

LIGHT FROM THE EAST

Miracles of Our Lady of Soufanieh



by

Fr. Robert J. Fox

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Dedication

I dedicate this book, written for Christian unity—for love and unity among all Christians and of each family in Jesus Christ—to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. I pray that in some way this book can be a voice to re-echo the call of heaven for such love and unity upon earth.

May all Christians hear this heavenly call for love and unity. “Yet not for these only do I pray, but for those also who through their word are to believe in me, that all may be one, even as You, Father, in me and I in You; that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that You have sent me” (John 17:20-22).

May the millions of dear people who profess the religion of Islam, and who also have a love for the Virgin Mother Mary, come soon into union with their Christian brothers and sisters.

Finally, I dedicate this book to my sister, Catherine Fox Hrabe, 89, the news of whose death, August 12, 2002, was received just as this book was completed and I was writing its dedication. She was my Godmother, the oldest in a family of eight children. She was always an example of love and kindness to all and an inspiration to me, as to our brothers and sister, her children and grandchildren. She always showed the greatest interest in my work as a priest and my efforts at Catholic journalism. Now she joins our mother and father, Susie Emma Lorentz, Aloysius J. Fox, and her husband, Elmer Hrabe.

Fr. Robert J. Fox

Prayer to Our Lady of Soufanieh

Virgin Mary, Mother of God and men,

Blessed are You to have accepted for the first time in the History of Salvation, a Mission in the heart of the Arab World.

Blessed are You to have chosen Damascus as a home, to gather your children who come from the five continents, to remind them of the Gospel of your Son Jesus and to listen to Him.

Blessed is your Son Jesus to have chosen at the end of a century full of hate, violence and murder (and at the end of a millennium with many divisions) to unveil to the whole world, as previously to St. Paul, the fascinating face of our God who is Love, Dignity and Peace.

Jesus, Mary,

Blessed are You to have chosen Myrna, a simple and young Arab, without much culture, to manifest Your Love that surpasses all cultures.

Blessed are you to have blessed the love of Myrna and Nicolas her husband, and their children, Miriam and John Emmanuel, in order to tell us again, at the end of a century (and end of a millennium) which experienced a systematic destruction of the Family and of Life, that Love is God Himself sealing the love between man and wife, and that the child is simply a Gift from Heaven.

Blessed are you to remind us in this modest district of Soufanieh in Damascus through this rosary of marvels such as exudations of oil, apparitions, ecstasies, messages, visions, stigmata, bodily and spiritual cures, with doors open to all, through continuous prayer in humility and gratuitousness; Blessed are you for your joint Presence, so powerful yet so discreet and loving, which is always the same, yesterday, today and forever.

Lord Jesus,

Blessed are you for your presence in the Arab world, welcoming yet so unrecognized, and where miraculously survives this little tenacious and living remnant of Your first Church.

Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and men, make us worthy to announce intelligently and courageously, Your Son's name, and to deserve the Mission with which You entrusted us. *Amen.*


[Prayer by Fr. Elias Zahlaoui]

About the Author

Fr. Robert J. Fox has long been recognized as a Catholic writer on Catholic doctrine, church history, catechisms and apologetics. Before founding the Fatima Family Apostolate and becoming editor of the *Immaculate Heart Messenger* magazine which is printed both in the United States and in the Philippines, the author had been a columnist for the *National Catholic Register*, regular writer for *Our Sunday Visitor*, *Catholic Twin Circle*, and many other Catholic publications. He now presents to us a new voice and some deeper insights into the miracles of Soufanieh and what Jesus and Mary are saying today in the land of early Christianity. Fr. Fox traveled to Damascus to present firsthand the fruit of his research.

Preface

Light from the East—in the Arab World

T SEEMED HARDLY coincidental that months before I departed for Damascus, Syria, I chose September 11, 2001, to be in flight there. I would spend time at an ideal Christian Community of Soufanieh that has developed in the midst of Muslim land. For the first time in 2000 years, in the Arab world, in the very area where St. Paul the Apostle was converted and baptized, from where he went to convert the world to be one in Jesus Christ, our Blessed Mother, the “Virgin,” has come to manifest her presence with a special mission. Miracles have been happening there since 1982. It is heaven’s call for love and unity.

I was urged to write a book on Soufanieh. I would not do so without first-hand experience of the area. I needed to get to know the people directly involved. It is important for you to read the Introduction to this book by Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, who teaches at the University in Damascus and has been associated with the Soufanieh events from the beginning. He is presently pastor of Our Lady of Damascus Church there, and is considered the Catholic priest in Syria at present most reliable on Soufanieh. I needed to interview Church authorities, both the Orthodox and Catholic. The Nazzour family at the center of the Soufanieh supernatural phenomenon has a Melkite-rite Catholic mother, Myrna, and Orthodox father, Nicolas.

I was in Damascus, Syria, for a week, each day as a guest at the Virgin’s House of Soufanieh. I was always made welcome by Nicolas and Myrna Nazzour and the broader Soufanieh family as they gathered each evening for prayer and for the holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

I had many interviews with people and authorities knowledgeable about Soufanieh. These included His Holiness, Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I, the Syrian Orthodox Prince Patriarch of Antioch; also, Gregoire III, Patriarch of Melkite Catholics; Archbishop Dionysius Behnam Jajjawi, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese; Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, associated with Soufanieh from the beginning and who was an invaluable resource for me in preparing this book.

I met also with Fr. Boulos Fadel, Myrna’s present spiritual director succeeding Fr. Malouli, and whom Fr. Zahlaoui recognized years ago would be valuable for the Soufanieh mission. I found great cooperation from all, including the friends of the local Soufanieh community. The love that flowed between all these people, the spirit of unity, was evident.

The Virgin Mother told Myrna in 1982 to open the doors of their home to all. I observed the Virgin’s House of Soufanieh, which is also the Nazzour home, opened daily to people of all faiths. They came from different countries and prayed before the Icon of Soufanieh. These included Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Buddhists, etc. Always there

was respect from all, always all were welcome. I admired the sacrifice of the Nazzour family in opening their home to all and always gratuitously. Never has anything been disturbed or stolen.

Whenever I offered the Sacrifice of the Mass at Soufanieh Home before the Icon, I found the people most devout. They prayed long before the Mass began. I was able to use the chalice daily which the Pope used when he was in Damascus in May 2001, when his Holiness went on pilgrimage, following the footsteps of St. Paul.

On my final evening of September 18, 2001, we were gathered for Mass and farewell in the upper terrace where Our Lady appeared. At the end of the Mass I expressed my gratitude for the charity and kindness of all. I was saying that I recognized a similarity between the message of Fatima in the West and Soufanieh in the East. Suddenly Fr. Elias Zahlaoui drew my attention that olive oil was exuding from the hands of Myrna who stood beside him.

When Fr. Zahlaoui announced the oil the youth present began singing a beautiful hymn to the Virgin of Soufanieh. They lined up so I could anoint them with oil from Myrna's hands. I had said Mass near midnight that final night in Soufanieh before returning to America. It is my prayer that I may offer holy Mass each day, even my last day on earth. Planes had been grounded after the terrorist attacks. What difficulties awaited me to fly back to the United States I did not know. I took the abundant oil from Myrna's hands and anointed each one present. It was obvious the youth were experiencing a presence of God and of the Virgin. As always happens, the oil began to cease when all were anointed.

While I had come to research for a book on Soufanieh I prayed that if God wanted oil to occur while I was there—if He felt that a miracle would make the book on Soufanieh I was to write more credible, it's in His hands. I did not deem myself worthy to witness such a miracle. If God wanted to bring forth oil, not for Myrna's glory nor mine, but only for the effectiveness of the message of Soufanieh, which is for love and unity of the family and the Church—only God can determine that and cause the miracle. I had no right to ask.

Before going to Soufanieh I did not know that the message of Soufanieh also concerned family life. I thought the call was only for Christian Unity of the Universal Church, starting with the reunion of Orthodox and Catholics. Then I discovered Soufanieh concerns love and unity in the family as well. Now I understood, as director of the Fatima Family Apostolate, dedicated to the sanctification of families, why, by unforeseen circumstances, I was called to Soufanieh-Damascus. It became clear why I chose to fly there to a Community of Love and Unity, September 11, at the same time when hatred of extremists was being unleashed in my native land.


When there are millions of families filled with love and living in unity in Christ there will come Christian Unity. The first big effort is to unify the Feast of Easter so Orthodox and Catholics celebrate the Feast at the same time. Then the rest will follow.

I hope the Icon of Soufanieh can be placed in our homes to remind each family of heaven's call for love and unity in our families and heaven's call for all Christians to pray for Christian unity.

Fr. Robert J. Fox

Introduction

Dear Fr. Robert J. Fox:

You asked me, in faith and sensitivity, to write an introduction to your book. I, in turn, respond in faith and with sensitivity as well. Faith, because the priesthood of Jesus incorporates us together; and, in sensitivity, because you, an eminent priest, known all over America, asked me, who is not well known in America, to write this introduction. 

Dear Father,

First, I must express gratitude to the Lord for He has led you in your travels to Damascus at an exceptional time: on the very day and immediately subsequent to the dreadful assault on the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., etc.

I must also thank the Lord for the invincible desire with which He has inflamed your heart to write a book about the activities of His most consecrated Mother in the Soufanieh neighborhood of Damascus, and hence for the whole world.

A great many people came to Damascus before you, were amazed and grateful as they discovered the inconceivable occurrences at Soufanieh. They have come from France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Holland, Spain, Tahiti, the United States, Mexico, Denmark and, of course, from all the Arab countries. However, only a few of them wrote articles or treatises on Soufanieh.

There are two exceptions: first the French journalist Christian Ravaz, who wrote a primer entitled "The Revelations of Jesus and the Virgin in Damascus" and, second, Fr. Adel Theodore Khouri, a German national who wrote a primer entitled "A Sign from Heaven," 1988.

You, Father, however desired to write an ample book addressed to Americans on the one hand and the English speaking world on the other. And since you have an acknowledged status in ecclesiastical and clergy circles in the United States, thanks to your books which have exceeded forty and through the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN), which was founded by Mother Angelica, this testimony of yours about Soufanieh will certainly be adequate to reach an innumerable amount of people.

Is there anyone in this world who has not witnessed the crucial

conflict in our modern world between those turning away from God and those with a zealous passion for Him?

Hence, your testimony about Soufanieh bears great significance.

Therefore, I would give thanks to the Lord, first, and then to you, dear Father, for the caution with which I have noticed in you to detect the Soufanieh occurrences with accuracy and going directly to reliable sources. You have never put aside any of the reported references, whether they be from sources that are ecclesiastical, scientific, educational or social.

You have done all this as if you were that exceptional priest the late Fr. Joseph Malouli, who was chosen by the Lord to take care of Soufanieh for so long during those momentous years, and who recorded all so lovingly and faithfully.

For these reasons, I have gratitude to the Lord and to you; hence I rejoice at your work.

Moreover, I experience an additional gratitude with joy for the Lord and for you, dear Father. You are a priest who has dedicated a great portion of your priestly life to spreading the message of Our Mother, her revelations, to the entire world. Then suddenly you came to Damascus and as it were spontaneously, as by divine guidance, saw the link between Fatima and Damascus; between the Virgin's revelations in Fatima and Her revelations together with Jesus in Damascus. How successful and fortunate you were!

At the level of the conjoined divine mission between Fatima and Damascus you vanquished the challenge to glorify the family and its members so that families would become the builders of the sanctity of the bigger, universal family which is the Church. Such sanctified families would also be the builders of Church unity and its sharp testimony amidst a world whose material density and arrogance multiplies and whose spirituality and substance declines.

Furthermore, you were fortunate in your emphasis of the importance of both Fatima and Damascus. There is no place for preposterous chance or luck and mere speculation as to what the Lord's choice has been. It is He who knows and plans and executes. Man may respond or turn away.


The Lord Himself chose the town of Fatima in the second decade of the twentieth century; likewise, He chose the city of Damascus in the second decade from the end of that century.

Fatima refers to a great Muslim name. What happened at Fatima embodies an urgent appeal from the Blessed Virgin to the world to come back to God humbly, lovingly and hopefully.


Damascus, on the other hand, is the name that relates radically to early Christianity through the apostle St. Paul, the messenger. Likewise it relates to the magnanimous Islam through hundreds of years. Without warning, what has happened at Damascus, in the modest neighborhood

of Soufanieh, summons people to return to God in faith and through love. It also summons each and every family on this earth to live in sanctity daily so as to turn humanity into one united human family, affectionate and faithful. This will unite all the sanctified families so as to synthesize together one Church to testify truthfully the efficacy of Jesus, the Redeemer (whom many do not yet share), the Unshared.

Mary, the Virgin, is the Mother from the East, whom God chose, excluding all other women, in order to open locked doors in both the East and the West. Mary is God's choice to demolish the extending high walls between the East and the West. Finally, Mary has been chosen to gather all the children of God everywhere at any time so as to form one human family which raises its polyphonic voice in united prayer to the One Divine Father.

Isn't that precisely what humanity needs so desperately today, more than anything else? 

