They refrain from all that is *haram* (sinful) and are far from all suspicion (*shubha*). They wear a white turban ('*amama*') on shaved heads.

The clothes of the '*uqqal*' are quite simple, in fact modest and decent. The basis is the outer garment (in colloquial Arabic 'Qimbaz') then for practical reasons it was replaced by a pair of loose trousers. The *Abaya* that the Sheikhs wear may be three types:

- Black for all religious men on Druze religious and social occasions;
- Red and short with white vertical stripes; usually worn by the elderly among the Druze;
- White and short with black vertical stripes, it is worn only by those whom the Trusted Sheikhs see to be truthful in *Tawhid* and in character; this means to the Druze that this person has advanced in science, fear of God, and virtue.

Unitarian Druze women ought to wear clothes that cover their bodies in full; they are wrapped in a white scarf that covers the head, the chest, and the back. Those among them who are religious also cover their mouth and the lower part of their

face. As to what is commonly known as 'the round turban' (*al-'amama al-mudawwara*) it is related to a conventional system amongst the Trusted Sheikhs. In fact, the Trusted Sheikhs chose one or more amongst them, in whom they see the true continuation of their righteous forefathers and their spiritual esoteric knowledge (*sirr*), as well as a continuation of what binds followers of *Tawhid*, a bond that will go on until the final hour. This is why their minds meet to crown this trust with a fine symbol, i.e. this turban ('*amama*') that takes the most complete of all shapes: the circle.



One *mutakammil* (the one that has a beard) Unitarian Druze Sheikh, in his religious outfit: a red '*abaya*' with a black '*abaya*' above it.





The Five-Colors Flag for the Mouwahidoon Druze

On many congregational Druze occasions, there rises a five-color flag which also appears on most of Druze houses and institutions. There is popular agreement on the purport of this symbol. Yet, there are many answers when trying to explain this symbol. This ambiguity is due to the absence of the interpretative text explaining each color. This is why it is justified to say that this symbol is more customary. In regard to this matter, we are brought by the common belief to the concept of '*hadd*' (limitary) by analogy to what is absolute.

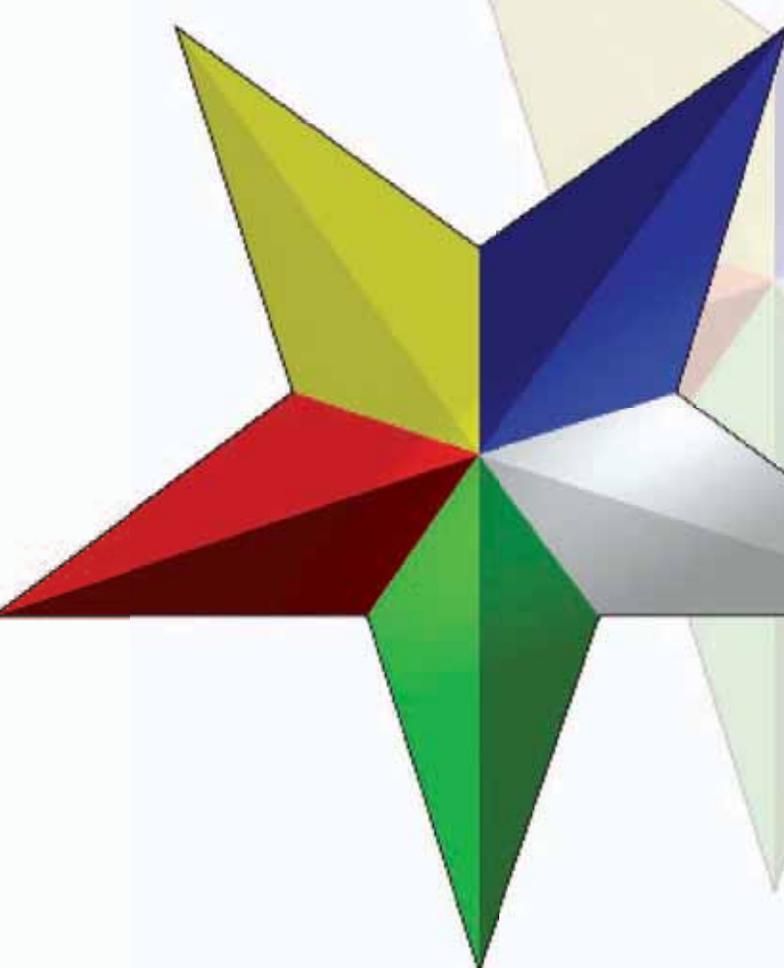
God (Exalted be his Name) (an expression that includes the finest meanings of *tanzih* - Exaltation) is *Al-Ahad al-Samad* ('the Unique, the Lord Supreme'), *Al-Munfarid bil-Wihdaniyyah 'ala-l'itlaq* (Absolutely Unique in His Oneness), *Mubdi' al-mubdi'at* (Originator of All Creatures), the Creator of Heavens and Earth: 'Wherever you turn, there is the face of God' (Sura: The Cow (2), Verse 114) (an expression of the most comprehensive Being).

