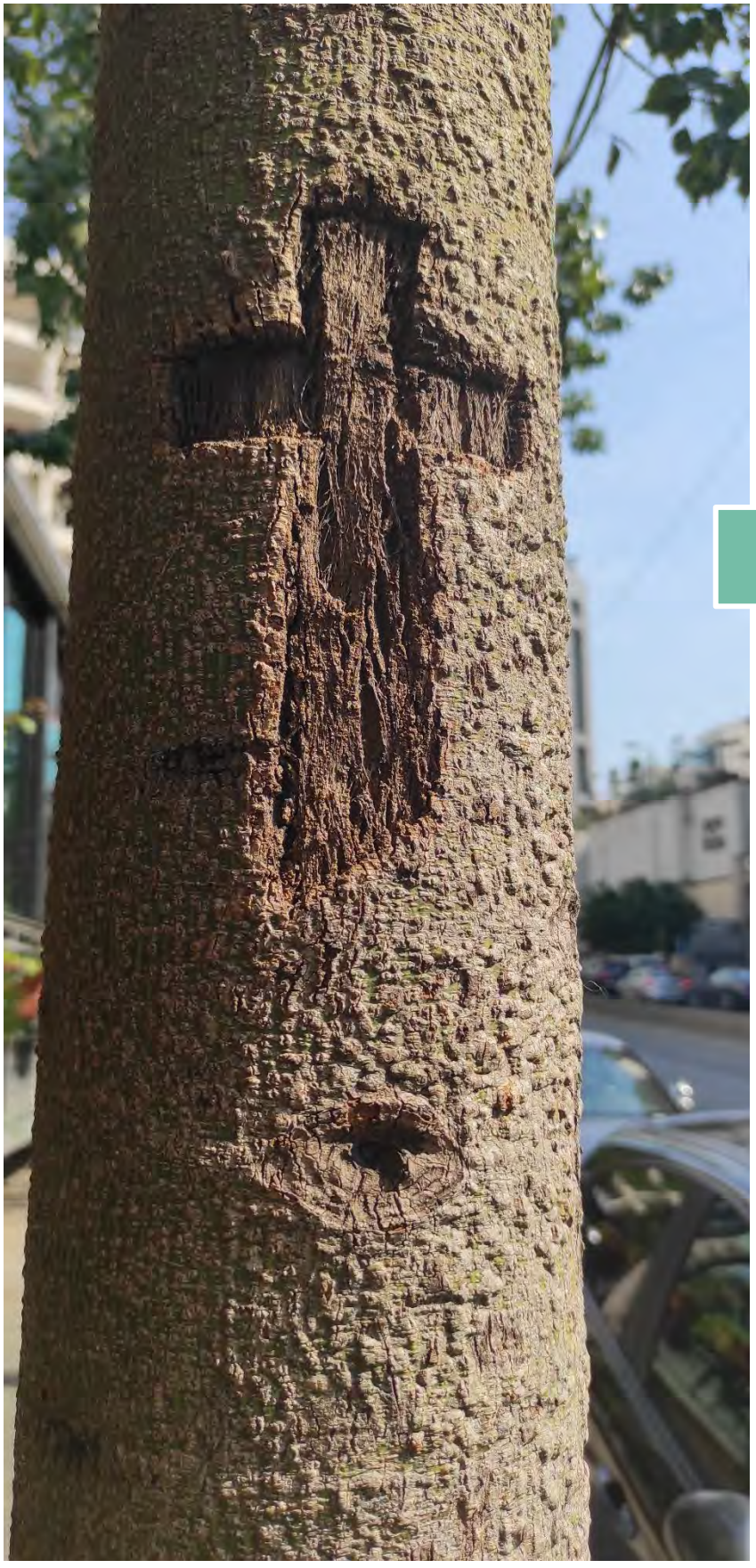
Resilience in the Eye of the Storm:
The Christian Communities in Lebanon



2023

SPECIAL REPORT

CME

CENTRE FOR MEDITERRANEAN, MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

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The field research was supported by the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (H.F.R.I.) under the 'First Call for H.F.R.I. Research Projects to support Faculty members and Researchers and the procurement of high-cost research equipment grant'

(Project Number: 1422)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Christian community in Lebanon is shrinking. However, the reasons behind its dwindling numbers are linked to the multiple crises affecting Lebanon and Lebanese people as a whole. Hence, the Christian presence in Lebanon is not threatened due to religious persecution, but economic hardships and political stagnation.