Dear Fr. Robert,


You have said all this in your book simply, joyfully and clearly. You have said it in an attentive and sensitive way which is directed to accumulating reiteration around the solid nucleus of the truth. One of the most amiable aspects of this reiteration is your discourse about the Mother Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh, that is, the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan upon which the Soufanieh Icon is based. What you have written about the history of the Kazan Icon and its Russian record has great dimensions, at the Church level, the ecumenical level and the level of faith in general. That is especially when you mention the way it was lost and the way it was found, and finally its sojourn under the protection and patronage of Our Lady of Fatima at Fatima. You have indicated all these dimensions without hesitation. Some of your indications acquire vigor whereas others are discussed delicately so as to comply with the nature of the West-East relationships. 

Dear Fr. Robert,

Being an Arab Catholic priest, and a son of the city of Damascus, I can't help but expose your honesty in testifying in favor of the children of the Arab Church today and to the people of Damascus, as you have demonstrated in your book. You have shown this in writing of the people of Damascus and Syria and the Arab Orient composed of Christians and Muslims. You did not spare a minute to manifest what you have discovered in them; human spontaneous tendency, aggression-free geniality, genuine faith and ethical open-mindedness.

There are plenty of issues which deserve to be contemplated and pondered and I would not misappropriate the pleasure for your readers in discovering them in this book. I would, however, point out one very

important topic in your testimony.

It is this: your constant, quiet emphasis on the prolongation of the absolutely free prayers which have been offered at the humble house of the Blessed Virgin in the Soufanieh community. It does give me deep happiness to notice that you have observed in your book, more than once, that both Christian and Muslim believers pray next to each other in both respect and faith. Both do this asking the blessing from their Virgin Mother, the blessing of peace, love and unity. They ask this blessing for themselves and for all of humanity, and even for their enemies. They do this while they stride every day over a great deal of hatred and antipathy and grievances which have accumulated in this Arab Orient. 

Amiable Father Robert,

Once again, I thank you for this precious, inestimable testimony that comes from you, the American priest, at a crucial time. I do beseech Our Lord Jesus, with the mediation of Our Virgin Mother, to make this testimony of your book a new voice to awaken those who got drowned in the delusion of this world; this delusion which is founded upon the disdainfulness of the science, the lust for power and worship of money.

May this testimony rouse a great many people to listen to the first words of the Virgin's discourse at Soufanieh to all her children throughout the world:

"My Children,
Remember God because God is with us."

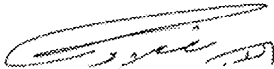
May this testimony as well rouse a great many people to the latest words of the Lord Jesus at Soufanieh to all His brothers in sacrifice:

"Don't forget that I am the reason of your existence on earth. And I am the reason of your happiness in Heaven."

Finally, I would not find a better conclusion to this introduction than to remind you of what the Lord Jesus said to Myrna on November 26, 1987:

"My peace in your heart will be a blessing for you and for all those who have cooperated with you."

Dear Father, God bless you and bless your effort.

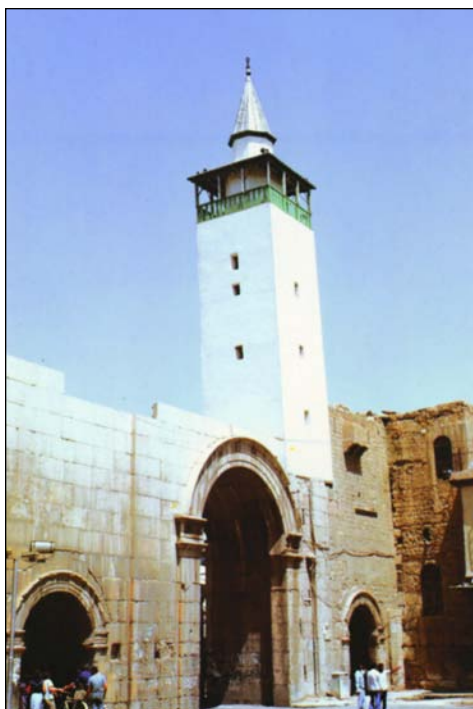


Fr. Elias Zablaoui
Damascus, 6/10/2002
Our Lady of Damascus Church
Al.Quousour, Damascus, Syria



Myrna Nazzour on mountain overlooking Damascus, Easter Sunday, 2001.

Scenes of Old Damascus




(Above) Eastern Gate (Bab Charki); (right) street scene.



Chapter 1

Overview of the “Pearl of the East”

 WAS ON PILGRIMAGE for the *Fatima Family Apostolate*—literally flying around the world for speaking engagements and research. I left by way of the Pacific from the United States and was scheduled to return from the east by way of the Atlantic. My purpose was to foster Christian love and unity for the family. I hoped to do research on reported heavenly interventions in the Middle East for unity of Christians throughout the world.

I had learned to some degree before departure from mid-America of reported heavenly interventions in the Muslim country of Syria where the number of Christians is relatively small. I had heard of an ideal Christian community known as “Soufanieh” formed in recent decades in Damascus, the oldest city in the world. Messages from heaven were reported being given within the context of family life, in a house close to the site of the conversion and baptism of St. Paul the Apostle.

Jesus and Mary were reportedly giving messages, apparitions, ecstasies. Olive oil and the stigmata were reported to be outward signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit in all this. There was the stigmata whenever the Orthodox and Catholics celebrated Holy Week and Easter at the same time.

The word “Soufanieh” is the name of an old quarter of old Damascus. It is a simple and quiet quarter where Christians live but it became famous after the reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary and the Icon there which began to exude oil. This occasioned people to begin calling the Icon “Our Lady of Soufanieh.” And the very house, home to the Nazzours, began to be called the Virgin House.

It had been suggested that I go to the Mideast, research, and then write a book myself on the unusual phenomena taking place in Damascus, Syria. I never considered seriously for one second going to Syria. Then circumstances developed that made it seem I was supposed to go to Damascus.

I had been told that in Damascus there was a home known as the

Virgin's house of Soufanieh. There its inhabitants and neighbors were filled with the spirit of the Gospel and the spirit of the early Christians. It was my conviction I could not write such a book without meeting first-hand the people involved. I had known for about ten years that the mission of Soufanieh concerned Christian Unity. Later I was to discover it concerned also unity and love within each family.

On September 11, 2001, I left Australia after many speaking engagements there in different states. On Northwest airlines I flew to the Middle East by way of Singapore, then Bahrain, enroute to Damascus, Syria. I had no idea what was ahead of me. I did not know that the history of terrorism, relative to New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., as well as the plane crash resulting from the same forces in Pennsylvania, was being made while I was on that flight to Damascus.

I was enroute to do research on an ideal Christian community of faith and love at the same time when violent acts, destructive of thousands of human lives and property, were being perpetrated in my country. Rooted in the hatred of Muslim extremists, violence was transpiring within the United States which would forever be remembered in history.

I was traveling to the very area made famous by the conversion of St. Paul (Acts of the Apostles 9:3-6). My goal was Soufanieh in Damascus. I was going to the neighborhood of Soufanieh in Damascus to do research on a movement that reportedly originated with heavenly interventions. The purposes of the heavenly messages were to develop families into domestic churches and to reunite Christians of the world into "one fold and one shepherd."

Australia is 16 hours ahead of my midwestern time. Syria is nine hours ahead. So leaving Australia in the evening of September 11, the time frame in New York was quite different from my location in another part of the world.

In Australia, on behalf of the *Fatima Family Apostolate*, I had spoken in Melbourne, Brisbane. A favorite spot was Canungra (Marian Valley), Shrine of Our Lady Help of Christians, who is the patron of Australia. There also is the Grotto of Our Lady of Fatima. I had spoken in Sydney, Albury, South Wagga and visited the Seminary of St. John Vianney in Wagga Wagga. I had talked to school children, young adults and parents and was most happy at the interest and reception in Australia. There the *Immaculate Heart Messenger* of which I am editor is distributed, being printed in the Philippines as well as in the United States.

It's a long way from Australia to Syria. Having left America September 4, from Los Angeles, flying west over the Pacific Ocean to the continent known as "down under," I wondered how I ever got myself into such encounters. I would return to America over the Atlantic, flying from Syria to London to Chicago, and finally back to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where my bishop resides for this midwestern diocese.

Thus I would fly entirely around the world.

I don't think I would ever have ventured on an around the world pilgrimage had it not been for Pope John Paul II making his pilgrimage in May 2001, walking in the footsteps of St. Paul, the apostle. By Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) I had followed the pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II in May, 2001 almost step by step.

Our Lady of Soufanieh and the unusual phenomena with messages received by Myrna Nazzour for Church unity, had been featured in the *Immaculate Heart Messenger* magazine about ten years previously. But then, because of complications with the movement in the United States at the time, I set it all aside. Through all the years, however, I kept a large replica of the Virgin of Soufanieh clearly visible in my bedroom. The Virgin's penetrating eyes would meet mine occasionally.

When the Pope was in Damascus, suddenly the recollection came to me of the small replica Icon of Soufanieh I had put away in the attic of my rectory ten years previously, while retaining the large one in my living quarters. As I watched the Pope on television in Damascus, I wondered if Myrna Nazzour might encounter His Holiness, Pope John Paul II there. Then the curious thought occurred to me to go to the attic of the rectory, a somewhat difficult feat, and rescue the small Soufanieh Icon placed there years ago. As soon as I came down and returned to the office, the phone was ringing. I was asked to phone a long distance number immediately. I did. Nicolas Nazzour at Soufanieh in Damascus, Syria, answered immediately, saying, "Oh! Fr. Fox. Fatima Family Apostolate." I was amazed. "You remember me? It's been ten years." "Yes. I remember you. Here is Myrna." Myrna then came to the phone. "Fr. Fox, come to our home. Visit Soufanieh."

I returned to watching His Holiness John Paul II on his pilgrimage in the "footsteps of St. Paul" to Damascus. The two incidents coming together was enough for me to conclude: "I must go to Damascus, Syria. I must spend time there to gather information to write a book on Soufanieh."

I choose then, months in advance, the day of September 11, 2001. Then I would fly to Syria from Australia. While at Soufanieh I would be able to celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass daily before the miraculous little Icon which had exuded olive oil from time to time since 1982, including Holy Week of 2001.

Mary Kourbet Al-Akhras, is known today as Myrna. She was born in 1964 of a Greek-Catholic father and a Greek-Orthodox mother. She studied in Christian schools, either Catholic or Orthodox but also in government schools. Myrna was considered to be average in studies. She left school a year before earning the unified Syrian baccalaureate diploma. Her religious knowledge before the phenomena of Soufanieh developed was considered elementary. Such is the simple background of the woman today known as Myrna Nazzour whom God will use in the

events of Soufanieh. God chooses who he wills. He gives his grace and gifts to whom he wills.

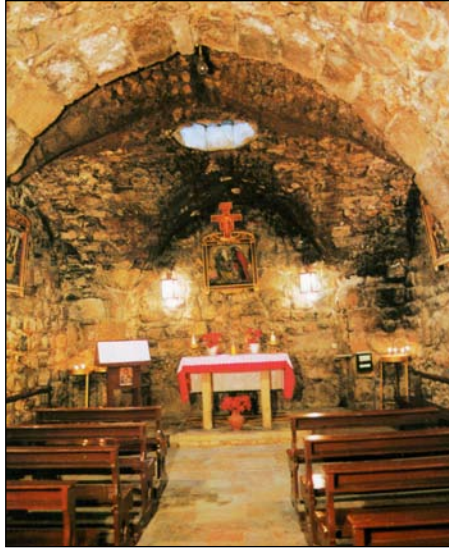
In offering the Sacrifice of the Mass at Soufanieh, I would use Myrna's chalice which was used by Pope John Paul II in Damascus. She had loaned her chalice, along with many others loaned for the papal Mass, as people would receive the precious Blood of Jesus along with the sacred Body of the Lord at the papal Mass under both species. Eastern rite Catholics are accustomed to receiving regularly under both species.

Myrna keeps a chalice in her home, where the Sacrifice of the Mass is offered, at least every Saturday evening. The Mass has been offered there by past papal nuncios, and at least weekly by local priests. While there were many chalices on the altar during the papal Mass, the Pope chose Myrna's to be front and center so as to be used for the elevation.

Damascus is considered the oldest city in the world. In the vicinity of Damascus there are inhabitants of the Maaloula village where to the present day the Aramaic language, which was spoken by Jesus Christ, is still spoken. I was going to the area of the roots of early Christianity, mostly Muslim now. Damascus is also home to the Omayyad Mosque, the mausoleum of St. John the Baptist, visited by Pope John Paul II in May, 2001 when he made his famous pilgrimage, following in the footsteps of St. Paul, the apostle. I would visit the same mosque and see Muslims praying, or sleeping, there in its vast open area.



Omayyad Mosque, Damascus, shrine of the head of St. John the Baptist. Pope John Paul II paid his respects here in May, 2001.



(Top) Chapel of St. Ananias, where St. Paul was baptized. (Center) St. Paul Church, Damascus. (Bottom) Tomb of the Head of John the Baptist, inside the Omayyad Mosque, Damascus.

Why would I want to visit Damascus in Syria, a land of Muslims where Christians are comparatively few, and among the Christians, Orthodox outnumber the Catholics? Well, I was convinced that God was working in the area, which was the cradle of early Christianity. I was convinced heaven is again calling the world from the East to unity in Jesus Christ. After 2000 years, God is manifesting Himself and His Mother in a special way for family life and Christian unity.