This is why the creation of the relative existence on the part of Absolute Oneness is to be linked to the miracles of divine power, and God in omnipotent. Yet, Creation itself is a wonder ('*aya*) to people who reason and ponder. And intellect ('*aqal*) cannot use the even path (*al-sabil al-sawiyy*); the intellect (*fikr*) cannot follow the right method (*al-nahj al-qawim*) in this matter – and in many other matters – other than by committing to *hadd* (limit), *hadd* being understood as the mediation (*wasita*) to the act of Creation.

This *wasita* (mediation) is the order of God, His will, His word, His act, and His deed (*'ihdath*). This is based on the following Verse: 'His wont, if He desires, is but to say to it: 'Be!' and it is.' (Sura: Ya Sin (36), Verse 82). In order for the command of the Absolute to fall into human understanding, there was *'aql*, as a mercy. For *'aql* is the *hadd* (limit) through which the worshipper understands what the *Rahman al-Rahim* (God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate) wants him to understand: 'Surely in these are signs for a people of understanding.' (Sura: Thunder (13), Verse 4). Likewise for the *hadd* (limit) through which are unified understandings of reason to become, through will, images in the soul. A third *hadd* (limit), the *hadd* of the word that 'had come from your Lord' (Sura: Jonah (10),

Verse 19), is also a mediator to the act of creation, as well as the *hadd al-fi'l as-Sabiq lil wujud* (the limit of action Preceding existentiation) then to what follows in actual existentiation : 'Be!' and it is.' These are five mediators (*wasat*) that regulate the limit of the possible (*al-hadd al-ma'qul*) between the absolute oneness and the relative cosmos. This is how man becomes ready to accept 'the Supreme word of God', which is the word of unification (*tawhid*), to receive the heavenly messages through the noble prophets: 'bringers of glad tidings as well as warners, lest mankind have any argument with God after their coming. God is Almighty, All-Wise.' (Sura: Women (4), Verse 165). Since man is endowed with reason (*'aql*), he logically has to endeavor to obey His command and refrain from disobedience as well as comply with the tenets of the Tawhid Druze Faith.

How did these mental concepts turn into colors in the absence of a clear text? Perhaps one draws near the truth by turning to the social and political history – and not to the tenets of the Faith – of the Unitarian Druze, more specifically to 'muthagharah': the fact that they took on the role of protection of the community, for many centuries, in its *thughur*, posts on the limit, to hold back any sinner that might aggress it. This group of fighters chose this special banner in honor of their heroism, and their sacrifices throughout the centuries. This banner is a five-color flag that embodies the idea of these five *hudud* binding the Unitarian Druze under its banner to our day.



General Customs and Traditions

Vows

The devotion of the faithful may express in different ways personal worship, which is why some have recourse to making vows. Christians make vows to Virgin Mary or to one of the Saints. One pledges to make an act of repentance, to pray a given prayer for a given time, to give charity to the handicapped for instance, or to visit a given place where the relics of a Saint are kept with reverence. Some also take part in seasonal celebrations for Holidays, part in the presentation of sacrifices, oil, candles, and harvests in villages, donate the decoration of a temple wall, icon, or chandelier. In some traditions, the faithful, namely Catholic, vow to wear for a given time, a habit which resembles that worn by the Saint whose intercession they ask for. This is how there are actually many women who wear a white and blue habit during the month of May, that resembles according to tradition the habit of Virgin Mary known to be traditionally white and blue, trying to complete a vow they have made.