- Lebanon is known for its system of consociational democracy that guarantees equal representation for the various sects and denominations, based on a strictly-defined allocation of political positions between the three dominant sects in the country: Christians, Sunnis and Shia. Even though confessionalism tends to create deadlocks in times of crisis, as evidenced by Lebanon's failure to elect a President, the vast majority of Christian religious and political leaders consider the current system as the best available, with no viable alternative in sight. Hence, instead of looking for a replacement, it is suggested that Lebanon should return to the letter and spirit of the 1989 Taef Agreement that set in place the current power-sharing system, which is claimed to not be implemented as it should.

- The landscape of the Christian political representation is crowded, as several parties vie for the support of the Christian constituency. Long-term personal feuds and ambitions interweave with deeply-held preferences with regard to political alliances, boiling down to a pro- or anti-Hizbullah stance, paint a complicated map of Christian political parties. However, local stakeholders do not consider political fragmentation as a hindrance for Christian unity, but rather a healthy expression of political pluralism.

- The religious leadership remains an important point of reference. However, its influence is bigger in social rather than political matters. In the latter, the Churches' ability to sway political leaders and members of their respective communities seems limited, even though some religious leaders express political opinions in their sermons.

- With regards to intra-Christian divides, it appears that differences and political crevices between Christian denominations have eased over the past years. Instead, Maronite, Greek-Orthodox and Greek-Catholic labels for instance have lost their explaining power in identifying political preferences. Instead, what appears to emerge is an overlaying common Christian identity that muffles denominational particularism.

- Christians in Lebanon are suspicious of external meddling in their internal affairs and the affairs of Lebanon in general. They do not wish to forge alliances with western countries as a counterbalance to similar alliances between the Shia and Iran and the Sunni and Gulf countries. On the one hand, they consider the West as barely Christian nowadays and, on the other, they blame western policies in the region for the challenges and threats Christians have faced and continue to face in the region.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The field research was conducted between the 20th and 28th of February, 2023 in Lebanon. The Christianity in the Middle East (CME) team interviewed stakeholders from Lebanon's numerous and diverse Christian communities. Within the broader framework of CME's project titled "Christianity and Religious Pluralism in the Modern Middle East: International Politics and Religion at the turn of the 20th and 21st century", the particular research explored how the Lebanese Christian communities view themselves and interpret the challenges they face. Moreover, the aim of the research was to provide a better understanding of intra-Christian relations and their implications on the Lebanese political scene. Finally, the study sought to explore the difference between the religious and political leaderships' perspectives regarding the future of the Christian communities in Lebanon.

To this end, the CME team conducted 19 interviews in total[1] with religious and political leaders of Lebanese Christian communities, members of the civil society and academics. In this respect, the team interviewed the Maronite Archbishop of Tripoli, Youssef Antoine Soueif, the (Armenian) Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia, Aram 1st, the Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Beirut, Mor Clemis Daniel Kourieh, the head of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, Reverend Habib Bader, the General Secretary of the Supreme National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, Reverend Joseph Kassab, and the General Secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, Father Michael Abs. It should be noted that the CME team reached out to the Greek Orthodox Church of Lebanon, but due to schedule conflicts an interview was not possible. Thus, the Lebanese Greek Orthodox community's perspective was conveyed by its members that belonged to the political, academic and/or civil society spheres.