By whatever title we give Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ, we are speaking of the same Woman who is Mother of God and Mother of the Church. Be it Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Miraculous Medal, Lourdes, Fatima, Soufanieh, etc., it is the same Mother of the Incarnate Word of whom we speak and venerate. The universal *Catechism*, which quotes the Second Vatican Council, says:

“This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly from the consent which she loyally gave at the Annunciation and which she sustained without wavering beneath the cross, until the eternal fulfillment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven she did not lay aside this saving office but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation. . . . Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix.” (969)

The *Catechism* quotes Scripture and the Council in saying, “All generations will call me blessed”; “The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.” Those are strong words: “The Church’s devotion to the Blessed Virgin is intrinsic to Christian worship.” While it distinguishes “the adoration which is given to the Incarnate Word” to the Blessed Trinity—nonetheless, recognizing that mankind, the Church, would not have the Word made Flesh without the cooperation of Mary in carrying out the divine liturgy, the worship of the Church which consists of the acts of Jesus Christ extended in time and space—there must intrinsically flow from this devotion to Mary. And devotion to Mary must lead us to Jesus Christ.

In adoring the Word made Flesh we must honor with the highest honor, called hyperdulia, she by whom, through the action of the Holy Spirit, the Word was made Flesh and dwells among us.


The *Catechism* tells us how to express devotion to the Virgin Mother Mary. It is through liturgical feasts dedicated to the Mother of God and Marian prayer, such as the Rosary, an “epitome of the whole Gospel.” We shall see in the early events of Soufanieh, the first time the Blessed Mother gives a message (second apparition), the Rosary is instrumental in pointing to Jesus Christ.

The Church through its Ecumenical Council of Vatican II tells us that Mary is the Mother and Model of the Church. She was the first disciple of Jesus Christ. She is the Woman of Faith—the Woman of obedient Faith of the New Covenant as Abraham was the man of faith

of the Old Covenant. This brings us to understand just what is meant by that devotion God wants established in the world—which is intrinsic, an essential part of our faith and its practice.

Devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in a final analysis, after invoking her intercession and honoring her in the greatest way, next to Jesus Christ means: having a faith, like Mary had; loving God and neighbor as Mary did; practicing all the Christian virtues as Mary did. We are going to see in our study of Soufanieh it is a call to love and unity, both for individual families and the family of Christians, worldwide.

The universal *Catechism* spelled out that devotion to our Blessed Mother is found in the celebration of liturgical Marian Feasts and praying the Rosary which is, the Church says, a *Gospel prayer* when prayed properly.

I once wrote a booklet, *First Saturdays—For the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart*. In it you will discover the profundity of meaning behind First Saturdays. And this may astonish you. First Saturdays concern also Christian Unity—and in a special way the reunion of the Orthodox Christians with the Roman Catholic Church. First Saturdays concern prayer and reparation for reunion of Catholics and Orthodox—union with the Pope—such as all enjoyed during the first 1000 years of Christianity. 

What is the Orthodox Church? It is a group of Eastern churches of the Byzantine tradition that were in full communion with Rome during the first millennium, and which all recognize the Patriarch of Constantinople as the first Orthodox bishop. The division between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox is often symbolized by the mutual excommunications of 1054. Still the Catholic Church considers itself to be in almost full communion with the Orthodox Churches. The Second Vatican Council said they “are still joined to us in closest intimacy” in various ways, especially in the priesthood and the Eucharist.

The Orthodox Churches recognize the first seven ecumenical councils as normative for their faith, along with the Sacred Scriptures and other local councils that took place in later centuries.

The Orthodox Churches are organized in 15 autocephalous (independent) churches that correspond in most cases to nations or ethnic groups. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (modern Istanbul) has a primacy of honor among the patriarchs, but his actual jurisdiction is limited to his own patriarchate. As spiritual head of worldwide Orthodoxy, he serves as a point of unity, and has the right to call Pan-Orthodox assemblies.

The Autocephalous Orthodox Church

The Patriarchate of Constantinople (Ecumenical Patriarchate), has jurisdiction in Turkey, Crete, the Dodecanese, and Greeks in the rest of the world outside Greece and Africa. Autonomous churches linked to the Ecumenical Patriarchate exist in Finland and Estonia. Several other jurisdictions of various ethnicities in the Diaspora are also directly under the Patriarchate.

Patriarchate of Alexandria, with jurisdiction in Egypt and the rest of Africa. It includes a native African Orthodox Church in Kenya and Uganda.

Patriarchate of Antioch, with jurisdiction in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Australia, the Americas.

Patriarchate of Jerusalem, with jurisdiction in Israel and Jordan. The autonomous church of Mount Sinai is linked to the Jerusalem Patriarchate.

Russian Orthodox Church, the Patriarchate of Moscow with jurisdiction over most of the former Soviet Union. Autonomous churches in Japan and China are linked to the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Serbian Orthodox Church, a patriarchate with jurisdiction in Yugoslavia, Western Europe, North America and Australia.

The Romanian Orthodox Church, a patriarchate with jurisdiction in Romania, Western Europe and North America.

The Bulgarian Orthodox Church, a patriarchate with jurisdiction in Bulgaria, Romania, Western Europe and North America.

The Georgian Orthodox Church, a patriarchate with jurisdiction in the republic of Georgia.

The Orthodox Church of Cyprus, an archbishopric with jurisdiction in Cyprus.

The Orthodox Church of Greece, an archbishopric with jurisdiction in Greece.

The Orthodox Church of Poland a metropolitanate with jurisdiction in Poland.

The Orthodox Church of Albania, an archbishopric with jurisdiction in Albania.

The Orthodox Church in Czech and Slovak Republics, a metropolitanate with jurisdiction in Czech and Slovak Republics. Its autocephalous status was granted by Moscow in 1951; Constantinople recognizes it only as an autonomous church.

The Orthodox Church in America, a metropolitanate with jurisdiction in North America and a few parishes in Latin America and Australia. Its autocephalous status was granted by Moscow in 1970; Constantinople and most other Orthodox Churches have not recognized this.

The Second Vatican Council, in *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, the Decree on Eastern Catholic Churches, pointed out the special role they have to play “in promoting the unity of all Christians.” The document stated in part as follows:

“The Eastern Churches in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome have a special role to play in promoting the unity of all Christians, particularly Easterners, according to the principles of this sacred Synod’s Decree on Ecumenism first of all by prayer, then by the example of their lives, by religious fidelity to ancient Eastern traditions, by greater mutual knowledge, by collaboration, and by a brotherly regard for objects and attitudes (No. 24).

“If any separated Eastern Christian should, under the guidance of grace of the Holy Spirit, join himself to Catholic unity, no more should be required of him than what a simple profession of the Catholic faith demands. A valid priesthood is preserved among Eastern clerics. Hence, upon joining themselves to the unity of the Catholic Church, Eastern clerics are permitted to exercise the orders they possess, in accordance with the regulations established by the competent authority. (No. 25)”

The Division of Archives and Statistics of the Eastern Orthodox World Foundation in a 1970 estimate reported more than 200 million Orthodox Church members throughout the world. A contemporary estimate puts the number to about 220 million while many Orthodox today claim a total membership of about 300 million. 🌊

Bridging a Thousand Years

Pope John Paul II, from the beginning of his pontificate, has always worked for Christian unity as visible head of the Catholic Church. He sees himself, the Slavic Pope from Poland, as given the

mission to unite East and West.


May 5-9, 2001, Pope John Paul II did something for Christian Unity that has not been accomplished in 1000 years: going for the first time into Greece, as part of a pilgrimage which retraced the steps of the Apostle Paul. It was really the Pope's final action of the Holy Year 2000 Jubilee, closing that year of grace "in the footsteps of St. Paul."

Pope John Paul II became the first pope in history to enter an Islamic mosque, the Omayyad Mosque in Damascus. That mosque is special for Christians because it has a shrine to St. John the Baptist. In early Christian history, it was the site of a Christian basilica dedicated to St. John the Baptist, whose head was allegedly kept here. Muslims took over the basilica in the 8th century and converted it into a mosque, yet, they kept the monument to the Baptist who is venerated by both Christians and Muslims. The Pope's goal was not the mosque but the Baptist's monument. Still, he was met in the mosque on May 6, 2001, by Sheikh Ahmed Kaftaro, Grand Mufti of the Republic, who is Syria's highest Muslim authority.

The Pope's gesture toward Muslims was timely, for just four months later (on September 11) Muslim extremists would attack the United States and endanger worldwide Muslim-Christian conflicts if both sides did not respond properly with calmness and wider vision.

The Pope has made many pleas for an end to violence and for peace in the Middle East. Muslims throughout the world had been moved by the Pope's stop at the Dheisheh Refugee Camp in the Autonomous Palestinian Territories on his Holy Land pilgrimage on March 22, 2000. He upheld the Palestinian right to their own homeland.

Any Greek Orthodox overtures to the Vatican would likely encourage other Orthodox Churches to follow.

The largest Orthodox Christian group in the world is in Russia. And we know that both the Pope and Russia were very much in the message of Our Lady of Fatima when she appeared to three little children in 1917, Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia. 

Catholic, Orthodox and Protestants. How do they differ?

For the first thousand years of Christianity the Orthodox were one with the Roman Catholic Church. They recognized the pope as the chief head for unity in the faith. Ancient writers, fathers of the Church of the first six centuries or so, always gave special recognition of authority to the bishop of Rome, the chief vicar of Jesus Christ, whether these writers were Christians of the East or West.

Then, with geographic separation of many miles, lacking the communications instantly available today, and the switch of the emperor from the West to the East, grave misunderstandings led to Christians of

the East, once in union with the pope, discontinuing to look to him as their visible head as all Christians had for a thousand years.

When in 1054 the separation of the Orthodox took place, they kept their validly ordained bishops, who could trace their powers of ordination in an unbroken line back to the first apostles—just as Roman Catholic bishops could do. The Twelve Apostles ordained by Jesus Christ Himself are the origin of the fullness of the priesthood. We call them bishops, given by Jesus Christ to certain men.

Unlike the Orthodox of the East, who kept their bishops and the seven sacraments along with all the basic doctrines of the faith, the Protestant rebels in the 16th century were quite different. Martin Luther denied the special powers of bishops and therefore of priests. Protestantism dropped the Sacrament of Holy Orders. Thus—and we are most sorry—our separated brethren in Protestant churches no longer have validly ordained bishops or priests. For them the apostolic chain, that is, apostolic succession has been broken. What does this mean?

Without the true priesthood of Jesus Christ, Protestantism does not have a true Eucharist. The Real Presence of Jesus Christ is not present in their Communion service. Their ministers have lost the power to change bread and wine into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Their Communion remains bread and wine, purely and only symbolic of Jesus. Many Protestant bodies claim no more than symbolism for the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Regardless of what they might claim, the Apostolic succession is just not there to effect a valid Eucharist.

In both the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches with a valid priesthood, the bread and wine are changed into the very living Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church uses the word "transubstantiation" to express its faith. Transubstantiation is defined thus: "The way Christ is made present in this sacrament (Holy Eucharist) is none other than by the change of the whole substance of the bread into his Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into his Blood (in the Consecration of the Mass) this unique and wonderful change the Catholic Church rightly calls transubstantiation" (Encyclical, *Mysterium Fidei*, of Paul VI, September 3, 1965).

The faith of the Catholic Church concerning the Holy Eucharist is even more than the Real Presence of Jesus in his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Every time a validly ordained priest consecrates bread and wine at Mass, the Sacrifice of Jesus' death on the Cross is perpetuated. To participate in the Mass is to be present at the same Sacrifice of the Cross offered on Mt. Calvary on the first Good Friday afternoon 2000 years ago. The Sacrifice is the same; only the manner of offering it is different.

The Angel at Fatima in 1916 gave the three little shepherd children Holy Communion. The Angel came in the form of a young man, transparent and much brighter than crystal pierced by the rays of the sun. He

held in his hands a chalice surmounted by a Host, from which some drops of blood were falling into the chalice. Leaving the chalice and the Host suspended in the air, he prostrated himself on the ground and repeated this prayer three times:

“O Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I adore You profoundly. I offer You the most precious Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, present in all the tabernacles of the world, in reparation for the outrages, sacrileges and indifference by which He is offended. Through the infinite merits of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, I beg the conversion of poor sinners.”

The Angel at Fatima is telling us that Holy Communion is really and truly the Body and Blood of our loving Lord Jesus Christ whom we receive in Holy Communion. Jesus is alive in the Holy Eucharist. The Host shedding blood reminds that the Eucharist is also the Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross perpetuated. Fatima reaffirms what the Bible and the Church teaches.

Orthodox bishops who have traveled to Fatima have said that the manner of the Angel’s prostrating before the Most Blessed Sacrament is the same Orthodox bodily position of adoration before the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ. Since the Holy Eucharist is central and so essential to the authentic Christian life in living the full gospel, the ongoing and developing message of Soufanieh as of November 26, 2001, introduced explicitly the Holy Eucharist. “I am giving you my Body and my Blood as a proof of my fidelity and love. Receive from me this sacrament with trust and faith, because this sacrament comforts you, provides you with strength and wisdom and increases you in grace. . . .”