For Muslims, *nidhr* (vow) is an act that Muslims commit to doing upon receiving something. For instance, one says: 'I make a vow to God that I should do (this) if I were to be healed.' Or 'I make a vow to God that I should do this...'. The condition of a *nidhr* is that it should be an authorized matter by Shari'a such as praying, fasting, invocation (*du'a'*), charity (*sadaqa*) to the poor, or the like. A Muslim is not supposed to vow to walk bare-foot or beg or other deeds that may humiliate a person or be a violation of his dignity. Yet, although these acts are forbidden they are still practiced at a limited scale in some societies that do not have a wide Islamic culture.



'Adhkar, Basmala, Tahiyya, and Adi'iyah

Muslims mention (*dhikr*) the name of God when speaking for instance they say: '*subhan Allah*' (Glory be to God), '*Al Hamdu lil-Allah*' (All thanks and praise be to God), '*Allahu-Akbar*' (God is the Greatest); by saying this last phrase Muslims express what is in their hearts and by saying that God is the One to have created them, He is the greatest *Mudabbir and Mutasarrif* (The One in whose Hands is everything, and Who manages all things), no creature in this world has any might or power except through God (*la hawla wala quwwata illa billah*) then one's miseries lessen and one feels the sovereignty of God in this *dhikr*. The greatest *dhikr* of all is '*La Ilah illa Allah Muhammad Rasul Allah*' (There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Prophet of God) since the Prophet (PBUH) said: 'The best of what I and the Prophets before me have said is '*La Ilaha illa Allah*' (There is no god but God) and these are the most important words in Islam through which one enters Islam. *Basmala* is saying '*Bismi-Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim*' (In the name of God, The All-Merciful, the Compassionate', which is a *Sunna* of the Prophet (PBUH) that Muslims follow as Muhammad (PBUH) would mention God for all things such as eating, drinking, reading, arriving, departing, and so on. Muslims also follow in this the Koran since this is the first Verse in it. *Basmala* is for asking *baraka* (blessing) and asking for God's help. *Tahiyya* in Islam is as such a greeting through which is expressed mutual respect and affection. Muslims are to answer with a similar greeting. For instance when one says: '*Al-Salamu 'alaykum wa Rahmat Allah*' (Peace and mercy of God be upon you), the answer is: '*Wa 'alaykum al-Salam was Rahmat Allah wa-Barakatuhu*' (And upon you be peace and mercy of God). The greeting in the name of God is a virtue and the answer is a religious duty (*farida*) which spreads affection and respect among people. The Prophet (PBUH) actually said in this sense: 'Verily I indicate to you what will help you share harmony, disseminate the greeting of peace amongst you.'

Names of People

A name is one of the components of a person's identity. It is the unchanged part of this person and his relation with others and with God who calls every one by his name. The believer on this earth realizes the importance of names so he first starts the day by mentioning the name of God and he mentions Him in everything he does until the end of the day when he mentions Him again. Christians say: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.' Muslims say '*Bismi Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim*' (In the name of God, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate'.

A name is sacred inasmuch as it is given to a person within a religious act, i.e. baptism in the Christian religion. This name may be that of a Saint who lived a life of perfect faithfulness to God and now intercedes with God for those who plead with him, especially those who have his same name or those who try to imitate him in virtues. There are also names that are given at baptism expressing one of the virtues of Christ the Redeemer or one fine humane value.

In the Bible, the name of a person is not only used to know him but is rather an image of him and his mission (for instance: 'John' means 'God is Gracious', 'Jesus' means 'God delivers', 'Joseph' means 'God will increase' ...). This is an honor to the holder of the name and, for those who say this name, it means due respect to the holder. The importance of a name resides also in the fact that a person enters eternity keeping his name, highlighting thus the singularity of a person who believes in Resurrection.

For Muslims names are special and have a virtue. The Prophet (PBUH) said: 'You are called by your names and the names of your fathers so be careful in the choice of names.' Islam prefers giving names that are virtuous, dislikes giving names that indicate non-honorable things, and forbids the giving of some names. The names considered virtuous are: 'Abdallah' since the Prophet (PBUH) said: 'The most favorite names for God (the Mighty and the Majestic) are Abdullah and Abdul Rahman' since they indicate worship of God and since they are a true blessing for they carry the name of God.

