

# **Impact of Famine on Mount Lebanon during World War One**

## **The case of Byblos and Batroun Villages**

### **(1916-1917)**

#### **Via the Bkerke Archive**

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### **Summary**

Lebanon had gone through many tragedies during World War One, which left the Lebanese with no choice but to rely on themselves without looking for external support. The Maronite Patriarchate played a prominent role in warding off the threat of hunger from the Lebanese as much as possible.

This article will shed light on the live observations of the delegation assigned by Patriarch Elias Howayek during its visit to the Byblos and Batroun villages to register the names of the poor so that they can be helped to overcome their plight.

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## Introduction

After being blessed with a certain degree of stability and prosperity during the Christian Mutassarifs era between 1861 and 1915<sup>2</sup>, calamities started to befall the Lebanese people as a result of the Ottoman Sultanate's involvement in WWI on the side of Germany against the Allies; and so, Ottoman forces entered Mount Lebanon, and martial law<sup>3</sup> was declared therein<sup>4</sup>. As a result of conflicts between the major powers, a siege was imposed on Mount Lebanon, which led to famine<sup>5</sup>. In 1915, the situation got worse after a swarm of locusts swept through the region, wiping out the agricultural crops<sup>6</sup>.

The Lebanese suffered greatly during what was called the Great Famine, and there were many accounts of the tragedies they went through. To chronicle some of these

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<sup>2</sup> Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate covered an area of 3727 km<sup>2</sup> and enjoyed a special political and administrative status since the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 1861. Accordingly, the Mount Lebanon's affairs were organized based on the international conventions concluded by the Ottoman Empire with the European major powers at the time. An Ottoman Christian Mutassarif took over who had broad authority and powers; provided that he would be assisted in managing the affairs of the country and the people by three councils, namely: the Grand Administrative Council, the Grand Trial Council and the Council of the Communities' Representatives. Mount Lebanon Mutasarrifate was successively ruled by eight main (Christian) Mustassarifs until 1915, and three extraordinary (Muslim) Mutassarifs until 1918. Abdullah Al-Mallah, *Al-Majlis Al-Idari Al-Awal Fi Moutasarifiat Jabal Lubnan*, 2004, PP. 7-8; and Abdullah Al-Mallah, *Jebbet Bechari Abban Al-Hukm Al-Othmani 1516-1918*, in the *Aamal Al-Moutamar Althaleth Li Tarikh Jebbet Bechari* book, Publications of the Gibran Khalil Gibran National Committee, Lebanon, 2005, PP. 413 – 415. Kamal Salibi, *Tarikh Lubnan Al-Hadith*, Tenth Edition, Dar An Nahar Publishing, 2008, P. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Martial Law: It gives broad powers to a military force over civilians, and is applied in emergency cases. Matthew Warshauer, *Andrew Jackson and the Politics of Martial Law*, Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2006, P 178.

<sup>4</sup> Hany Fares, *Al-Nizaat Al-Taifiya Fi Tarikh Lubnan Al-Hadith*, Dar Al-Ahlia for Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, 1980, P. 88.

<sup>5</sup> Carlo Vacchi, *Lubnan Men Al-Imara Ila Al-Dawla*, Publications of the Holy Spirit University, Kaslik, 2017, P. 217.

<sup>6</sup> Lahd Khater, *Ahed Al-Mutasarfine Fi Lubnan 1861-1918*, Second Edition, Beirut, 1982, P. 203.

events, this article mainly relied on a historical document from the Bkerke Archive<sup>7</sup>; as it showed the poverty and hunger in the villages of Byblos and Batroun during WWI.

The Maronite Patriarch Elias Howayek<sup>8</sup> spared no effort in helping the people as much as he could; and so he sent a delegation to the Byblos and Batroun villages starting from the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1916 until the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1917 consisting of the Lebanese Beiruti Priests Peter and Paul<sup>9</sup>; in order to record the names of the poor to support them; and that was after he issued a Patriarchal Decree to facilitate the Delegation's work.