By the same token, CME interviewed members of leading Christian political parties; including, the former Lebanese President and former head of the Free Patriotic Movement, General Michel Aoun, the head of Public Policy & Legislation Office of the Kataeb Party, Lara Saade, the spokesperson of the Lebanese Forces Party, Marc Saad, the General Secretary of the Tashnag Party (Armenian), Hagop Pakradounian, the head of the National Liberal Party, Camille Dory Chamoun, and the former Minister of State (2004), Karim Pakradouni, an influential politician of

[1] 16 of the 19 interviews were conducted in Lebanon, 1 in Athens, Greece, and 2 via Zoom.

Armenian origin who was influential in both Kataeb Party and the Lebanese Forces in the past. CME reached out also to the Marada Movement, but possibly due to the dedicate political situation with regards to the election of a new President and given that Marada's leader, Suleiman Antoine Frangieh, was rumoured to be a candidate, the interview request was not granted.

In addition, CME interviewed key stakeholders form the academic community and the civil society, such as Khalil Karam, Ambassador of the Maronite League, Dr Tarek Mitri, Greek Orthodox academic, former minister and former UN Special Representative for Libya, Prof. Boutros Labaki, a leading economist and former senior official at the Ministry of Planning, Sam Anasseh, Greek-Catholic journalist, Antoine Saad, a Maronite influential public figure and journalist and Ziad Sayigh, executive director of the Civic Influence Hub (CIH). Finally, the team visited Dbeyah Camp in East Beirut, which hosts Palestinian Christians, and interviewed several of its residents, who wished to remain anonymous.

The interviews were semi-structured, in the sense that they followed a series of themes, yet they left room for questions related to each interviewee's interests and expertise. The core questions posed by the team focused, first, on how each community evaluated the dwindling numbers and/or influence of Christians in Lebanon and the situation of the Christian communities in the post-Daesh era; second, whether they feel that their respective community is discriminated against by other Christian or non-Christian communities and what is the day-to-day interactions between all Lebanese communities; third, the type of socio-political regime they prefer (particularly consociational democracy or non-confessional citizenship democracy); fourth, how Christians view the relations between the religious and the political leaderships and, in turn, their respective relations with the community; fifth, what facilitates or hinders the cooperation and partnership between different Christian denominations, on a religious and political level; sixth, what hinders the Christian parties to have a unified political front in the Lebanese political scene; and, finally, seventh, how they view the West's role in protecting the Christian communities.

LEBANON'S CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AND THEIR CHALLENGES

Lebanon is the only country in the region, where Christians do not have a minority status. As one interviewee aptly put it, "there are two categories of Christians in the Middle East: the Lebanese Christians and the Christians of the region". Contrary to the rest of the region, the role of the Christians is guaranteed within the political system, based on a power-sharing structure that allocates equal power to the Christian and the Muslim communities. Within the Christian camp, which consists of eleven different denominations, Maronites hold a dominant position, since it is the only denomination eligible for the Lebanese Presidency. In the same vein, in the Lebanese Parliament, Christians hold 64 seats overall; of which over half are allocated to the Maronites (34 seats), while the second largest Christian denomination, the Greek Orthodox, hold 14 seats, the Melkite (Greek Catholic) 8, the Catholic and Orthodox Armenians 6, the Evangelicals/Protestants 1 and the remaining smaller Christian denominations share the remaining 1 seat.

The Christians' powerful presence in the Lebanese political system is attributed to the fact that upon the establishment of the state of Lebanon, Christians constituted 50 percent of the population, with Maronites comprising 29 percent, according to the 1932 census. Today, these numbers are dwindling drastically. Although there is no official census since 1932, there are various estimates with regards to the size of the Christian community today. For instance, many from within the Maronite ecclesiastical community claim that the Christian communities comprise approximately 35 percent. One of the interviewees suggested that the community is estimated to be 40 percent of the Lebanese population and claimed that the notion of declining Christian numbers is an exaggeration. A controversial televised statement of former Prime Minister, Nagib Mikati, who claimed that the Christians make up only 19.4 percent of Lebanese, without though revealing the source for his estimate, re-ignited the 'war of numbers'. [2] Christian leaders were swift in reaffirming that the Christian community's size is estimated at 35 percent of the total Lebanese population. Notwithstanding the disagreements regarding the precise percentage, the Muslims have a clear majority in the country, rendering demography a central issue for the Christians.