If the Eucharist was not mentioned explicitly in words earlier in the messages of Soufanieh, the sacrificial note was surely there. As early as October 28, 1983, Myrna speaks of the sensations of being pierced by a sharp and pointed object in the palms of her hands. The following November blood appears on her hands, feet and side. It was the beginning of what would be even more pronounced stigmata in the following years. The Eucharist is the same Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross.

The truth of the Eucharist as the Sacrifice of Christ and his Church is expressed in the *Catechism* of the Catholic Church from which the quotations below are taken:

¶1367 “The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross, only the manner of offering is different. And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner . . . this sacrifice is truly propitiatory.”

¶1368 “*The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the Church*. The Church which is the Body of Christ participates in the offering of her Head.

With him, she herself is offered whole and entire. She unites herself to his intercession with the Father for all men. In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of his Body. The lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value. Christ's sacrifice present on the altar makes it possible for all generations of Christians to be united with his offering.

"In the catacombs the Church is often represented as a woman in prayer, arms outstretched in the praying position. Like Christ who stretched out his arms on the cross, through him, with him, and in him, she offers herself and intercedes for all men."

As a baptized member of the Church, Myrna, while not empowered with the Priesthood of Holy Orders, bears witness in her body to the members of the Church joined to the Sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross and perpetuated at the Sacrifice of the Mass.

Our divine Lord spoke explicitly to Myrna about his Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist; "through the Sacraments I unite myself to you."

At the same time that Jesus gave his message of the Eucharist he said, "But the whole is incomplete without your unity at the altar." This is obviously reference to the lack of perfect unity among Christians, even among Orthodox and Catholics. Orthodox and Catholic priests may not concelebrate at the same altar although both have the same Holy Eucharist.

The Act of Consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was something many Orthodox bishops joined the Pope, together with Catholic bishops, in doing on March 25, 1984. The Consecration and First Saturdays are part of one entity requested as Our Lady revealed July 13, 1917, when she said Russia would eventually be converted. Catholics the world over need to continue making the First Saturdays for the conversion of Russia, and hopefully for a total reunion of East and West in the one Church of Jesus Christ.

The Orthodox who separated from unity with the pope, as we have said, kept a valid priesthood. The main thing from the Catholic perspective is to recognize that the pope, as the successor of St. Peter, is the rock of authority and faith for the universal Church. If Orthodox accepted the position of the pope from the Catholic perspective, they would then totally be one with the holy universal Church with the pope as visible head, and Jesus as invisible head. They already have Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. They have the Sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated in their divine liturgies. They have the other sacraments Jesus Christ gave his Church. Pope John Paul II, with a view to reunion, has invited consideration of how the Petrine primacy might be exercised in harmony with Orthodox traditions.

Jesus said to St. Peter: "You are Peter [*petros*="Rock"] and upon this

Rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell will never prevail against it.” The pope is the successor of St. Peter. This Holy Father, Pope John Paul “the Great,” was in Greece in May, 2001. He went to Ukraine in June, 2001, working to reunite the Orthodox and Roman Catholics.

He took some striking risks. On April 7, 2001, he sent a letter to the leader of Ukraine’s largest Orthodox Church, the same leader who publicly asked the Pope not to visit his country in June. The letter was delivered to Metropolitan Vladimir of Kiev by Cardinal Roberto Tucci, chief organizer of papal trips.

Vladimir is head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church which is in communion with the Russian Orthodox Church. Ukraine has two small Orthodox communities which were not opposed to the papal visit scheduled for June 23-27, 2001. Vladimir had taken the position that if the Pope met with other Orthodox communities in Ukraine, communities his Church considers to be in schism, it could mark the end of Catholic-Orthodox relations.

The Pope went and the people, both Catholic and Orthodox, and the faithful from other confessions, felt the spiritual warmth of the message, words and gestures, of the Pope as he came to the East. Ukraine was the fourth Orthodox country that he visited after Romania, Georgia, and Greece. In none of these countries did the Holy Father make a move against the desires of the Orthodox. The Pope worked to open doors and to keep them open. It remained for Christians to help leaders out of their stalemate, which is often very delicate and complicated. In various parts of the East, Orthodox have responded to the attempts of the Catholic Church by accusing it of “proselytizing” their faithful. At the same time the Catholic Church claimed that it had good will in working for Christian Unity.

Pope John Paul II, described as “the most Marian Pope in history,” entrusted his pontificate and his life to the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, and the risks he takes seem repeatedly to work out for better relations.

Damascus, where Pope John Paul II went in May, 2001, is home to Myrna Nazzour, an eastern-rite Melkite Catholic. She is a special messenger for Our Lady and Jesus regarding Christian Unity. Her husband Nicolas is Orthodox. The mission given her by our Lady has had the favor and recognition in Damascus of both the Catholic and Orthodox hierarchy.

I communicated years ago with the former papal nuncio of Syria who verified it. I heard from the Greek Melkite Catholic Metropolitan of that area giving approval for Myrna to come to the Fatima Family Apostolate Congress with also the approval of my bishop in 1993, but I decided to await on this.


Syria is an Arab socialist republic in southwest Asia with its capital, Damascus. Christian communities were formed in apostolic times when

many came to the Christian faith in the area. It is believed that St. Peter established a See at Antioch before going to Rome. Damascus became a center of influence. The area was thus known for great men and great events in the early history of the Church.

Monasticism developed in Syria in the fourth century. So did the Monophysite and Monotheist heresies to which a portion of the Church succumbed. Byzantine Syrians who remained in communion with Rome were given the name Melkite Catholics. Christians of various persuasions—Jacobites, Orthodox and Melkites—were subjected to various degrees of harassment from the Arabs who took over in 638 and from the Ottoman Turks who isolated the country and remained in control from 1516 to the end of World War II.

Damascus, the world's oldest inhabited city, has given the Catholic Church six popes as well as saints and priests over the centuries. Pope John Paul II acknowledged its ancient role in the history of Christianity, when there, calling it the "Pearl of the East."

Myrna's experiences involve the Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh which on special occasions exudes olive oil. About 1990, Our Lady revealed to Myrna that she would not have the stigmata again until the Orthodox Church of the East and the Roman Catholic Church of the West celebrated Easter at the same time. Easter in 2001 fell at the same time for both Orthodox and Catholics, the East and the West.

On Saturday, May 5, 2001, I talked by phone to Myrna and her husband Nicolas in Damascus. They told me that on Holy Thursday, April, 2001, the stigmata returned. On Holy Saturday, April 14, at 2 a.m., the Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh for Christian Unity again shed olive oil. 

To appreciate what has just been written I will review here in brief Soufanieh from the beginning for those who still have no acquaintance. Myrna, Melkite Catholic, was an 18-year-old beautiful young woman, who had recently married Nicolas Nazzour, an Orthodox Christian. They went to Rome for their honeymoon. Their plans for a quiet family life were soon to be interrupted.

It was a Monday, November 22, 1982. Myrna accompanied Alice, her mother-in-law, to the bedside of Leila, Nicolas's sister, who was bedridden with pains which made her scream. Various women were present, including relatives, neighbors and Marie-Rose, Leila's eldest sister. Marie-Rose, seeing the seriousness of the situation, suggested that all present pray for the sick person.

Myrna continues this story saying:

"Suddenly I felt a strange, indescribable thing, all my body shivered, as if a force had come out of me. A young Muslim woman named Mayada Kazaly shouted: 'Myrna, what's on your hands?' Oil was oozing from my hands."

While Myrna almost fainted, others present spontaneously shouted: "Oh! Virgin, help us."

Myrna then rubbed the painful places on Leila's body with her oil-filled hands. Immediately the pain stopped for Leila. Later when Nicolas arrived, he could not help but notice the paleness on Myrna's face and worried about her condition. When Marie-Rose related what they had just been through, Nicolas exploded with laughter and mockingly said to his new wife: "Maybe you ate too much 'labne' (macerated eggplants) and oil has dripped on your hands?"

"*Brother, don't blaspheme*" responded his sister Maria-Rose. Nicolas departed, promising to come back later to pick up his wife. Then Leila's husband Farid arrived and found his wife smiling and busy at domestic chores. "*Thank God, you look better*" is how he greeted her. All agreed.

That evening Myrna was praying again, this time in the presence of Farid and Nicolas after Myrna had washed her hands carefully and dried them. Now at prayer Myrna's hands filled with oil again. This convinced Farid and Nicolas that they were facing a supernatural phenomenon. They agreed with their wives that this oil was a "sign from God."

As Myrna and Nicolas were on their way home they kept asking themselves: "Why would we have been chosen by God?" When others afterwards asked them if they were saints they laughed joyfully. They were not particularly religious, just going to church when necessary.

Myrna would explain it this way, even to the priest, Fr. Elias Zahlaoui:

"Don't delude yourself, Abouna [Arabic for "Father"]. I am 18-years-old. I got married six months ago. All I know about prayer is the 'Lord's Prayer' and the 'Hail Mary.' I know how to make the Sign of the Cross and sometimes go on Wednesdays to the Confraternity of the Virgin with my mother-in-law at the Church of the Holy Cross to attend the service. . . ."

We are describing here the beginnings of a supernatural phenomena that will reach around the world. We are living at a time when mankind is turning away from God. The young often disregard the Truth because they cannot see it, do not learn it properly, are not taught it properly, and often get lost in the ever-increasing number of religious sects and cheap unbalanced spiritualities. We live in a time when even many among their elders have sold themselves for money and pleasure and whose examples have betrayed the Truth. We live in times when evil, Satan and his helpers, are hard at work to divide families, divide people of the Church, divide religious communities from each other, to take away love and unity, and grasp souls.

Myrna and Nicolas more and more soon came to realize: "God is maybe asking something from us."

Myrna prayed as follows:

"My God, what is this oil? I know that it is of divine strength, but

why have you chosen me, so weak, whereas thousands deserve this grace more than I do? In spite of everything, Your will be done. Now, I offer you my actions, my fatigues, my pains, my sufferings and my joys, so that nothing interferes in my veneration for You. O God, I put in You all my hope, because I fear my weakness. Steer me away from any action that You do not want. . . ."

The months ahead would be difficult for Myrna, Nicolas too. Thank God, Nicolas is 20 years older than Myrna and with a certain maturity, which he already has by some experience in life, and in which he would now grow, the two would adapt. But first, and perhaps through their entire lives, there would be anguish, then some serenity; again doubt, then reassurance; then pain and finally joy. The cross of the mission laid on their family would remain for years, doubtlessly until their deaths. They are on a road leading to faith and deepened love, and this with a mission that would touch millions of individuals and thousands upon thousands of families throughout the entire world.

As the author of the book writes, it has been in the goodness of God for him to have worked and shared with various mystics who have had a certain favor, however quietly, of their bishops. I am aware of the diabolic attacks that come to these individuals whom God uses in a special way to bring others to holiness. I am aware of the loneliness they experience even as the world wants to meet them and take their time and disturb their privacy and even their prayer-life, if not protected by God and His holy Mother and the good holy angels, especially St. Michael the Archangel as well as their Guardian Angels.

Myrna's mother on November 25, 1982, having learned of Leila's sudden healing, gave a little appeal to her daughter that she too was suffering very much in her spinal column and asked for her prayers. Myrna then prayed in the presence of the family, while holding a wad of dry cotton in her hand. Oil appeared on Myrna's hands and dampened the cotton which was applied on her mother's back. The pains of her mother ceased immediately.

The next day the entire family accepted Nicolas's suggestion that all of the family observe a day of fast and prayerful thanksgiving in order to give gratitude to God for the oil. This was welcomed by the family.

It was November 27, that same year, as Myrna was doing housework that she noticed the two icons of Our Lady and the Christ Child, enclosed in cheap plastic



The miraculous small Icon, which often exudes oil, is seen enclosed in a glass globe in the Virgin's House.

ivory frames, which Nicolas had brought back from Sofia, Bulgaria. The first one, in wood, was very beautiful and replicates an icon of the 15th century as far as was known. The second icon was one of ten small reproductions Nicolas had bought in Sofia. Myrna noticed the latter was very shiny. She took it into her hands and noticed that drops of oil were forming on the glass cover protecting the reproduction.

Myrna ran to her husband. Surprised and trembling, Nicolas took the small icon from Myrna and placed it on a little decorative plate so that the oil would not fall on the floor. The plate quickly filled with oil to its extremities. Then a large silvery tray was used. They knelt down not knowing what to do.

They asked themselves: “How can oil flow so abundantly out of a picture printed on plain paper?”

Nicolas went to get family members while Myrna remained alone. She was afraid. Then Myrna heard a woman’s voice:

“My daughter Mary, [Myrna], don’t fear, I am with you. Open the doors, don’t deprive anyone from my sight. . . .”

When Nicolas returned with several parents and friends he becomes fearful of what will come of this added dimension of oil. First oil from Myrna, now oil also coming from the Icon of the Virgin and Christ Child.

Nicolas demands that all keep this a secret. “No, Nicolas, I heard a woman’s voice telling me to open the doors and not to deprive anyone from her sight. . . .”

Immediately Nicolas agreed to what his wife was saying. More than 20 years later, the doors of their home remain open all day as thousands

upon thousands have walked into their home unhindered. There they see the Icon; there they pray; there they learn about the messages of Soufanieh.