After their visit, the Delegation wrote its report in detail, stating its observations of the poverty and spiritual hunger suffered by the people of Byblos and Batroun during this disturbing and difficult period in Lebanon's history.

### **The Travel Path of the Priests Peter and Paul Beiruti in the Byblos and Batroun Villages**

In late 1916, the people of the Byblos and Batroun villages were struck with hunger and extreme poverty, which led to a lot of destitution, tragedy, and death. As a result

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<sup>7</sup> Bkerke Archive, Patriarch Elias Howayek File No. 31, Historical Document No. 5. The report of the visit made by the Lebanese Beiruti Priests Peter and Paul to the Byblos and Batroun villages, which was submitted to Patriarch Howayek, and was made on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1917.

<sup>8</sup> Patriarch Elias Howayek: He was born in Helta Village in late December 1843. He learned the primary principles at the village school and at the St. John Maroun School in Kfarhay. He then joined the Jesuit Fathers School in Ghazir, and was sent by Patriarch Paul Massaad (1854-1890) to the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith School in Rome, where he completed his studies and ordained a priest. He returned to Lebanon in 1870, and Patriarch Massaad promoted him to the bishopric degree on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December 1889. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1899, the Bishops Synod elected him Patriarch for the Maronite Church. He died in 1931. Abdullah Al-Mallah, *Bayn Al-Bateriark Elias Al-Howayek wa Muzafar Bacha*, Al-Manara Magazine, Issue No. 3, 1996, P. 449.

<sup>9</sup> The two priests wrote their names in their report on the title page as follows: "Lebanese Beiruti Priest Peter and Lebanese Beiruti Priest Paul". On page 10 of the report, they wrote their names as follows: "the Lebanese Beiruti Priests Peter and Paul". Bkerke Archive, Patriarch Elias Howayek File No. 31, Document No. 5.

of this tragic situation in the region, the Maronite Clergy, headed by Patriarch Howayek, decided to stand by his people in the said region; and so he formed a delegation to write down lists of the poor and destitute; in order to provide them with nutritional, financial, and spiritual support.

### **1- From the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1916 until the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 1917**

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1916, Priests Peter and Paul, who make up the Delegation, set out with their humanitarian mission from the Dimane village, after snowstorms had delayed the departure of one of the priests by two days.

As for the second priest, he was able to reach the Hadath El Jebbeh village, where he gave some instructions to the villagers and heard their confessions<sup>10</sup>, and then the first priest followed him in order to help.

The two priests visited the Sisters of the Holy Family School, and then they went to Hardine. They arrived there on New Year's Eve, and spent the night at Al-Khawaja Peter Lawen, who was the endowment agent. On the occasion of New Year's Eve, they were able to conduct a sort of a spiritual retreat<sup>11</sup>; as they distributed the Sacraments of Confession and the Holy Eucharist<sup>12</sup> to everyone. After gathering the priests, the conciliation sheikh<sup>13</sup>, and some dignitaries of the Hardine village, the two priests read to them the Patriarchal Decree aimed at compiling lists of the poor and making them understand its purpose. The people of Hardine made an important

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<sup>10</sup> Sacrament of Confession: It is the recognition of sins before the priest in the Sacrament of Penance. There is the public confession that was known in the old church, and the auricular confession known today, which is done in a low voice in the priest's ear. Sobhi Hamwi, *Moajam Al-Iman Al-Masihy*, Second Edition, Dar El Machreq, Beirut, 1998, P. 46.

<sup>11</sup> Spiritual Retreat: A period of time during which the believer withdraws to think, meditate and pray, and his goal is to reform his life or prepare himself to carry out an important religious act. Sobhi Hamwi, *Ibid.*, P. 244.