The names of prophets are also virtuous especially 'Muhammad' and 'Isa' among others. Forbidden names include '*malik al-muluk*' (King of kings) among others since they show greatness of oneself whereas Islam called upon humbleness. Other forbidden names are those of Pharaoh or Korah (Qarun), Haman, and the names of angels as Gabriel and 'Israfil among others.

Setting up Charity Associations and Mabarrat

Modern civilization reinforces the idea of justice both culturally and politically as it is a necessity to organize society based on the principle of social justice in order to ensure each one's rights and dignity, be that spiritually or physically. However, the number of those in need is increasing every day. Every day, there are more sick people, handicapped, orphans, abandoned children, children who are astray, elderly who need care,

prisoners, lost immigrants, battered women, etc. Poverty is not only physical, but also cultural and religious since there is a growing need for education, knowledge, guidance, spiritual comfort, and moral support through tolerance and patience.

Social justice laws have preserved the dignity of people who have encountered various hardships in life. Yet, these laws have not been able, in the best of cases, to remove all forms of need in society. All religions urge believers to give, contribute to charities and *mabarrat* to help either physically or spiritually. Giving to those in need – whoever they may be – is a true testimony of love for the others and loyalty to justice that may please God. Many associations have been set up and offer organized help and assistance, some in specific fields, others in cases of emergency.

These associations also endeavor to mobilize public and private bodies so that they may help in cases of emergency. They urge people to take part in organized initiatives for the sake of those in need. The best deed is that of raising awareness among people and individuals giving them all that is necessary to thrive and be economically independent.

Evening Religious Gatherings

Evening religious gatherings are a special phenomenon in modern civilization that has paved the way for the individual's comfort putting at his disposal all the world's inventions and products. Thus, the individual's ability and uniqueness have been developed yet, in exchange, individuals are more socially secluded and isolated.

For Christians, religious evenings are held upon a personal initiative coming from those who take part in them without commitment or tutelage. They vary according to the intention behind the evening; it may be to live with the congregation a moment of conviviality and friendliness. It may be to pray chosen prayers, or sing known hymns. Some participants may improvise prayers or invocations to express what they need to say to God. They meet in the need to call upon God to have mercy on them and on all the people, and give them peace.

In some evenings, participants deal with religious matters or chosen excerpts from the Holy Bible. All those present listen to other people's ideas or experiences. In fact, one may present a real-life experience and then the rest discuss it.

These evenings foster dialogue. They help people who belong to different social and professional backgrounds to meet. People are urged to think about life in the light of the Bible and through dialogue with others. Some evenings include various religious liturgical, or social and civil

activities. They are a testimony of the spiritual and humane values of the faithful.

These evenings may occur once every week or every two weeks, or every month. Whatever the lapse of time between one evening and another, an individual or a team must be asked to organize and prepare for one regularly so that these evenings may remain fruitful and useful.

Religious evenings for Muslims include a thorough religious program of studies (*durus*) and Islamic readings from the Koran or *madih* (odes '*nashids*') as well as Islamic contests. They are held on major Islamic occasions such as Ramadan evenings, and others. These evenings strengthen the bond between the worshipper and God and are not aimed at wasting time.

Sufi groups hold religious evenings on Thursday evenings most often. Muslims hold *mawalid* (ceremonies for *Mawlid*) and chant *nashid* for a newborn, for success at school or *khatm* of the Koran (completing recitation of the Koran).

Festive Religious Re-Enactments

Saint Barbara

This feast is on the fourth of December in remembrance of a martyr called Barbara. Stories vary as to her country of origin since some say that she was born in a village of Heliopolis of Phoenicia, i.e. Baalbek, the city of the sun. Her father was a

wealthy atheist who had her learn science and literature. She met Valentinus, a Christian who taught her the sacraments of Christianity. She believed in Christ and was baptized. She vowed to remain a virgin for Jesus Christ. She destroyed the pagan statues around her, which angered her father who accused her before the prefect of the province. The latter had her imprisoned, tortured, and beheaded in A.D. 235.