[2] Zeina Antonios, "Mikati says 'Christians constitute 19.4 percent of Lebanon's population,' how accurate is this estimate?", *L'Orient Today*, March 3, 2023, https://shorturl.at/xyU07, Accessed on: 10/6/2023.

The Christian communities shrinking numbers cast reasonable doubt on whether Lebanon will continue to be the last bastion of Christianity. Bearing this in mind, the CME team sought to understand the factors that have contributed to the dwindling numbers of Christians and what is threatening the Christian communities' presence in Lebanon. Interestingly, not a single interviewee stated that Christians are under threat in terms of religious persecution. As one interviewee underlined, "Christians are not under threat any more than Muslims in this country, but given that the latter are in greater numbers, they feel the threat less compared to the Christians". In fact, most of the interviewees suggested that the protracted financial and political crises in Lebanon are the main factors that have contributed to the migration of Christians. Some claimed that Christian migration is more common because it is easier for them to leave. Another trend contributing to the shrinking size of the community is that rural families tend to have fewer children than before. However, it should be noted that this trend is also catching up among the Muslim community, especially amongst the Sunni.

The 'Muslim threat' is two-fold in the Lebanese context. Firstly, it is the demographic challenge posed by the rapidly growing Muslim community, especially the Shia community. Secondly, Christians are indirectly threatened by the intra-Muslim conflicts. More specifically, the country has been at the mercy of the Sunni-Shia rift since Hariri's assassination, effectively sidelining Christians' political clout. The civil war in Syria and the subsequent refugee influx from the neighbouring country has added a new layer to this threat perception. Over a decade after the war started, the Syrian refugees still remain in the country, with over 60 percent living under the poverty line. Even though the number has dropped from 1.5 million registered Syrian refugees, mostly Sunni, to some 800.000, it remains a significant number for Lebanon, whose population was estimated to be around 5 million in 2022.

In essence, Syrian refugees have replaced Palestinians in the collective threat perception. Interestingly, during the field research, it was more than apparent that the fear of the prolonged presence of the Palestinian refugees has drastically decreased, alongside the actual decrease of the Palestinian community, which once upon a time was estimated to be around 500.000, as compared to merely 200.000 today. The Palestinian case offers an interesting insight into the importance of religion in Lebanese politics. While the majority of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon were Sunni Muslim, many of the Palestinian Christians that were displaced in 1948 were eventually

given Lebanese citizenship in the early 1950s. The two-gear policy towards Muslim and Christian Palestinian refugees was very visible in the social and public life. Thus, the Palestinian Christians were more integrated, leading to well-known families to be more involved in the development of Lebanon, such as the Khoury and Sabbah families, known for the Consolidated Construction Company (CCC) and Gargour family running the official car dealership for Mercedes Benz cars in the Middle East.

However, despite the commonly held misperception—particularly among the Muslim Palestinian refugees in Lebanon—that all Christian Palestinians are privileged as a result of their religion, not all were treated the same way. Today, there is one official refugee camp, Dbayeh, that hosts exclusively Christian Palestinian refugees, who are mainly Greek Catholic. It is situated in East situated in the outskirts of East Beirut, whereas the (Muslim) Palestinian refugee camps are mainly in West Beirut. CME interviewed several residents of the camp, who stressed that not only they do not enjoy special privileges, but they do not access to services available to other Palestinians, such as UNARWA schools. Many Palestinian Christian interviewees said also that they abstain from intra-Palestinian politics to avoid tensions with the Lebanese neighbours around the camp. Most importantly, they underlined that they are discriminated by the Christian Lebanese, who primarily identify them as Palestinians rather than Christians; a claim that casts doubt on whether religion overrides historical memory and grievances.