<sup>12</sup> The Holy Eucharist: It is the sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which is a spiritual nourishment for the soul. Paul Antoine, *Al-Lahut Al-Adabi Be-Asreh*, presented by Father Joseph Ajlouni, Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith Printing Press, 1795, P. 155.

<sup>13</sup> Conciliation sheikh: In every Lebanese village, there was a sheikh they called the conciliation sheikh, and most of the sheikhs inherited the job, and had priority in the government's interests. Makarios Shaheen, *Hasr Al-Litham An Nakabat Al-Sham*, First Edition, Egypt, 1895, P. 14.

note that two lists should be issued; the first of which would include the destitute, while the second would include those who were extremely poor. The two priests saw the soundness of this note; and so the poor of Hardine were registered, after which two lists were issued in the other villages as well.

On Tuesday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of January, the two priests set out from Hardine to the Kfour village; however, they were unable to complete their mission there on the same day; due to the bad weather and the absence of Pastor Hanna Al-Andary, who was the parish<sup>14</sup> servant, from the village. Consequently, the two priests only passed by it heading to the Bassa School, where they got trapped for two days because of the rain and snow, during which time they were able to complete their tasks in Kfour.

## **2- From the 5<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 to the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1917**

Despite the bad weather and the snowfall, on Friday, the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, the two priests went to the Houb Monastery, and as soon as they reached it, they resumed their journey on the same day to the Tannourine, village<sup>15</sup>. The two priests met with the priests, the conciliation sheikh, and some dignitaries at the house of sheikh Peter Tarabay. After the two priests read the Patriarchal Decree, which aimed to help the people, everyone deliberated it.

The two priests then left after briefing the people on how to compile and register the poor in the list; and then they returned to the Monastery to wait for the list to be sent to them; however, the people of the village decided to send it to the Patriarch directly; as the two priests could not wait for them to complete the list; due to the bad weather and the outbreak of chickenpox<sup>16</sup>. It was also for this reason that the

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<sup>14</sup> Parish: An ecclesiastical area headed by the priest. Sobhi Hamwi, *Ibid.*, P. 236.

<sup>15</sup> Village: means the village or its center. Gebran Massoud, *Al-Raed Muajam Lughawi Asri*, Dar El Ilm Lilmalayin, Seventh Edition, Lebanon, 1992, P. 634.

<sup>16</sup> Chickenpox: It is a common disease that occurs among children; however, adults are also exposed to it, with symptoms that are more severe than in children. It is an infectious disease that is easily transmitted between people through breathing, by touch and using the infected materials. This rash begins with red spots appearing above the skin surface, and then they turn into blisters that burst forming what looks like lesions. Zainab Mansour, *Muajam Al-Amrad Wa Eilajih*, Osama House of Publication and Distribution, Jordan, First Edition, 2010, PP. 372-373.

two priests could not carry out the spiritual duty in accordance to their desires and those of the Patriarch.

On Sunday morning, the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1917, the two priests arrived in the Chatine village, where they preached<sup>17</sup>, heard the confessions of its people, and made a list of the names of their poor. Afterward, they went to the St. Jacob Al-Hosn Monastery, while passing through the Douma village without being able to stay there; due to the presence of chickenpox. Hence, they stopped by Abraham Constantine's house, made him aware of what was necessary, and dictated to him a list of the poor, and then they continued their journey towards the St. Jacob Al-Hosn Monastery.

### **3- From the 8<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 until the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 1917**

On Monday morning, the two priests took their day's food from the St. Jacob Al-Hosn Monastery and went down to the Beit Chlala neighborhood, where they met its servant the Pastor. They made him aware of the purpose of their arrival; afterward, the church bell rang to hear some confessions, and quite a few people from the village came despite their busy work.

Afterward, the two priests continued their journey towards the Assia village, while passing by the Bdael, Awra and Yarita farms, where they heard the confessions of some of the patients there. They then arrived at the Assia village at night and spent the night at the endowment agent Pastor Peter. That night, the two priests gathered the priests and the conciliation sheikh, and compiled with them the list of their poor. The two priests noticed that the people of the Assia village were the neediest and destitute compared to other villages, and most of their lands had become barren. In 1916, about 150 of its inhabitants died of starvation.