Barbara's martyrdom became famous in the East and people admired her tenacity and courage. In the time of Emperor Constantine, Christians started commemorating her martyrdom, praising her virtues, visiting her shrine, and receiving her blessings. They organized a special ceremony reenacting her martyrdom as follows:

On the eve of the feast, young men and women would gather and visit houses covering their faces with masques and wearing odd clothes. This procession on the feast of Saint Barbara was in fact a festive play that was deformed with time until it became what it is today. Westerns use this



on carnivals and now form of feasting has reached Beirut and other Lebanese cities.

Saint Barbara feast includes other family traditions among which:

- Wheat is boiled in water on the eve of the feast; it is eaten with sugar and pistachios since the martyr fled from her father and entered a wheat field which immediately grew to cover her up to prevent her father from finding her for some time.
- Several pastries are prepared (*zlabya*, *'uwwaymat*, and *qatayif*) to say that Barbara was given bitter food in her torture, but God turned it in her mouth into sweet-tasting food. Some take this pastry as a sign that Barbara has attained heavenly joy.
- On the eve of the feast, the man of the household lights candles the number of his family members. This custom developed

since the Saint was tortured by kindling her body with lit torches that burnt her ribs but God healed and appeased her pain.

- The custom of women gathering on the eve of the feast to have the smoke of candles darken their eyelids is inspired from the martyrs' beautiful eyes and from the heavenly lights – healing and blessing her – which she saw as she was subject to torture.
- Construction and quarry workers consider St Barbara as their Patron Saint since it was said that Barbara was seen fleeing from her father, but on her way was a huge stone, which soon enough was cut into two to let her go and hide. She is also the Patron Saint of miners and those who work with explosives since she was known to overcome hardships with great courage and strength.



Lazarite Re-Enactment

Lazarus of Bethany had two sisters, Mary and Martha. He became sick, died and was buried. Jesus was away with his disciples but He knew what had happened so He returned with his disciples to Bethany. When the two sisters learnt about his coming, they went out to meet Him on the road with a lot of mourners who had come to console them. They started crying and said; 'Lord, had you been here, our brother would not have died!'

Jesus who was moved by their crying asked: 'Where was he buried?' They answered; 'Lord, you know that Lazarus has been dead for four days, and there will be a bad smell.' But Christ asked them to have faith and He headed to the tomb followed by the crowd. The tomb was a cave with a stone rolled against the entrance. He ordered to have the stone rolled away. He looked up to heaven and prayed. Then He shouted: 'Lazarus, come out!' The man who had been dead came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of burial cloth. Jesus then told the people: 'Untie him and let him go.' This miracle was narrated in the Gospel of John (11: 1- 43). Lazarus is honored on the day before Palm Sunday. Christians in Lebanon celebrate his feast with a procession known as the 'Lazarite re-enactment'.

Christian schools used to prepare the Lazarite re-enactment. Students gather after Saturday mass. They would have been prepared by their teacher and they would have rehearsed their roles. One of the students wears a white shirt and covers his head with a white veil and fastens it with a white

cloth to represent Lazarus. Other students dress as Martha and Mary, his sisters who are in mourning. The school students then go out in procession at the head of which is the Cross. Upon entering a house, the one representing Lazarus lies on the floor, arms and legs flat, eyes closed, lying still as though dead. Both his sisters throw themselves at his right and left side and cry.

Then the choir appears and surrounds the dead. They cover them with a large cloth painted with drawings and poetry. This poetry is the parable of the miracle, congratulating people for the feast, and wishing them well.

The parable is read in a sad and moving voice. When they say: 'Lazarus, come out!' the one representing Lazarus stands and leaves the house followed by his sisters. The procession leaves after the owners of the house have offered them plenty of coins, eggs, and pastry for the feast.



Beards and Shaving of the Head

In many cultures and religions, the beard and moustache represent manhood, wisdom, and knowledge. The ones with beards and moustache are respected and revered. They have an image of courage and determination. They may also have the image of ascetics and virtuous people.

Eastern Christian Orthodox clerics have to have a beard and moustache without letting any scissors into their hair as is the case of many priests. Many monks and priests in other Christian communities do the same not because it is imposed on them, but rather to express their will to commit to an ascetic life.