IMPLICATIONS ON CHRISTIANS' POWER

The dwindling numbers of the Christian community in Lebanon do not necessarily reflect the community's clout, be that in political, financial, societal and even cultural terms. As one of the interviewees suggested, the 'war of numbers' is futile and "community presence is more important than numbers". He pointed out that the active participation of Christians in the public and social life by financing the health and education system and the industrial base of the country is what preserves the Christian presence in Lebanon. In fact, the Lebanese President is still a Christian, the community still holds 50 percent of businesses and almost 60 percent of the Lebanese land, despite constituting only one third of the Lebanese population.

Nevertheless, the Christian communities as a whole feel that they have lost their political clout, even though this is more pronounced among the Maronite community. However, the remaining Christian communities believe that this shrinking political

influence, in the face of the growing demographic, military and political power of Muslims, creates a sense of common destiny. Against this backdrop, many Lebanese Christians identify primarily as Christians rather than their distinct confessional group. As one interviewee stated, this constitutes a major change for the Christian communities, whose sense of belonging and national consciousness were heterogeneous as evidenced by differences in views, alliances and political affiliations.

RELIGIOUS CONFESSIONALISM

The power-sharing system of Lebanon, which guarantees an equal participation of Muslims and Christians in the political scene, has been viewed as both a curse and a blessing. Everyone acknowledged that the religious confessionalism and the system of consociational democracy inherently generates sectarianism. As one interviewee aptly put it, this type of system "allows the political leadership to exploit the community for their own personal, political and economic ambitions. This is not unique to the Christian community". In essence, this has created a corrupted political and financial elite detached from the community.

While alternative models have been suggested and supported by the Christian community, such as a new social contract without religious confessions, Christian federalism or effective partition of Christian areas, not a single interviewee supported the abolishment of religious confessionalism in Lebanon. The primary reason is the demographic threat and, by extension, fear of being forced to live under Shari'a law like all the other Muslim majority countries. At the same time, the lack of secular parties either within the Sunni or the Shia communities demonstrate that the concept of equal civil citizenship may fail in Lebanon by default. Despite its faults, for most, religious confessionalism allows two very different communities with different cultural and religious orientations to co-exist without imposing on each other; this constitutes the idea of Lebanon. The demographic threat is not interpreted as a military threat but it is an issue of political security of the Christian community. On of the interviewees stated that although this system is "unprogressive" for Western standards, it allows the different Lebanese communities to preserve their distinct identities. A handful of interviewees suggested that if the Taef Accords were to be dissolved, this would possibly lead to a new civil war. Others claimed that even if it were to be removed,

the Lebanese political system would continue to be ran by a hidden confessionalism. Another interesting proposal has been discussed: to add a 19th confession consisting of seculars from all communities, who do not wish to self-identify via the religious communities from where they originate. Interestingly, the idea was rejected vehemently by Muslim communities.

Having said that, and since all suggested the preservation of the existing system, the discussion revolved around how to improve it. Many suggested circling back to the Taef Accords of 1989. Indeed, several interviewees claimed that the spirit and key provisions of the Taef Accords have not been implemented. Hence, some claimed that if the Taef agreements are materialised as initially envisaged, there is hope for the Lebanese political system to safeguard equal representation and to overcome the sectarian or confessional element within the political system.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

The Christians are represented by a plethora of Christian-led political parties, which are predominantly Maronite and claim to be the protectors of Lebanese Christians. As one interviewee said, "The law of numbers dominates the intra-Christian relations when it comes to the political realm". The two most influential Christian parties are the Free Patriotic Movement, led by the former President Michel Aoun, and the Lebanese Forces, led by Samir Geagea. According to an interviewee, although these two parties seem to hold the political majority, in reality, they are a sociological minority. Most of the Christians do not identify with them and view them as corrupt. He further mentioned that there is a low turn up in the elections because many in the community feel disappointed and disengaged from politics.