We have described in brief the very beginnings of what has happened in three decades in Damascus, and is still happening in Soufanieh, a district in Damascus, Syria. We shall return to these events again and again. Permit the author to jump ahead at this time so the reader can learn quickly the great significance where God is leading this new family in Damascus, for the good of peoples everywhere. ~



Myrna presents large Soufanieh Icon to Fr. Fox at conclusion of Mass to bless people with it.

On Holy Saturday, April 14, 2001, at 2:50 p.m., Myrna received a message from Jesus Christ at Soufanieh. “Stay on your path, and I am with you.

Otherwise, I will close the gates of heaven in your faces. But here is Mother suffering . . . praying . . . saying to me: 'O Lord, You are love in its totality!' And I say: Do not despair, O gate of heaven, because I love them and I want them to respond to this love with giving. . . ."

Myrna told me years ago of the great love she had for Our Lady of Fatima. She went to Coimbra, Portugal, where Sr. Lucia lives, the sole survivor of the three children of Fatima who saw Our Lady. There she had a brief encounter with Sr. Lucia.

We know the humility Pope John Paul II showed when he went to the Holy Land in the Great Jubilee Year and broke down many walls of hostility between Jews and Christians. How? By his honesty, simplicity, humility, goodness, his holiness. And the Pope also reaches out to the Orthodox to invite them back into unity with Catholicism, their sister Church.

And what did the Pope do in Greece? In May 2001, after a critical harangue by the Greek church leader, Archbishop Christodoulous, who called on the Pope to apologize for things that took place hundreds of years before, the Pope asked God to forgive whatever wrongs Roman Catholics have committed against their Orthodox brothers and sisters.

Many Orthodox blame Catholics for a litany of offenses, starting with the Great Schism of 1054. They also cite the Fourth Crusade that sacked the Byzantine capital Constantinople in 1204 and the Latin rule of parts of the crumbling empire. The Pope said, in return, that acts like the Fourth Crusade fill today's Catholics with "deep regret."

After the Pope's humble apology for things 800 to 1000 years ago, the demonstrated anger of Orthodox nuns and monks and lay people on the streets of Athens fizzled out. The white-clad Pope said in an address to the Archbishop: "For occasions past and present, when the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by actions and omission against their Orthodox brothers and sisters, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we beg of him."

Christodoulous, who had only grudgingly allowed the Pope to realize his dream of following the footsteps of St. Paul in the region, burst into applause and embraced the Pope. His aide said the Pope's statement was "bold" and that it could help overcome misunderstandings. [The very next day this Orthodox archbishop boarded a plane and flew to Moscow to meet with Patriarch Alexi II—who is head of Russian Orthodox—the largest Orthodox body in the world.]

It is said, Pope John Paul II does not simply allow history to happen, he directs it.

The Pope, since early in his pontificate, was anxious to visit Russia where is the world's largest Orthodox body of Christians resides. The Pope was long anxious to take with him the Miraculous Icon of Our Lady of Kazan which he kept in his papal apartment at the Vatican. Our Blessed Mother on behalf of the Our Lady of Kazan was known in



The Miraculous Icon of Our Lady of Kazan, now at the Vatican.

Russia as Lady Liberatrix and Protectress. The Lady of Soufanieh Icon in Damascus is said to be a replica of or derived as a version of Our Lady of Kazan Icon which has been venerated in Russia for centuries. The Russian Orthodox Church long ago proclaimed two liturgical feast days in her honor, July 8 and October 22.

The Icon of Our Lady of Kazan is one of the most venerated icons in Russia and is inseparable from its long Christian history. The image is linked to the rich sources of Russia's religious life. Kazan is a city on the Volga River located some 500 miles east of Moscow. Invoking Our Lady of Kazan, even taking her image into battle, has spared Russia repeatedly in past centuries.

The Pope keeps a small replica of Our Lady of Kazan in his limousine which he sees when he travels about Rome.

When Pope John Paul II was shot with virus on the bullet and laid long in Gemelli Hospital slowly recuperating in Rome, I went to his hospital with about 100 Youth for Fatima. There beneath his hospital window we sang and His Holiness came to his window and blessed us. At that time I was told that when the Pope arrived at Gemelli Hospital his blood pressure was near zero and he was within seconds of being dead.

The Pope became convinced that Our Lady of Fatima spared his life. He was left in the world to fulfill a special mission, not the least being the work for the reunion of Christians into one fold.

Myrna Nazzour of Damascus, in developing a special love for Our Lady of Fatima, obviously senses a connection of Our Lady between the message of Fatima and that of Soufanieh.

Fatima reminds us that holiness is a condition for the everlasting happiness of heaven; Fatima tells of the reality of sin, as an offense against God and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. It tells of the Christian solidarity of the Mystical Body of Christ; and of Mary as Mediatrix of all grace. Fatima tells of the necessity of penance and prayer for salvation. It tells of the love of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and gives us a call to consecrate ourselves to her Immaculate Heart. In the miracle of Fatima so that all may believe, the spinning of the sun during which there was the apparition of the Holy Family, has been interpreted by the Bishop of Fatima and scholars of Fatima as heaven's call for the sanctification of the family. Both Fatima and Soufanieh are a call for unity and holiness of the family.

It was interesting that Pope John Paul II at Damascus gave a


challenge to families for holiness, for such is also the message of Our Lady of Soufanieh in Damascus.

Fatima is ecclesial—that is, it calls us to live our spiritual lives within the Church with loyalty and devotion to the Holy Father, the pope. Fatima calls us to virtues of purity and modesty, to a spirit of reparation.

Fatima promises us the final triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. And the final triumph I believe will come with the reunion of the East and the West—when the sister churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox, become united: one Church, one fold, one shepherd.

When His Holiness spoke in Damascus, where St. Paul was converted, he said:

“Christian families, the Church looks to you with confidence to pass on to your children the faith which you have received over the centuries since the time of the Apostle Paul. By remaining united and open to all, by always defending the right to life from conception, be homes of light, in full conformity to God’s plan and the true requirements of the human person! Give significant time to prayer, to listening to God’s word and to Christian education, in them you will find effective support to tackle the difficulties of daily life and the great challenges of today’s world. Any faithful and consistent Christian life requires regular participation in the Sunday Eucharist. The Eucharist is a privileged gift where communion with God and others comes about and is proclaimed.”

Because the miracles of Damascus, associated with Our Lady of Soufanieh, are in a largely Muslim country, to appreciate the significance of Soufanieh it is important that we have some knowledge of Islam. 

Islam

According to Dr. John Borelli, executive secretary for Interreligious Relations, or U.S. National Council of Catholic Bishops (NCCB):


“Islam,” meaning “grateful surrender (to God),” originated with Muhammad and the revelation he is believed to have received. Muslims acknowledge that this revelation, recorded in the Koran, is from the one God and do not view Islam as a new religion. They profess that Muhammad was the last in a long series of prophets, most of whom are named in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, beginning with Adam and continuing through Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and down to Muhammad.

“Muslims believe in the one God, Allah in Arabic, and cognate with Hebrew Elohim and the ancient Aramaic Elah. According to the Koran, God is one and transcendent, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, all-merciful and all-compassionate Ruler and Judge. God possesses numerous other titles, known collectively as the 99 names of God.

The profession of faith states: 'There is no god but the God and Muhammad is the messenger of God.'

"The essential duties of Muslims are to: witness the faith by daily recitation of the profession of faith; worship five times a day facing in the direction of the holy city of Mecca; give alms; fast daily from dawn to dusk during the month of Ramadan; make a pilgrimage to Mecca once if possible.

"Muslims believe in final judgment, heaven and hell. Morality and following divinely revealed moral norms are extremely important to Muslims. Some dietary regulations are in effect. On Fridays, the noon prayer is a congregational (*juma*) prayer which should be said in a mosque. The general themes of prayer are adoration and thanksgiving. Muslims do not have an ordained ministry.

"The basis of Islamic belief is the *Qu'ran*, the created word of God revealed to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel over a period of 23 years. The contents of this sacred book are complemented by the *Sunna*, a collection of sacred traditions from the life of the prophet Muhammad, and reinforced by *Ijma*, the consensus of Islamic scholars of Islamic Law (*Shariah*) which guarantees them against errors in matters of belief and practice." 

Conciliar Statement of Vatican II

The official attitude of the Catholic Church toward Islam is stated as follows in the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*, No. 3):

"The Church has a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his virgin Mother they also honor, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason, they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms, deeds and fasting.

"Over the centuries many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims. The sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding; for the benefit of all men, let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values."

Pope John Paul II has met with Muslim leaders and delegations both in Rome and during his trips abroad. He addressed large gather-


ings of Muslims in Morocco, Indonesia, Mali and elsewhere. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has held formal dialogues with Islamic organizations from time to time.

Following the example of Abraham, Jews, Christians and Muslims strive to give to God the place in their lives which is his due as Fount and Origin, Master and Guide, and Ultimate Destiny of all beings. Yet, they are aware too that there are also other believers, men and women with religious sentiments, who are worthy of respect. It is in the name of God that every authentic believer shows respect for each human person.

Mary is Islam-Christianity link. Mary is the only woman mentioned in the Koran. The Koran regards Mary as holy and says that she is the most pure woman in the world. The Muslim world may have different interpretations of the Koran but they all have a profound respect for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

When Iran reestablished diplomatic relations with the Vatican in 1999 some of the Muslim leaders learned about Mary's appearance at Fatima, Portugal for the first time. It was somewhat shocking to them. Fatima was the daughter of Mohammed and the Portuguese town was named by the Moors when they occupied the country. The Muslims found the coincidence startling and concluded that the apparitions were a message that Mary wished to mediate and bring peace to the world. Sura 19 ("Suras" are equivalent to books in the Bible) is entitled "Maryam: Mary," The Sura describes the virgin birth of Jesus and the special place Mary has in the Moslem faith.

The Muslims also share a profound respect for life, notwithstanding a fringe element of terrorists. At the United Nation's Beijing and Cairo Population Conferences, it was the Muslim world that came to the side of the Pope and supported pro-life. The resentment of America by many Muslims is reportedly more America's preoccupation with material goods than it is with its religion.

Our Lady choosing Muslim country for the special message for Christian Unity brings with it a message of our relationship to Muslims. Happening in the area of St. Paul's conversion and baptism contains in itself a message to return to our early Christian roots, to "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5). 



(Above) A photo collage of Myrna suffering during Holy Week. Shown in front is the chalice used by Pope John Paul II when he was in Damascus in May, 2001. (Right) Pictured with the light blue awning is the home of Nicolas and Myrna Nazzour. The iron railing is that through which the Virgin passed.





(Top) Myrna's and Nicolas's wedding day. The phenomenon of Soufanieh began about six months later. (Bottom) Myrna and Nicolas and their children, John, Emmanuel and Miriam, with the author as he was researching for this book in September, 2001.



Maya Patsalides, center, was an invaluable interpreter and translator. She also translated Father's homilies as he offered Mass daily before the Soufanieh Icon.



(Left) The Holy Family Icon in the Virgin's House of Soufanieh is immediately beside the Miraculous Icon. This same family icon is in thousands of Fatima Family homes.

Chapter 2

Historic Syria, Christians, Muslims and Mary



DAMASCUS, WHERE POPE John Paul II went in May 2001, is home to Myrna Nazzour, an Eastern-rite Melkite Catholic. She is a special messenger for Jesus and Our Lady regarding Christian Unity. Her husband Nicolas is Orthodox. The mission given her by our Lady has had the interest in Damascus and beyond of both Catholics and Orthodox.

Byzantine Syrians who remained in communion with Rome were given the name Melkite Catholics. Christians of various persuasions—Jacobites, Orthodox and Melkites—were subjected to various degrees of harassment from the Arabs who took over in 638 and from the Ottoman Turks who isolated the country and remained in control from 1516 to the end of World War I.

The independence of the Syrian Arab Republic dates from April 17, 1946. Syria is proud of its ancient patrimony as a cradle of civilization and of the world's two great monotheistic religions.

Syria has a history of sometimes being the seat of an empire and sometimes a part of an empire. A great Semitic empire centered in northern Syria about 4,500 years ago and extended from the Red Sea to what is now modern Turkey and east to Mesopotamia. At Jesus' birth, 2,500 years later, "when Quirinus was governor of Syria," the entire Mediterranean world was under Rome.

In 636 Syria came under Muslim rule. The ancient city of Damascus became the capital of the Omayyad Caliphate, the Muslim empire that extended from Spain to India, 663 to 750. Syria and all the Near East was part of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years before World War I. After the war, until its independence, Syria was governed by France with a mandate from the League of Nations.

Syria today is a rapidly developing country of nearly 17 million people, most of whom are Muslim. About ten percent of the population is Christian, including 309,000 members of various Catholic churches.

Fifty percent of the total population of approximately 17 million are below the age of 23. Syria is a secular state and yet the president must be Muslim. The Christian churches have freedom to maintain their institutions and practices for their people. In some ways, such as tax exemptions, Christians are favored by the government.