On the next day, i.e. on Tuesday the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, the Priests Peter and Paul heard some confessions and performed the Divine Liturgy<sup>18</sup>. As soon as they left the church, they were surrounded by the poor - old and young - from all sides. The two

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<sup>17</sup> Preaching: Proclamation of salvation, and this proclamation may be evangelistic, didactic, or instructive. Sobhi Hamwi, *Ibid.*, P. 452.

<sup>18</sup> Divine Liturgy: The mass is a true sacrifice in which the priest sanctifies the body and blood of Christ and offers it with rituals, prayers and sacred words. Due to its essence, this sacrifice was ordained by Christ in the Secret Supper. As for the rest of its rituals and ceremonies, they were organized by the apostles and their successors, i.e. the Holy Fathers. At the expense of Terra Santa, *Kitab Murchid Al-Masihi*, the Franciscan Monks Monastery Press, Jerusalem, 1853, P. 132.

priests gave them some money, as if they were giving them life; little did they know that their charities would not save them from the claws of death that threatened them (according to the claims made by the two priests, who represented His Beatitude the Patriarch).

The two priests set out from the Assia village towards the Bchaaleh village, where they were able to perform a sort of a spiritual retreat. On Wednesday morning, the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, they went to the Tartej village, where they met with the priests and the conciliation sheikh, read the Patriarchal Decree to them, and compiled a list of the names of the poor who came in a devastating shape during the two priests' presence at the village. The two priests gave them money and prayed with them, and they could not fulfill their spiritual duty; due to the preoccupation of the people, who have been saved by the divine providence from calamities and death.

Afterward, the two priests headed to the Jaj village and reached it in the evening, and so they spent the night at the endowment agent Al-Khawaja Abdul Ahad Mouawad. The two priests Peter and Paul met with the priests and the conciliation sheikh, and while they were compiling the list of their poor, the obituarist came saying: "This person whose name you have registered has died, so cross off his name", thus showing the severity of the distress and the presence of poverty in general, which may lead to imminent death, and its severe impact on the soul.

#### **4- From the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 until the 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1917**

The next morning, the two priests went to the church in the Jaj village; hoping that they would carry out their spiritual duty. Only a few people came and confessed, and most of the attendees went on their way to find the necessary sustenance.

Afterward, the two priests set out from Jaj to Saqee Lehfed and Al-Amaya Farm, and they reached Lehfed in the evening. In order not to burden anyone, they sufficed with giving a summary of the Patriarchal Decree to the officials and how to compile a list with the names of their poor. The two priests then reached the Mayfouk Monastery and compiled a list of the names of the poor after they had stayed there on Friday.

On Saturday morning, the 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1917, the two priests took their food from the Mayfouk Monastery and went to Khariba, then Hakel, and finally Abadat; where they spent the night. On Sunday morning, the 14<sup>th</sup> of the same month, the two priests gave some instructions and heard the confessions of the people who were about to die. The two priests were very pleased with the purity of the intentions of these sick

people; as they considered it a special trait in the Maronites. The two priests saw poverty haunting its people despite the vastness of its lands, which provided its people with more than their needs.

In Abadat - as in every village - the poor flocked to the two priests and asked them and the village's priests with hopeless eagerness to put their names on the list, on which they had placed high hopes. The two priests strengthened their hopes in the Lord and asked them to raise prayers so that God would inspire the leaders to achieve this project according to plan.

On Sunday morning, the two priests went to the Ramout Farm and Beithabbak, followed by Shamat, where they met Pastor Paul, who was the Secretary of Patriarch Howayek, and they compiled a list of the poor in Shamat. They assigned Pastor Nema Al-Kadhum to visit his neighboring villages; as the two priests could not go to the said villages, and they also sent him a copy of the Decree after asking him to perform the spiritual duty according to the Patriarch's wishes.