The differences between the two parties go beyond their vision of Lebanon and the way they perceive the best interest of the Christian communities, dating back to personal and political rivalries that were developed during the 1975-1990 civil war. After the 2005 withdrawal of Syrian forces, they came to represent the two main Christian political outlooks in the country. The Hizbullah factor is the main point of contention. Michel Aoun's alliance with Hassan Nasrallah dates back in 2006 and this unlikely coalition, known as the March 8 Alliance, has proven very fruitful for both as the success of the Free Patriotic Party depends on Hizbullah and vice versa. For many Christians, including smaller yet important parties such as Tashnag and Marada,

Hizbullah's forces have repeatedly defended the country against Israel in 2000 and 2006 and later against ISIS. On the other end of the spectrum, Lebanese Forces and other Christian parties, such as the National Liberal Party, led by Camille Dory Chamoun, and the Kataeb Party, led by Samy Gemayel, support the Sunni-led March 14 alliance, which opposes Hizbullah, and supports 'the sovereignty of Lebanon'.

This divide between the Christian parties, along the Sunni-Shia rift dating back to 2005, has not changed much in terms of the political agenda and approach for almost two decades, with the exception of the Kataeb Party. It seems its current leader, Samy Gemayel, is steering the party in the direction of the liberal footsteps of his brother, Pierre, while moving away from the right-wing traditions of his father and grandfather. This tendency possibly reflects an effort to distinguish Kataeb from other Christian parties.

When asked about the possibility of Christian political unity, the interviewees were stunned at the suggestion, claiming that even though all Christians have a common faith, they have different political stances and agendas. Furthermore, almost everyone claimed that the large array of Christian parties reflects the political plurality and diversity of the community. However, this alleged plurality seems unable to extract them from the Presidential election deadlock, which has led to a political vacuum since Michel Aoun stepped down in October 2022. Indeed, many interviewees underlined that the disagreement on possible candidates was merely an ambition-driven *bras-de-fer* between Christian political leaders. At the time of the writing, Lebanon has failed to elect a president for the 12th time, perpetuating the political crisis and by extension the financial one.

RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP AND INTRA-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

The two biggest Christian communities are the Maronites and the Greek Orthodox, with the former accounting for 30 and the latter for 9 percent of Lebanese total population. During the controversial presence of Syrian troops in Lebanon, the political leadership of Christians were either in exile or prison. Hence, the religious leadership of the Maronite community had a political standing both within the community and the Lebanese state. For the past decade and a half, the Maronite religious leadership has lost most of its political clout, both in terms of influencing the political leadership and its flock. The Maronite Patriarch Rai's involvement in politics is

symbolic and limited to occasional convening of all Christian leaders in Bkerke, the episcopal see of the Maronite Church in Jounieh, in an effort to foster a climate of dialogue between the Christian parties; albeit rarely successfully. This is a defining shift in the religious/political nexus of the community in the post-civil war era.

The Greek Orthodox Church, under the tenure of the Metropolitan of the Archdiocese of Beirut in Lebanon, Elias Audi, who has held this position since 1980, is undergoing a noticeable change. In the past decade and even more so after the port explosion of August 2020, Audi has become visibly critical of politicians. Also, he has converged with Rai on political issues, which reflects the new trend among the Greek Orthodox, who move away from their traditional pan-Arabist and more leftist ideas towards centre-right positions as a way to safeguard their Christian identity.[3] Both Rahi's and Aoudi's Sunday sermons touch upon political issues. Nevertheless, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that the religious leadership truly influences the political choices of their flock.