Although eight earlier popes were Syrian-born, Pope John Paul II was the first pope to visit Syria in modern times. Syrian and papal flags were flying, and the President of Syria, Dr. Bashar Assad, the ministers of his government and all the patriarchs and bishops of Syria were there to welcome the Pope, May 5, 2001. The President laced his welcoming remarks with references to Syria's rich Christian and Muslim heritage.

An amazing event took place on the Pope's first full day in Syria. He went to greet the Muslim leaders of Syria in the Omayyad Great Mosque, for 13 centuries considered one of the most important mosques in Islam. Hundreds of robed and turbaned sheiks and scholars awaited the Pope in the big porticoed courtyard outside the doors of the mosque. The Pope first visited the memorial of St. John the Baptist. A Byzantine church was built to enshrine the head of the Baptist, but it was rebuilt and enlarged as a mosque in the eighth century. The Muslims honoring what they believe is the tomb of the head of St. John the Baptist and the Pope paying his respects at that tomb can motivate Christians to invoke the intercession of St. John the Baptist for Christian Unity.

The Baptist so effectively preached a repentance to make ready for the Lord's first coming. Intercession from his place in heaven would surely be concerned that all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord, God and Savior be one in Jesus Christ. He would also be concerned that Muslims who honor his remains in the Omayyad Great Mosque accept Jesus Christ as Lord, God and Savior.

Pope John Paul II was the first pope ever to visit a mosque in the history of Islam. Sheikh Ahmed Kaftaro of the great mosque welcomed the Pope after he emerged from the mosque. Sheikh Kaftaro has long been an advocate of Muslim-Christian dialogue and understanding. He once was received by the Pope in Rome and now there was a reciprocation for the Pope himself.

It was my privilege on September 17, 2001, in Damascus to have an audience with His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I, Prince Patriarch of Antioch and all the world. He is described as "Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church." Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, Melkite Catholic priest, acquainted with the unusual happenings of Soufanieh from the beginning, accompanied me to the audience with Patriarch Ignatius Zakka I. Fr. Elias assured me in advance that this Patriarch was a very holy man. I gained the same impression from my visit with him.

Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, born in Damascus in 1932, studied at the Greek-Melkite Catholic seminary of Ste-Anne in Jerusalem. He was ordained in July 1959, devoting himself to university youth while teaching at

Damascus University. A parish priest of Our Lady of Damascus since 1977, he organized a choir named “Choeur-Joie” which has over 450 members belonging to all the Christian communities. He was a privileged witness since the beginning of the Soufanieh events. He is an author of several books. He is highly respected, well-known for his search for truth, his integrity, his spirit of poverty and abnegation. He is described as an apostle, illuminated and set ablaze by Jesus Crucified.

Myrna received a personal message in December, 1982 regarding Fr. Elias Zahlaoui:

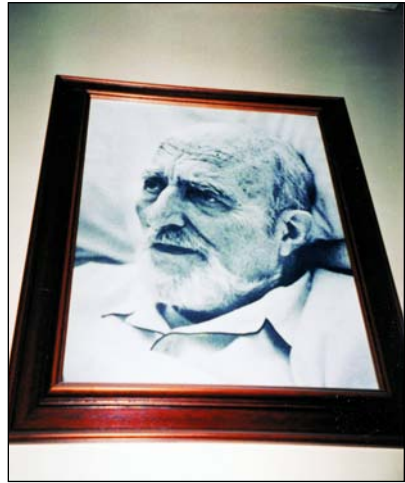
“My son Elias, I, myself, have lifted you up from the ailing bed, and I made you leave your church to come here and serve me. Carry on your work of spreading the faith. You are an apostle. You are good. I, myself, am aware of your long struggle since the holy month of July. I know you struggle with yourself and with all those who surround you and especially with your church and the other churches. You are an apostle. You are good. The unity which you are seeking will happen.”

I was able to interview His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I in his audience hall at his Patriarchal See in Damascus. Before I departed this Patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church presented to me a book in English, “*The Quest for Unity*”—*An Apostolic*

Journey of Goodwill. It was written by Dr. Daniel Babu Paul and was published by the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Damascus, Syria.

This book featured, in addition to much historical information in English, many colorful pictures including the Patriarchal Delegation to the Ecumenical Summit at the Vatican in June, 1984. The Summit at the Vatican culminated in the Joint Declaration signed by their Holinesses the Pope and the Patriarch of Antioch.

To quote Daniel Babu Paul in the preface: “According to this declaration the Christological controversy which had led to the alienation of the two Churches has been laid at rest for good. To enable the readers to appreciate its significance I have devoted some space to introduce the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, to which I feel proud to belong, the Christological controversy in the early centuries and the relatively recent attempts at healing the breach. This is not meant to be a scholarly



Fr. Joseph Maloui, so important in the Soufanieh events, is shown on his sick bed not long before he died, March 5, 2000.

dissertation on the subject; it is only a general background for the uninitiated. . . . I am grateful to His Holiness the Patriarch for kindly according apostolic approval to this work. . . .”

Of the “Apostolic Journey of Goodwill” to the Vatican, Patriarch Zakka wrote: “The challenge that the world has placed before the Christian Church can be faced only through beginning together which is the vision of our Lord expressed in His ‘High Priestly Prayer’ seen in the 17th Chapter of St. John’s Gospel. Our visit to His Holiness Pope John Paul II and the consequent joint declaration is an important step in this direction. Hence, we consider our trip to the Vatican as an historical event. . . .”

Dr. Daniel Babu Paul begins his book by quoting Fr. Bede Griffiths: “The Syrian Church . . . is the remnant of a once great and glorious Church, which extended its sway from Antioch on the shores of the Mediterranean right across Asia to India and China. . . . Its importance for Christendom as a whole remains very great, both because of the beauty and antiquity of its prayers and its rites, and because it is the one surviving link with the ancient Aramaic Church which was the Mother Church of all Christendom.”

Then Dr. Paul continues:

“From the beginning of the Church the Patriarch was [existed]. The Church did not have any elaborate organizational structure during the apostolic times but it had its Patriarch in the person of St. Peter, the Chief of the Apostles. There were also bishops, presbyters and deacons. It was in the fourth century, after the conversion of Emperor Constantine, that the Church built around itself an organizational frame.

“The Throne of Antioch was established by St. Peter in 37 A.D. After his departure for Rome, where he courted martyrdom, he was succeeded by two patriarchs, Mar Eudios and Mar Ignatius Noorono. One looked after the Jewish converts and the other the Gentile converts. After Mar Eudio passed away, Mar Ignatius Noorono became patriarch for both Gentiles and Jews. From that time onwards the Church came to be known as the Universal Syrian Church. The expression “Universal” meant that it encompassed all Christians whatever their origin.

“The Syrian Orthodox Church was the original church established in Jerusalem and grafted in Antioch by the Arameans and other Gentile converts. Its liturgical heritage and theological and missionary record are unique. It is rich in all the best traditions of the undivided Church of the first five centuries. Antioch was the center of Christianity in Asia. It had at one time presided over a flourishing church with 107 archbishoprics extending as far as China. . . .”

“Fr. Bede Griffiths says:

“In the course of time the Syrian church with its liturgy in Syriac spread all over the East from Syria to Mesopotamia and Persia and even to China and India, . . . with all its wealth of liturgical, doctrinal and spir-

itual life, the Syrian church possessed a spirit of missionary enterprise which carried it right across Asia to China and India and made it at one time the most widely extended church in Christendom.'

"The monasteries of the church were at one time famous both for the number of monks and for their contribution to the life of the church. It is recorded that in the fifth century the church had 600,000 monks. There was a time when there were 90,000 monks in the 300 monasteries in the mountains of Edessa, 12,000 in St. Matthew's near Mosul and 6,300 in St. Basu's near Homs.

"Among these monasteries perhaps the most significant was St. Mark's in Jerusalem. That is where our Lord had His Last Supper, the house of John Mark; that is where the Holy Quorbono was established; that is where Jesus appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection; and that is where His mother and disciples waited in prayer between Ascension and Pentecost. Later on, that Upper Room was consecrated as a church dedicated to the Mother of God. A Syriac inscription of the sixth century discovered there in 1940 says: 'This is the house of Mary, mother of John also called Mark. The apostles consecrated it as a church after the name of Mary, the God-bearer. It was rebuilt in 73 A.D. after King Titus destroyed Jerusalem.'

"The Syrian church produced many scholars. Bardaisan, Mar Aprem, Mar Balai, Mar Yacoub of Srug, Bar Ebraya and Bar Saleebe are but a few of them. It is interesting to note that some of the thoughts shaped in the West in the later centuries had already been anticipated in their writings. 'Man is a small world,' said Harder. This concept of man being an epitome of the world was discussed by Mar Ahodemeh, Catholicos of the East, in the sixth century. Some of Galileo's theories of astronomy were treated in the book 'The Cause of all Causes' in the tenth century. Even Nietzsche's theory of the superman was discussed in that book.

"The later historical experience of the Syrian Church has been similar to that of its Master, of repeated crucifixions and resurrections. The Patriarchate had to be shifted from place to place because of persecution. The survival of the church to this day is indeed a miracle, a work of God.

"The Biblical heritage of this church is significant, too. In 404, one Daniel translated the Bible into Armenian. In the seventh century the Syrian fathers translated the Bible into Arabic under orders of Patriarch John II, in response to a request by the Prince of Jessera, Abi Waqqos El Ansari. In 1221, John Joseph, a Syrian priest from Taflis, translated it into Persian and in this century Corepiscopo Mathen Konat, the Malankara Malpan then, translated into Malayalm. . . .

"The Syrian Orthodox Church is spread over all the continents of the world—except, of course, Antarctica. The total number is small, only around five million. Of this about two million are in India, where we have nearly 1300 churches. . . . There are 13 Metropolitans in India besides the Catholicos; there are also Metropolitans in West Asia,

Europe and North and South Americas; one is to be shortly appointed to Africa. . . .

"It is well-known that Christological differences between Rome and the East led to the end of what one may call the Nicean era when the Patriarchal thrones and the churches under them were in full communion. The council of Chalcedon is generally recognized as the watershed marking this distinction. . . ."

It is not the purpose of the book on Our Lady of Soufanieh to give a detailed or precise study of the problems which developed centuries ago. It was encouraging to read in the book, *The Quest For Unity*, presented me by the Patriarch of Antioch, "It is now widely accepted that the difference was one of emphasis. . . . The theological formulations were not unaffected by the political situation in the Empire."

It has always been a mystery to me and many how in the seventh century Mohammedanism could have such a fast conquest among areas of the once-Christian East, which was in communion with the See of Peter in Rome. In making my study on Our Lady of Soufanieh in Damascus and heaven's call for Christian Unity, I could not help but wonder if the controversies among Christians of earlier centuries had contributed not only to divisions among Christians, but to the widespread of Islamism among Muslims today.

My suspicion, not based on any study in depth, was strengthened when I read in Daniel Babu Paul's book, *The Quest for Unity*: "The judgement of the efflux of time on this controversy is best summarized in the following words of Walker: 'The effect of the Christological controversies was disastrous to church and state. By the close of the sixth century the Rome state church of the East had been rent, and separated churches, Nestorian and Monophysite, had been torn from it. Egypt and Syria were profoundly disaffected toward the government and religion of Constantinople—a fact that largely accounts for the rapid conquest of those lands by Mohammedanism in the seventh century.'"

Now in the 21st century as dialogue intensifies between the Church and Muslims, Mary is being seen more and more as a link. The Virgin Mary occupies an important position in the Koran on the historical and dogmatic plane. In addition to being the object of as many as 34 direct or indirect references, Mary also gives Sura XIX its name and is its central figure as the Mother of Jesus.

In its edition of April 13, 1978, *L'Osservatore Romano* (weekly newspaper of the Holy See) carried an article by Giancarlo Finazzo on "The Virgin Mary in the Koran." He wrote as follows:

"The characteristic note of references to the Virgin in the Koran and, to an even greater extent, in Islamic tradition, can be seen both in the information about her genealogy and her childhood—a part of which is more detailed than in the four Gospels—and in the language and way of narration which are seen to be particularly significant.

Without going deeply into the question of the validity of the information and of the vast Islamic exegesis or “Mariology” to which it has given rise, we will limit ourself here to recalling that the sources of Moslem tradition are, in this connection, *The Arab Gospel of Childhood*, the *Protogospel of James*, the *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*, the traditions of Judaizing Christians and the *Hadith*.

“To confirm the extraordinary value of the person of Mary, the fact that to her, alone among creatures, and to her Son, is attributed a nature exempt from all sin, is sufficient. We know that the Islamic religion ignores the concept of original sin, it attributes to man, however, a natural defectiveness which makes him impure and imperfect from birth. Nevertheless, in a famous *Hadith* attributed to the Prophet, it is affirmed: ‘every child is touched by the devil as soon as he is born and this contact makes him cry. Excepted are Mary and her Son’. From this *Hadith* and from verses 35-37 of Sura III, Moslem commentators have deduced and affirmed the principle of Mary’s original purity. God, according to the Koranic text, granted the wish of Anna who consecrated to him Mary, about to be born, and the One to whom she would give birth (III,37). God predestined Mary and purified her, raising her above all women (III,45).