#### **5- From the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 until the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 1917**

On Monday morning, the 15<sup>th</sup> of January, after hearing the confessions of some patients in Shamat, the Priests Peter and Paul headed to the Ghalboun village. On their way to the said village, they came across an orphan boy about ten years old, who had no shelter in this world, and he asked the two priests for charity. The two priests gave him some money, and asked: "Who gave you this?", and the boy said: "The Lord", and then they asked: "How do you get food?", and he said: "I rely on the Lord, and he inspires people to feed me, and so far I have not slept a night feeling hungry". The boy hung a small bag around his neck containing some grains; such as string beans, wheat, barley, and lentils that people gave to him as charity, and he ate them lustfully. Afterward, the two priests asked him: "Where are your father and mother?", and he said: "My father, mother, and uncle died of starvation because they were stealing". The two priests checked whether the boy knew how to confess, and found that the boy - despite his young age - was aware of what needed to be known for his age, and so they heard the boy's first confession and released him.

Upon arriving in Ghalboun, the two priests Peter and Paul gathered the village's priests, the conciliation sheikh and the village's mukhtar and compiled the list together. The two priests heard some confessions and solved some differences, and then went to the Bejjeh village, where they stayed the night at Pastor Elias Al-Hayek's house. That night, there was a meeting at a funeral for the sake of offering incense, and the two priests talked to the attendees about the importance of the



religious duties, and informed them about the Patriarch's desire and lofty patriarchal feeling toward them. On the next day, they heard some confessions and took the list.

On Tuesday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of January, the two priests went to the Ghbaline Farm and formed a list, and then learned that the sheikh of the Ain Kfaa village was absent and there was no priest to serve it; in addition to the fact that chickenpox had heavily struck its people; so the two priests left this village and assigned the abbot of the monastery to carry out the task on their behalf. Afterwards, the two priests went to the Maad Monastery at noon, and they were met by a large crowd of poor people at the Monastery's door. The two priests addressed them in a spiritual tone and asked them to rely on the Lord, however, the people's response was only to ask them for food to satisfy their hunger.

On Wednesday morning, the 17<sup>th</sup> of January, which was the St. Anthony the Great feast day, after the two priests had fulfilled their spiritual duties, they went during the day to meet the people of Maad and found them in greater need of support compared to the rest of the villages.

#### **6- From the 18<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 until the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1917**

On Thursday, the 18<sup>th</sup> of January, the two priests went to Fghal, followed by Chmout, and then returned to Maad Monastery; and since the sheikh of Chmout was absent, the two priests assigned the Abbot of the Maad Monastery to act on their behalf in it and in Kfar Kidde.

On Friday, the 19<sup>th</sup> of January, the two priests passed through Hsarat and found that its sheikh and the pastor were performing agricultural work, and asked the two priests to postpone making the list until the evening; because of their work. However, the two priests were unable to spend the night there, due to the presence of chickenpox, and the poverty of its people; so they sufficed with making them aware of what was necessary and advised that they should send the list to the Monastery of Saydet El Maounat. Afterward, the two priests headed to Hbaline, followed by Gherfine, and then the Monastery of Maounat.

On Sunday morning, the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, one of the priests went early to the Eddeh village; where he preached, performed a sort of a spiritual retreat, and heard the confession of the parish priest; afterward, he went to Amchit on the same day and informed the priests, the conciliation sheikh, the mukhtars and some dignitaries about the Patriarchal Decree, and he assigned Pastor Joseph Al-Amsheeti to perform this task in Hosrayel and Jeddayel, due to lack of time and to lighten the people's

burden. He then returned on the same day to the Monastery, where the two priests took a break and helped with some work for four days.