The Armenian community of Lebanon has a distinct role in how it is represented politically and religiously. In the wake of the Armenian Genocide, tens of thousands of Armenians took refuge in Lebanon, becoming thus the backbone of the Armenian community in the country. By the mid-1970s, the Armenians were estimated to be around 300,000, divided into three communities: the Armenian Apostolic, Armenian Catholic, and Armenian Evangelical. Today, even though the population has more than halved (approximately 120,000), Lebanon still remains one of the most important political, spiritual and intellectual centres of the diaspora in the region. For instance, Beirut hosts the Haigazian University, the only Armenian higher education institution in the diaspora.

The Armenian community remains a key political player, either through its leading party, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation (Tashnag) or as independents supported by other political formations. Unlike some other communities, where frictions between the political and religious leadership are commonplace, the Armenian political figures are in good relations with the religious leadership. This might indicate the presence of different perceptions and tendencies in smaller Christian communities, which feel the pressure of unity more acutely and fully grasp the unifying

[3] It should be noted that Elias Audi's political stance is different and almost in direct opposition to that of the Patriarch Yohana of Antioch and All The East, who is based in Syria. However, as one interview pointed out, the two acknowledge that they live in different realities and refrain from criticizing each other on political issues.

role religious authorities might play. This pressure is not as intense among the Maronites which, as one Armenian interviewee pointedly said, are born with the post of president in mind, which fosters intra-community antagonism that, in turn, hinders intra-Christian unity.

Contrary to the Armenian community, which has the privilege of independent political representation through the 6 parliamentarians allocated to the Armenians, other small communities, such as the Syriac Orthodox Church, feel that their flock are effectively politically marginalised because it shares a candidate with all the other smaller Christian denominations. The Protestant/Evangelical community presents another interesting case. The Protestant community in Lebanon, which unites Reformist, Anglican and Baptist traditions, elects its own candidate in the parliament even though it merely constitutes 1 percent of the population. Protestant missionaries established an Arabic-speaking congregation in Lebanon and Syria in 1848, which was legitimized in 1856 by a *firman* under the Ottoman law in order to facilitate the community's family law. It should be noted that the terms Protestant and Evangelical are interchangeable in Lebanon due to the lack of an Arabic translation of the word 'Protestant', while the term 'Evangelical' has its roots in the Arabic word for bible 'Injeel'. Unlike the more diffused and horizontally-organized Western traditions of Protestantism, the Eastern Evangelicals established a Supreme Council for the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon in 1936 under the French Mandate so as to be included in the Lebanese confessional system. The institution is considered an equivalent of a patriarchate, without an ecclesiastical dimension; a social entity with the purpose of representation vis-a-vis the state.

One of the greatest challenges that Protestants in Lebanon face is that often they are confused with the Evangelicals and New Born Christians in the US. The latter also have a counterpart in Lebanon but, contrary to the local Protestant community, practice proselytization, straining relations between local Muslim and Christian communities. The Christians on an ecumenical level took a policy decision in the early 20th century to not proselytize each other. Nonetheless, they are blamed for the proselytization conducted by foreign missions and at the same time, the latter criticize them for not being 'Protestant enough'.

Having said that, all church leaders in Lebanon are in agreement on a number of key issues. First, they all support religious confessionalism that preserves the religious representation of their communities, as per the Taef Accord. Second, they all keep a

neutral stance towards the governments and regimes of the region. Finally, they all seek to support each other and promote cooperation in the face of the volatile national and regional environment. This cooperation is channelled mainly via social services. It is no coincidence that Lebanon hosts the headquarters of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), which embraces the four families of the Churches in the region: the Catholic, the Oriental Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox and the Evangelical.

MECC's main goal is twofold. First, to foster cooperation between Muslims and Christians, but also among the Churches, steering away from politics so as to safeguard their credibility. Second, to assist cooperation between Churches cooperate in the promotion of a number of basic services amid the financial crisis, such as health and education, as well as to propose and implement strategies to stop Christian migration.