“After this premise it is not surprising that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, though only implicitly contained in verses III, 31, 37, is unequivocally recognized by the Islamic religion. The recognition arises without difficulty also from the repeated and always unanimous evaluation of the extraordinary person of Mary and of her pure life (III, 42; XXI 91; LXVI 12) which set her, with her Son, above every other created being.

“Mary’s childhood, as seen through the Koran narration and Islamic tradition, is entirely a miracle. Mary grows under direct divine protection, she is nourished daily by an angel (III, 32) and has visions of God every day. Everything contributes to making her and her Son a *signum* for mankind (V, 79, XXI, 91, XXIII, 50). But if the detailed narration of Mary’s childhood confirms the exceptional value of her person, it is necessary to stress that the greatness of Mary is completely related to the extraordinary event constituted by the birth of her Son Jesus. The fearful and sweet vicissitudes that precede and accompany the birth and the childhood of her whom God chose above all women, are, in fact, nothing but the prelude to the coming of the Messiah (III,40). Therefore, in the intentions of Mahomet and the whole Islamic tradition, the advent of the Man generated by the Word (III, 45) finds in the history of the little Mary the mysterious preceding fact that prepares the believer, even more than the Gospels themselves do, for an expectation full of awe and hope.

“This atmosphere, so charged with expectation and wonder, certainly does not disappear at the moment of the annunciation—a moment

that for Mary is the highest and most mysterious one in her earthly life, and that reveals to her at last the significance of her function in the history of men. The Koran does not indicate the place in which this mystery was carried out (XIX, 16). It asserts, on the contrary (III, 42 FF; XX, 17), that God sent his Spirit under the semblance of a handsome young man who, similarly to what is narrated in the *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*, was the Archangel Gabriel, often identified in ancient time with the Spirit of truth or at times divine Spirit (*ruh ul-amin* and *ruh Allah*, XVI, 102, XIX, 17, XXVI, 193). It should be pointed out that in the Koran version Mary does not utter the *fiat* which expresses her responsible acceptance of the divine will. Here she merely asks, "How can I give birth to a son if no man has touched me?"; receiving the answer: "Just so! God creates what he wants: when he decides something, it is enough that he should say, let it be! and it is" (III, 147, XIX, 203). A version that confirms the typically Islamic sense of the absolute authority and power of God, and the complete submission of man to his will. . . .

"The Koran gives no details about the birth of Jesus. It at once presents Mary who, returning among her people and showing them the Child, becomes the object of terrible slanders. The episode, brief but dramatic, is suddenly solved when the Infant, speaking unexpectedly from the cradle, takes his Mother's defense and exonerates her from all blame (XIX, 30-33). This miracle, to which the Koran refers more than once (e.g., III, 46; V, 113), is among those that have made the most impression on the imagination of Moslem believers and that are still alive in their conscience. The episode, however, has also a kerygmatic importance for Islamic theology, since the fact that the Child speaks from the cradle is a violation of natural laws and therefore bears witness to the greatness of the Spirit that is in him. . . .

"Those who do not know the Islamic religion may be surprised to learn that Mahomet defended Mary's virginity, or that he recognized her as the woman chosen by God for a function that was to be unique in history. Mahomet's commitment to defend her and exalt her, also explains his harsh condemnation of the Jews (e.g., IV, 156), guilty of persisting in the slander and in refusing to admit Mary's unique role. It is necessary to clarify, however, that, also for Mahomet, Mary is unimaginable if dissociated from her Son: the divine election and the purity of the Mother are directly proportioned to the qualities of the Son, the moment of their interdependence is greatly felt, therefore, since the historical greatness of Mary is conditioned by that of her Son, and the Son in his turn depends on his Mother, who constitutes the indispensable promise for his presence on earth. In the Koran Christ is called repeatedly *Issa ibn Maryam*—"Jesus son of Mary" (V, 19, 75, 81, 113, XIX, 34)—a name which if it will become perhaps the best known one in the Islamic world, will also be the one that characterizes most the figure of Christ. This correlation, which has led Moslem religious thought to affirm the indissolubility of the dual

concept Mary-Jesus and to base its refutation of Christian doctrine on it, seems to have its foundation in the principle of necessity. The negation of Christ's divinity finds its reason, in fact, precisely in Mary's human nature, that is, in the genetic relationship which, entailing the transmission of properties, would exclude a leap of quality from Mother to Son.

"This conception, in which there is also inherent the idea of the primacy of the female line over the male line (in the Koran narration of Mary's life, while the person of Zacharias, the Virgin's uncle and guardian, is thwarted by the constant presence of the Angel of the Lord; that of Joseph is completely ignored), is due, in our opinion, more than to the influence of the apocrypha, to an ancient way of feeling that is characteristic of the Semites of Arabia. It is a way of feeling which is also alive in Mahomet and which leads to mental operations of the analogical type, to a thought geared less to speculation than to the pursuit of parallelisms, to the concordance of diverse but congruent elements, and therefore to the vision of a firm reality, because it is founded on perfect and therefore immutable relationships, which seem to exclude the possibility of gradual evolution.

"What Mahomet and his commentators failed to grasp intellectually is the concept that the presence of God can come about in different ways, realizing itself as a circumstantial and determined presence, without causing for this reason any alternation in God himself. This presence, furthermore, may have the character of a gradual and growing manifestation, and may mark a new temporal effect at the very moment in which God sets up a new relationship with his creatures. That Islamic theology should find it so difficult to grasp this concept seems almost incomprehensible when it is remembered that Mahomet himself, in addition to affirming with unusual forcefulness the omnipotence of God, also perceived a certain development of God's manifestation of himself through his 'messengers,' and recognized Moses, and particularly Jesus and himself, as having a role which, though not well defined theoretically, seems superior to that of the other prophets.

"In this case, too, mention should be made, for the sake of equity, of the doctrinal difficulties connected with the Arab social and religious environment in the sixth and seventh centuries, which Mahomet had to cope with and by which he was conditioned in no small degree. Also the historical figure of Mary raised problems for him. At the end of the century, in fact, precisely some Christians of Arabia had introduced the Marian cult which, in the time of Mahomet, had already degenerated into worship of the Virgin as the third person of the Holy Trinity. The inevitable disapproval and condemnation by the prophet of Islam thus involved the historical person of Mary in new polemics." (Taken from *L'Osservatore Romano*, April 13, 1978, page 4.)

We chose to give considerable space above to "the Virgin Mary in the Koran," the position of Muslims and their link to Mary, the Mother

of Jesus, with good reason. The happenings at Soufanieh for Christian Unity originate in a country largely Muslim. Muslims come to the Naz-zour House of the Virgin in Damascus. We see the call of heaven, renewed strongly in our times for Christian Unity, to involve also, a call to Muslims through Mary, to embrace the divinely revealed religion of Christianity.


Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world in terms of numbers. We are grateful they believe in one God and venerate Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The miracles and messages of Soufanieh are for the Muslims too. 🌀



Icon placed into bricks at the street entrance of the Nazzour home (18 Soufanieh Street, Damascus). The Virgin asked the Nazzours to open their door to all. People stop on the street to pray before it.

Chapter 3

Signs of the Finger of God Here

OW KNOWN AS Myrna, her name before marriage was Mary Kourbet Al-Akhras. She was born in 1964 of a Greek-Orthodox Mother and a Greek-Catholic father. Her childhood was considered normal without any serious sickness or accident. She studied in both Catholic and Orthodox Christian schools as well as in government schools. She was an average student. She discontinued school before receiving the unified Syrian baccalaureate diploma. Myrna is by nature of jovial character. Her close friends in Damascus told me that at the time when the supernatural occurrences take place, “she is not the Myrna we know.”

Before the supernatural interventions which began in 1982, Myrna’s knowledge of religion was very basic, nothing advanced. When she was only 18-years-old she married Nicolas Nazzour, a Greek-Orthodox man, in mid-May, 1982. Myrna’s parents were opposed to the marriage because of the age difference. They gave in, seeing their daughter’s determination since she felt a “real admiration” for Nicolas. Nicolas, who had not been considering marriage previously, liked Myrna immediately upon meeting her.

The marriage took place in the Nazzour home. It was reported that Nicolas did not want a Church wedding, implying his lack of religious fervor. Nicolas had a relative that died not long before the wedding was to take place and thus his request that the marriage take place in the home, rather than a festive wedding at church. The marriage of Nicolas and Myrna was followed by a honeymoon to Rome.

Since the message of Soufanieh includes the call for families to be domestic churches, it may well be divine providence that it developed that this family begins with the Sacrament of Matrimony being administered in their home.

Myrna told me that when she announced to her family that she was going to marry Nicolas who was 20 years older than she, her brother became angry, and hit her. About 20 years later when she related this to me, she laughed about it.

The unusual phenomenon began on Saturday, November 27, 1982, on the eve of the First Sunday of Advent, which was only about six months after their marriage.

One day as I sat with the Nazzour family for a noon meal, suddenly Nicolas said to me: "Tell me, Father, why did God chose me for this?" I answered: "Because God knew you would accept and do His will as a husband in this case since in Christian marriage the two are one." He replied: "A young man would never have been able to handle it."

Nicolas later said to me: "If you know Myrna, she is a jewel. I am 20 years older and have had many experiences in life. After these years with Myrna I can say she is a jewel. Anyone who accepts God's will and accepts suffering is a jewel. Everyone has a mission from God. My mission often was to be a babysitter as Myrna often had to travel and also to pray with people. I had to take care of the children."

He continued: "I think it is the first time in an Islamic country that there has been an icon on the street (in front of our house), and Christians stop on the street to pray to the Blessed Mother before the Icon." The Blessed Mother had asked that a stone be removed so this Icon could be placed outside at the entrance to their home.

Nicolas added: "Myrna has had to pray with people even while at home. There was no time for her to handle all the Soufanieh needs and take care of children. God gave us no children until four and a half years after marriage. I love children. Before the children were born Myrna would hold other people's children and cry. She would say: "It is God's will we are not having children." By then I had witnessed that this was no ordinary family. There was little privacy. The world would come in as the door was always open. There was no need to knock. They just came in. It is what the Blessed Mother had requested.

Nicolas had met me at the airport shortly after I arrived at 2:30 p.m. local time at Damascus. He felt badly that I was there a few minutes before he found me. I assured him it was all right. "No," he said, "it is terrible I was not here immediately." That immediately informed me of the great concern he and his family would extend to me the week I would be at their home.

Getting into the car, within minutes, he mentioned to me that we must work for unity. I was surprised to have him get into the subject of unity so quickly. Then he told me about what had happened during my flight from Australia to Syria. Terrorists, expected to be extreme Muslims, like Osama bin Laden's people, had totally destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center, and struck the Pentagon. Thousands were killed. Also, the Pentagon had been crashed into by a third plane and a fourth plane intended for terrorism had crashed into the countryside of Pennsylvania when passengers resisted the terrorists. All planes in the United States were grounded. This situation doubtlessly prompted Nicolas to introduce to me quickly the need to work together for unity.



The message of Our Lady of Soufanieh is artistically written on the walls within the Virgin's House of Soufanieh. The branches of the vine have a message on each leaf.

Being in Syria where Arabic is spoken, although Nicolas speaks English freely and fluently and also Myrna with some hesitation, I was most anxious to hear news from the United States. Temporarily they were able to get CNN. It showed the horrible crumbling of the Trade Towers, people running, smoke, ashes over the city, etc. The commentator quoted a lady in New York, who asked: "Is there no longer a sign of God's presence?" To this Nicolas responded aloud that there is. We were watching the news from his home where their occurs daily great signs of God's presence.

In the months after I returned to the United States, it seemed that millions in America were

learning something about Islam for the first time. Doubtlessly many Muslim people were also coming to realize the extremism among Islamic Fundamentalists which led to the acts of terrorism on September 11, 2001. There are extremists among Christian Fundamentalists too. In both cases, it is not true religion when hatred and violence is involved.

Nicolas explained to me that it seems Soufanieh's mission is for union with Islam too. Holy Mary told Myrna, "Open the doors . . . Do not forbid anyone to visit me. . . ."

I asked Nicolas: "How do you keep up the spirit of joy with people coming all the time?" He responded: "Fr. Malouli would advise us: 'God accomplishes everything. Take it easy. Do not hurry. God does everything right.' Sometimes I feel tired. I sleep only for my body. My spirit never gets tired. Before I married I wanted the people to leave after a half hour. Now I accept whatever. It's not my human nature to be this way. God is helping me in this. It's not natural.

"Before marriage I worked in Saudi Arabia. God gave me success there. I made enough money so when I came back here to live, I had

enough money to go on. God was preparing me for this without my knowledge. We put up a sign 'No donations' from the beginning. Before I would accept three or four people for a half hour. Now I accept thousands of people. Who makes me strong? GOD."

Fr. Joseph Malouli who shall appear in this book from time to time, has proven to be invaluable to the Soufanieh movement. From the beginning, Fr. Malouli recorded everything in writing. He was almost constantly at the Nazzour home, and he recorded everything, it seems, almost second by second. Fr. Zahlaoui describes Fr. Malouli's role this way: "[He] succeeded in developing a file so detailed that a psychoanalysis professor who teaches in Belgium, Germany and the United States, said: 'I have presented the file prepared by Fr. Malouli as being the best scientific file that I have ever seen.' This occurred because of the notes that Fr. Malouli took day by day, minute by minute, second by second, something I never would have thought of doing. Or perhaps I would have thought about it a few months later, but by then I would have forgotten a lot."