A tradition that turned into an obligation in the Middle Ages is for Latin clerics to shave their heads in circular form. It was meant to express humbleness before God for the one renouncing the world. The upper part of the head shows the depth of human heart that perceives, with God's help, the most hidden intentions and acts. The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican cancelled this obligation from the Catholic Church and exempted women from the obligation of covering their heads in the church. Women still have to cover their heads in Armenian Orthodox churches upon approaching the altar for communion.

Muslim men from various Schools (*mazahib*) prefer to have beards and short moustache in answer to the recommendation of the Prophet (PBUH). Islam

considers long beards as a human disposition that existed before religions, but it called to clean it. This is what Muhammad (PBUH) recommended people to do by saying: 'Have neat clothes and be special among people for you are coming to your brethren.' Muslims have long beards to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet (PBUH) and to obey him for in this is great reward and recompense. It is better that the length of a beard does not exceed the length of a fist.

'Uqqal (Knowledgeable Sheikhs) of the Unitarian Druze community who 'wear a white turban over their shaved heads' – as said previously – have shaved heads in sign of humbleness and asceticism. Speaking about Salman Farisi may shed light upon this matter since it was said that he was seen with his entire head shaved. When asked: 'What is this Salman?' he said: 'Truly I tell you, real life is the one to come.'

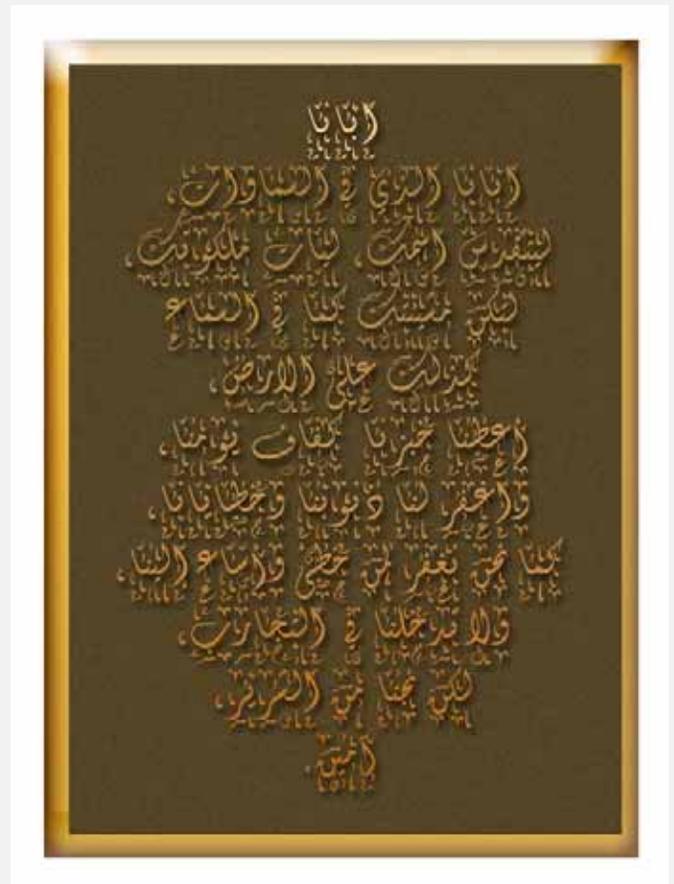
It is said in the Glorious Koran: 'God has confirmed the vision of His Messenger by making it come true: you shall indeed enter the Sacred Mosque, God willing, in security, your heads shaved, your hair cropped short, and having no fear. So He knew what you did not know, and has decreed an imminent victory to precede that entry.' (Sura: Victory (48), Verse 27).

Decorating Homes and Cars

There are many ways to decorate homes, and decoration of cars is varied in modern times. The Christian faithful keep in their homes a space in which they honor a special icon or the icon of one Saint whom they ask for intercession during the day. Traditionally, on the day of his baptism, a child receives the icon of his patron Saint to go with him all his life. Holy books namely the Bible in Christianity and the Koran in Islam hold a special place since members of the family turn to the Holy Books for prayer and meditation. There are

also sometimes in some homes Holy Verses that are put up for guidance and wisdom or prayer and invocation.

Drivers put up icons of Saints (such as Saint Christopher who is the Patron Saint of drivers), a chaplet, verses, or du'a', which are considered a baraka (a blessing) for their journeys. Some Muslims put up a copy of the Koran in a special box to keep their bond with God (SWT).





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