FOREIGN ALLIES

With the Shias backed by Iran and the Sunnis by Saudi Arabia, the question of external support to Christians becomes key for evaluating their continuing presence in Lebanon. When seen under this lens, the foreign disinterest for the Lebanese Christians—especially from past Western allies—indirectly contributes to perceived threats for the Christian presence in the region. It was quite pronounced during CME team's discussions with various members of the community that they felt that 'the caring mother', or il Um Al-Hanunah, had abandoned them. They seem to acknowledge that the West is not concerned with the Middle East and the Christian community as it used to be. Thus, the community is looking for other options and is "more interested in amending relations with Lebanon's eastern neighbours". Others claimed that this should have already happened, stating that the relations of the West with Christian communities in the past led to their precarious situation today, as evidenced by the status of Christianity in the region, particularly Iraq and Syria.

When inquired about what do they expect from the West, many church leaders seemed to expect little, as some claimed that the West has "lost its Christian character". A few church leaders, however, underlined that financial aid and charities are vital during this critical time so as to carry on the churches' work, especially in the field of education and health, and preserve the Christian presence in Lebanon.

CONCLUSION

During the field research, the toll of the economic and pollical crises on Lebanon was very apparent; undoubtedly, a reality that concerns and affects all Lebanese, Muslims and Christians alike. Yet, the demographic challenges the Christians face render the community slightly more resilient. The community was able to reconstruct many parts of East Beirut, home to most Christians, almost immediately after the port explosion in August 2020. Nevertheless, the communities conveyed a sense of anxiety regarding their future in the country.

Interestingly, the impact of the religious leadership on politics was rather limited, despite occasional virulent Sunday sermons. Perhaps, more than ever before, the Churches seem to have a common stance in regards to the type of governance that is best for the Christians. In fact, the convergence of views between the Maronite and Greek Orthodox churches is significant, reflecting how the communities have changed the way they self-identify. The Christian communities that were adamant about their distinct confessional identities now view themselves as part of a greater community, that of Christians, in an effort to counterbalance the demographic challenges.

Indeed, the greatest challenge for the Christian presence in Lebanon seems to be migration, which is prompted by the deteriorating financial and unstable political situation. Surprisingly, the Christian political landscape seems to be stagnant in a futile rift between the pro and anti-Hizbullah Christians. What is even more, the very composition of the political parties seems to have frozen in time. They promote figures from the same families that established them and pertain to the same ideology, with the exception of the Kataeb party, which seems to be moving towards a more liberal and inclusive agenda.

As the world enters a new era competition, the Middle East seems to teeter between old animosities and practices and promising reproachments, such as the restoration of the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Lebanon, which is mired in its own feuds and problems, has always been sensitive to regional shifts. In this respect, it is hard to make projections into the future, but there is little doubt that the future of Christianity in Lebanon is inescapably tied to the prosperity of Lebanon, which in turn can arise under a stable and peaceful region. CME

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Khalil Karam	President of the Maronite League
Joseph Antoine Soueif	Maronite Archbishop of Tripoli
Sam Manassen	Journalist (Greek Catholic community)
Ziad Sayigh	Executive Director of Civic Influence Hub (CiH)
Aram I	Catholicos of the Great House of Cilicia
Lara Saade	Head of Public Policy & Legislation Office, Kataeb Party
Tarek Mitri	Professor and President of St George University of Beirut
Habib Bader	Senior Pastor of the National Evangelical Church of Beirut
Hagop Pakradounian	Politician of Armenian descent, Head of Tashnag
Michel Aoun	Former President of Lebanon
Marc Saad	Spokesperson for the Lebanese Forces
Mor Clemis Daniel Kourieh	Syriac Orthodox Archbishop of Beirut
Boutros Labaky	Professor and former Minister of Planning
Antoine Saad	Author and Journalist (Maronite community)
Karim Pakradouni	Politician and former active member in both Lebanese Forces and Kataeb Party
Camille Chamoun	Head of the National Liberal Party
Representatives & numerous members of the Dbeyah Camp	Palestinian Christians (Greek Catholic community)