### **7- From the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 until the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1917**

On Wednesday, the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, the two priests left the Monastery of Maounat to resume their mission and went to Qartaba and Aqoura. On their way, they passed the Qarnia Farm and the Bshilli Farm, where they heard some confessions from the patients and other residents. The two priests met with Pastor Peter Gemayel, who was the priest of the aforementioned farms with Jourat Al-Qattin, and they made him aware of what was necessary. They then went to the Nabaa Torzaya School.

On Thursday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of January, the two priests set out from the Nabaa School after assigning Father Peter Al-Sirini to go to his neighboring farms; due to the bad weather and to lighten the people's burden. The two priests stressed: "We would have liked to go in person to every village and farm if it were not for these two reasons, without any concern for our fatigue or troubles". The two priests went to the Qartaba village, where they arrived at noon on Thursday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of January. On the same day, one of the priests went to Aqoura to perform the task; as he met with the priests, the conciliation sheikh, the mukhtar and some sheikhs, and they compiled the list. The next morning, the weather was rainy, and so the two priests preached and heard the confessions, and then went to Majdel, then Mugheirah, then Kashkash, and Abboud Farm, all while it was raining.

On Sunday, the 28<sup>th</sup> of January, the two priests held a sort of a spiritual retreat in Qartaba and heard the confessions of a large gathering; and in the evening, they celebrated the Eucharistic procession.

### **8- From the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1917 until the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1917**

On Tuesday, the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, the two priests left Qartaba and headed to Ehmej, and then it rained as soon as they arrived; so they went to the house of the endowment agent Pastor Mikhail. They also met with the priests, read to them the Patriarchal Decree, and advised them on what needed to be done. The two priests did not want to stay in Ehmej; due to the great distress, so they went towards the St. Maroun-Annaya Monastery while it was raining; and for this reason, they could not go to Mishmish; so they entrusted it to the Abbot of the St. Maroun Monastery, and told him to send its list to the Monastery of Maounat, and the rain trapped them at the St. Maroun Monastery for two days.

On Thursday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, the two priests returned to the Monastery of Maounat, while passing through the regions on their way; such as Sirin, Bmahray, Zamr, Fidar, Hboub, and other farms.

On Saturday, the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, one of the priests went to Nahr Ibrahim, followed by Halat, and finally Doueir, and he performed the mission in each of them; afterward, he returned to the Monastery on the same day. The two priests then received news from the Patriarch to brief him on the lists of the poor, so that the wheat could be distributed.

### **9- From the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 1917 until the 16<sup>th</sup> of February 1917**

On Monday, the 12<sup>th</sup> of February, the two priests left the Monastery of Maounat, after staying there for about nine days due to some work; and they headed to Batroun. While they were walking, they met with the Patriarch's Secretary Pastor Paul Akl, who asked the two priests to meet with Patriarch Howayek as requested by him; and so the two priests changed their plan to visit some villages in Batroun. They first went to the Holy Family Monastery in Ibrine; where they met with the priests, made them aware of what was necessary, read to them the Patriarchal Decree, distributed some money in the presence of the priests and the Monastery's vicar, and deliberated with most of them about the current circumstances, the Patriarch's wishes, and his willingness to avoid harm, with the Lord's blessing.

At the Holy Family Monastery, the two priests met with the Abbess of the Monastery and some of Ibrine's priests, and they distributed what they could afford to some of its poor; and then they left the Holy Family Monastery in Ibrine, heading towards the St. John Maroun School, and spent the night there. The next morning, they learned that Pastor Joseph Al-Hakim of Artaz had carried out his duties properly despite the distress he was going through; so the two priests asked for him and praised him, along with giving him some money to give to those he knew they needed them the most.

Afterward, the two priests left the School and headed to Boqsmayya, and they found it poor in spiritual and physical matters, because the Pastor there did not accept to hear anyone's confession without a fee; which was why most of its people abandoned the holy confession. The two priests met with a group of the village's people, and they heard their confessions and gave them money as much as possible, and they also incited the Pastor of Boqsmayya to carry out his duties. The two priests claimed that if it hadn't been for the difficult weather, they would not have left Boqsmayya without hearing everyone's confessions.

