

In Memoriam

A Westphalian Life: Msgr. Elias El-Hayek

Monsignor Elias El-Hayek, a dear friend of Lyndon LaRouche and his movement, died of a heart attack in Lebanon on May 20, the day that the leaders of his beloved nation were signing an agreement in Doha, Qatar, which would lead them away from the brink of civil war.

The statement by Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa at the announcement of the Doha Agreement, “We have proven that the historic Lebanese formula of ‘no victor and no vanquished’ is the only formula that can lead us to safe shores,” reflects the life’s work of Msgr. El-Hayek. Throughout the stormy years of post-civil war Lebanon, he assured everyone that his nation would never allow itself to be dragged into civil war again. The “no victor, no vanquished” formula was Msgr. El-Hayek’s way of translating the idea of the Peace of Westphalia onto Lebanese soil.

Msgr. El-Hayek, a Chor-Bishop in the Maronite Rite of the Catholic Church, was a renowned scholar who published innumerable articles on the Syriac and Greek origins of the early church. A professor of philosophy and law in Lebanon, the United States, and Canada, he played a leading role on the Human Rights Tribunal which examined the case of Lyndon LaRouche. He was an active participant for many years in Schiller Institute initiatives for the creation of a just new world economic order. He was an irreplaceable advisor not only on Lebanese affairs, but on the political and cultural history of the entire region. He was a tireless proponent of an ecumenical approach to faith and reason, in the lands which had long been manipulated through religious conflict.

During the Israeli war against Lebanon in 2006, Msgr. El-Hayek was persuaded to leave Lebanon to use his influence in Washington for the cause of his country. This was based on his experience in the period of the civil war in Lebanon, when he established a Lebanese lobby in Washington to seek American help in bringing peace to the warring factions.

This writer was honored to be one of the invited guests at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary



*Monsignor Elias El-Hayek
(1923-2008)*

of his ordination, held in Montreal in 2000. In the Mass, which was celebrated in Aramaic, Arabic, French, and English, the congratulations of Pope John Paul II were joyfully conveyed. In the grand banquet following the Mass, a Lebanese poet improvised, in Arabic, for two hours, on the theme of the saga of the Chor-Bishop’s fruitful life. One subject of the oration was El-Hayek’s audience with Pope John Paul II in May of 1980, during the Lebanese civil war. When Msgr. El-Hayek asked the Pope to pray for Lebanon, John Paul II replied, “I pray for Lebanon every day. But you, what are you doing for Lebanon?”

On May 23, as Msgr. El-Hayek’s funeral mass was being celebrated in Lebanon, the Bishop of the Eparchy of St. Maron, Gregory Mansour, told this writer, “Monsignor El-Hayek was the consummate teacher, named the first rector of the Maronite Seminary in Washington, D.C. in 1961. His work was foundational for seminarians and the church. His sense of humor, intellect, and human traits will be sadly missed.”

Bishop Mansour heard of Msgr. El-Hayek’s death as he was travelling to Washington with the Maronite Patriarch, Cardinal Peter Sfeir. The Patriarch was in Washington to meet with President Bush and present him with a memorandum which discussed the need for the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Lebanon and Syria, and the effort to stop Israeli overflights. Msgr. El-Hayek would often say that when he and the Patriarch, who were childhood friends, were despairing over the future of their nation, they would trade jokes about what we might understand as the long negotiations for the Peace of Westphalia, but in the Lebanese idiom, in which the leading characters were always a stubborn donkey and a frustrated peasant from their hometowns.

After what is known as the Second Lebanese war, although many hoped he would remain in the United States, Msgr. El-Hayek returned to his home in the mountain village of Bijji, where he was born in 1923. “I want to die in Lebanon making peace and a future for coming generations,” he told his friends.—*Nina Ogden*