Afterward, the two priests went to the St. Jacob Monastery while passing by Helta, where they met with Mr. Lawen Bey and offered him what money they had left to be distributed to the poor. However, he did not accept this money out of compassion for the other poor outside of Helta; as he had received some money from Pastor Paul Akl for the same purpose.

On Wednesday evening, the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, the two priests arrived at the St. Jacob Monastery, and they got trapped by the rain on Thursday and Friday.

In response to the Patriarch's instruction, the two priests did not bear to be delayed; so they walked in the rain on Friday to the Bassa School and spent the night there, and they soon left heading toward the Patriarch.

### **The Notes of the Two Priests**

In all of the two priests' travels, they had saved as much as they could from their expenses and gave charity to the poor; as indicated in the list they carried. This was done in implementation of Patriarch Howayek's will, which the two priests assumed in all their works.

During the two priests' visit, the poor traveled to them from one village to another; as it was rumored by many that the two priests were sent by the Patriarch to distribute charity to the poor. Many saw this as the best news, while the poor and needy received it as the happiest news that prompted them to raise prayers to the Lord to save the Patriarch's life.

As for the notes made by the Priests Peter and Paul after the end of their visit:

- Spiritual poverty had reached its extreme in most villages.
- The reason behind this poverty was the negligence in serving the parishes, and all of the priests claimed that if any of them was negligent, it was due to their incapacity, which was realistic; however, the failure of some priests in performing their duties should not be due to their lack of virtue, laziness, and greed in the worldly matters.
- The complaints of the endowment agents in general.
- Death by starvation increased due to misery without the presence of any consolation, even if it was spiritual consolation, or any other known matters.

## Conclusion

The foregoing showed the prominent and pivotal role played by the Maronite Patriarchate in standing by its people, who suffered from spiritual and physical famine, especially since Patriarch Howayek – ever since assuming the Patriarchate in 1899 - had been forming delegations to count and know the needs of Maronite parishioners<sup>19</sup>. The striking thing in the two priests' report was the great faith harbored by the orphaned child, whose faith in the Lord and the divine justice had remained strong despite his young age and poor condition.

The two priests' report showed several tragedies that befell the Byblos and Batroun villages in that period:

- About 150 people from the Assia village died of starvation after most of its territory became barren.
- The extreme distress and poverty that the two priests saw in the Jaj village, to the point that the obituarist called out at the time of recording the names of their poor, saying that a person had died; in order to cross his name off the list.
- What the two priests encountered in most of the villages they visited from people flocking them; in order to ask for financial support and their keenness in having their names recorded in the lists of the poor, showed the prevalence of hunger and destitution in that period.
- Children became homeless after being orphaned by famine, and their dependence on charities.
- The two priests heard the confessions of a large number of sick people; the matter which showed the severity of the diseases' outbreak, which led to a large number of deaths.
- Not all priests performed their religious duties, such as the priest of the Boqsmayya village; on the other hand, there were priests who performed their religious duties to the fullest, such as Pastor Joseph Al-Hakim of Artaz.

It can be seen from the foregoing that the role played by the Maronite clergy was as follows:

- Record the names of the poor; in order to be counted and assisted.
- Provide as much money as possible to the poor and destitute they encounter.
- Distribute the wheat to the poor in the region.

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<sup>19</sup> Marc Abboud, *Mawarinat Jebbet Bechari Matlaa Al-Karn Al-Eshreen Men Khilal Archive Bkerke*, Lebanon, 2022, P.18.

- Strengthen the people's faith through holding masses, prayers, spiritual retreats, and providing the sacrament of confession.

There is no doubt that Lebanon had gone through a very difficult period during WWI; however, the people struggled for life and continued to work in their lands; in order to secure their daily food and did not give up on their belief in the hope of a better future.

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