Nicolas told me that even though the doors of the home are always open nothing has ever been stolen. No one has ever bothered anything in their home. One day I happened to be alone in the Soufanieh home as Myrna had to go to school for the children's sake and Nicolas was away having repairs done on their 1964 car. People came and went as usual as I observed them in the home.

I had the occasion when alone to write down some of what is on the wall of the main room of their home where the public comes to pray and read the inscriptions on the wall. In one place there is a picture of the Icon and branches and leaves extending out from it with some of the messages of Soufanieh. Below are excerpts from different messages as found on the branches and leaves:

"The Church is the kingdom of heaven on earth. Whoever divided it has done wrong and whoever rejoiced in its division has done wrong." 3/24/1983.

"All that I ask for is that all of you may unite in Me, just as I am present in every one of you." 11/26/1988.

"Do not be afraid, my daughter, that I tell you that you are seeing me for the last time until the Feast [Easter] is unified." 11/26/1990.

"Do not be fragmented like the elders. You shall teach the generations the word of unity, love and faith." 3/24/1983.

"But you, my daughter, will not hear my voice until the feast is one." 4/14/1990.

"You are my Church and you belong to me; unless this heart has chosen to follow another god." Los Angeles. 8/14/1988.

"The Church that Jesus adopted is one Church because Jesus is one." 3/24/1983.

“Tell my children that I ask them for unity. And I do not request it from those who pretend that they are working for union.” 9/7/1988.

“Go and preach to all nations and tell them without fear, to work for unity.” 11/26/1987.

“The Church is the kingdom of heaven on earth. He who has divided it has done wrong, and he who has rejoiced for its divisions has also done wrong.” Hassake 8/8/85. ~



After copying the above message from the wall of the Soufanieh home, I decided after a time to visit the park across the street. There is the eucalyptus tree from which the Mother of God came and stood on the terrace of their home. I prayed the divine office in the park and was thus gone for some time. I had left my small luggage with valuables, passport, etc., in the main room where the public comes to visit and pray. When I returned everything was as I had left it. With thousands coming and going during the year, it appears the Virgin protects this home in a special way.

Nicolas said to me: “What I made in Saudi Arabia makes it possible to live reasonably well. God planned things out long ago before either I or Myrna were born. My hobby is learning languages. I speak German, French, English and Dutch. God prepared me to translate for Myrna.”

After becoming acquainted with the Soufanieh home of the Naz-zours I thought much how Sacred Scripture teaches that the Christian home is a little church, miniature Mystical Body. I recalled that the Pope often speaks of the family home as the domestic church, the church of the home. Myrna’s and Nicolas’s seems more like a church, in some

respects, than a family home. It has become a church to which the world comes to pray. It is then very significant that their wedding took place in their home with the priest coming there for the wedding ceremony.

I observed Myrna's naturalness, her great sense of humor. She did common work about the home; no airs, she was simple and hospitable. She was kind as was Nicolas.

One day, September 15 to be exact, when I was writing at a portable table, suddenly Myrna called to me: "Father, look!" She then kissed Nicolas on the cheek. I think it was to show me that although the happenings of Myrna's life and in their home of Soufanieh were most unusual, yet, as husband and wife, they had a human love blessed by special grace.

Close friends of Myrna's told me that their daughter Miriam was, by Holy Mary's own words, "a gift" from the Blessed Mother. Nicolas and Myrna had been married four and a half years without children. They did not live as a normal husband and wife for one year after the phenomenon started, but then Mary told Myrna that she had not come to separate. Miriam, their daughter, when she was two to three-years-old, one day said to her mother Myrna, who did not know she was pregnant, "Mama, Emmanuel is inside of you." They named the baby boy, born later, John Emmanuel.

There have been many signs of God's presence in the Soufanieh home. There are signs too of God's presence as Myrna has traveled the world. The daily coming of people from various parts of the world to their Soufanieh home, the conversions and healings that take place there, all are signs of God's presence.

It was a great privilege for me to be able to offer the holy Sacrifice of the Mass daily, in *persona Christi*, in their Soufanieh home where Jesus and Mary, and the Holy Spirit have manifested themselves so vividly. I offered Mass each evening after the daily Soufanieh community prayer session, immediately before the small miraculous Icon which has repeatedly exuded olive oil and where Myrna has experienced the stigmata and accompanying sufferings whenever the Orthodox and Catholics have celebrated Holy Week and the Feast of Easter at the same time.

During my first full day in Damascus Nicolas told me that the events of Soufanieh had turned his planned married life entirely around. It brought him to Jesus and what is needed for salvation in a very strong manner. "It all started in November," he said. "By December that year of 1982 I was totally convinced it was all of God. Then we opened the doors to Christ in our home."

Why oil? Oil is a sign of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign too of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit. Oil is a sign of healing, soothing, and comforting. It strengthens athletes and brings light when burned. Oil is a pre-eminent sacred sign, the sign of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Chrism, the consecrated oil by the bishop on Holy



Fr. Fox looks in amazement when Fr. Zablaoui presented Myrna to him with olive oil exuding from her hands.

Thursday, is used in the anointing which is the sacramental sign of the seal which the Holy Spirit gives in Confirmation. Oil is used at the ordination of priests when the newly ordained hands are anointed for through his hands graces will flow. Oil is also used at baptism when the one baptized is given a share in Jesus Christ as priest, prophet and king. Oil is essential in the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation which brings us the Holy Spirit in a new and special way.

Oil has often exuded from Myrna during prayers or while speaking about the phenomenon or during ecstasy. The oil exudes most often from her hands while praying but oil has also flowed from Myrna's face, neck, eyes, stomach—such as on the third day of a triduum of strict fasting, November 26–29, 1984. Oil which has flowed has always been in relation to the phenomenon of Our Lady of Soufanieh.

The oil has exuded from Myrna not only when in Damascus but in various places throughout Syria; also in Lebanon, Jordan, Cyprus, the United States, Canada, Germany, France, Netherlands, Australia, Belgium, Egypt, Spain, Portugal, Italy, etc.

Oil has exuded from reproductions of the Icon, reported to have happened with up to one thousand different reproductions. Such has been reported in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Venezuela, Switzerland, United States, Canada, France, Holland, Germany, Belgium, Australia, Haiti and other Arabic countries.

The oil has flowed from reproductions of the Icon during prayer, before or after, when others have been praying, or during a conversation about Our Blessed Mother. Oil has been known to flow from a replica of the Icon or its photographic reproductions outside of prayer time, sometimes even in Muslim houses.

People have been led to prayer through the oil phenomenon. They then pray in an atmosphere of peace in whatever homes the oil has been manifested. This has served to bring back communal family prayer.


The oil which exudes from the body of Myrna Al-Akhras Nazzour has been analyzed to be 100 percent pure olive oil. It has the fragrance of roses. Its time and manner of appearance is unforeseen. It appears and disappears without any control of Myrna. She is not able to decide when it should or may appear. It does appear when Myrna is fully conscious and often in the presence of others. It may appear any time of the day or night.

I know in my own experience the oil on Myrna's hands appeared while I was expressing the relationship of Our Lady of Soufanieh to Our Lady of Fatima, having just concluded the celebration of the Holy Mass. The oil also appears during ecstasies when Myrna is to see Jesus or the Virgin Mother Mary. Often the occasion is during religious ceremonies.

When a respectful and a prayerful atmosphere does not exist or last, the oil evaporates very quickly. It does not stain clothing. When it appears, Myrna is usually asked to anoint the foreheads of the people

who are present. She will never anoint priests but asks them to anoint themselves, or another priest to do so.

When the oil is being applied to persons present with oil from her hands, it evaporates when there are no more persons to be anointed. I noticed that the oil was disappearing when I completed the anointing of those present, mainly youth who had been at the Tuesday night youth prayer gathering at Soufanieh. All who were present at the conclusion of a Mass I offered at the site of the apparitions thus wanted to be anointed. On this occasion Myrna stood beside me with her hands extended from which oil exuded and I anointed each person present, taking the oil with my thumb from her two hands. Fr. Zahlaoui and I then anointed each other.

Below is given but one testimonial of a youth who was present that evening at the House of the Virgin, at the site of the apparitions. He sent it to me after my return to America. 

From Soufanieh—A Youth's Experience

"I am writing from Soufanieh. Everybody is still talking about your visit. Fr. Elias talked about you during Mass. You can be sure that you will always stay in our hearts.


"As you know, I am from Germany, but studying in Damascus and attended your Masses at Soufanieh, went with you to Papal Nuncio, etc. I just want to tell you about my feelings connected with Soufanieh. Actually, before I never considered Soufanieh a special place. I never had any doubt that it was true and I never felt uncomfortable, but it was the same like praying in a church or other places.

It was only the last evening you were there when you had just said Mass in the upper terrace where Our Lady appeared when I felt that "Our Lady of Soufanieh" put some special love into my heart, a love that I will never forget in my life. The oil that came after the Holy Mass was even the most unimportant thing that occurred for me. It may sound strange, but just before this happened I remembered the words of the Vatican Nuncio, who said that it does not matter whether there are miracles or not, important is that people go there and pray. I said to myself that this is true, what else do we need?

Those young ladies and men present for the Tuesday night prayer night and then also Mass are proof enough, I thought, that the Spirit of God is in this house. At the same time I felt like it was Christmas. It was such a wonderful atmosphere between the young people gathering around this beautiful statue of the Virgin [at the site of the apparitions]. The oil was then like the Christmas present of our Mother. Since then I am deeply touched by all of this and every day I am looking forward to go and pray again at Soufanieh.

About my faith, I have to tell you that I was a Christian before and that my faith in Jesus Christ was strong, but now I feel like I became a witness of

this faith, just like if I had lived at the time when Jesus was preaching on earth. I am praying the Rosary every day. You can say that I really experienced a special kind of love in my prayers at Soufanieh and perhaps also through the people I have met there.

There are many things I have to tell you, but at the moment I do not have the time with work at the University. I have to think about you and about Soufanieh every hour. Please keep in touch with me, if you have got the time. Thank you, Father. Tobias Beutgen—Soufanieh 

The letter above is from a 25-year-old young man from Germany. He spent time with me daily at Soufanieh and continued his studies in Damascus before returning to his university in Germany. There he started a similar youth prayer group as at Soufanieh. It is typical of what happens to so many at Soufanieh—love of God and neighbor becomes a reality.

I was asked by the Soufanieh community to write for their records my own testimonial as to what I had witnessed. It follows:

Author's Testimonial to Damascus Miracle

September 25, 2001

From September 12 until September 19, 2001, I was in Damascus, Syria, each day a guest at the House of Soufanieh, where I was always well received by Nicolas and Myrna Nazzour. I was in Damascus and at Soufanieh to make a detailed study of Our Lady of Soufanieh. I am a Catholic priest who is the pastor of St. Mary of Mercy Church in Alexandria, South Dakota, USA. I am also chaplain to the contemplative nuns, discalced Carmelite Monastery of Our Mother of Mercy and Saint Joseph. I am known in the United States also as a priest-journalist, author of many books. I work with Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN)—Catholic cable, which goes to many countries and is recognized by the Vatican.

I am the founder-director of the Fatima Family Apostolate which is canonically established in the Catholic Church and is in union with the Pontifical Council for the Family. It exists to call families to holiness.

It was my privilege while in Damascus to make many interviews. These included His Holiness, Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch; Patriarch Gregoire III of the Melkite Catholics; Papal Nuncio, Msgr. Diego Causero; Archbishop Dionysius Behnam Jajjawi, Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese; Fr. Elias Zahlaoui; Fr. Boulos Fadel, et al., as well as friends of Nicolas and Myrna Nazzour. I found great cooperation from all.

I observed the doors of Soufanieh opened each day to people of all faiths from different countries who came to pray before the Icon of



It was at the conclusion of a youth Mass when all lined up to be anointed with oil from Myrna's hands.

Soufanieh; these included Christians: Catholics, Orthodox, Protestant; Muslims, Buddhists, etc. Always there was respect from all, always all were welcome. Only God knows what was transpiring in the hearts of many. I admired the sacrifice of the Nazzour family in opening the doors as Mary requested of them.

Whenever I offered the Sacrifice of the Mass at Soufanieh I found the people most devout and prayerful long before the Mass began.

On the late evening of September 18, 2001, when we were gathered for prayer and farewell in the upper balcony where Our Lady appeared, I was expressing my gratitude for the charity and kindness of all. I expressed the thought that I recognize a similarity between the message of Fatima in the West and Soufanieh in the East. Suddenly, Fr. Elias Zahlaoui drew my attention that olive oil was coming from the hands of Myrna who stood beside him. Soon the people began singing a beautiful hymn to Our Lady of Soufanieh and wanted me to anoint them with oil from Myrna's hands. This I did. They received with devotion.

During the week I had prayed, expressing my desire to accept God's will. While I had come to do research for a book on Soufanieh, I prayed that if God wanted oil to occur while I was there that it be accepted not for Myrna's glory and not for mine, but only for the effectiveness of the message of Soufanieh for Unity of the family and of the Church.

God is good. His Mother is holy.

Sincerely in Jesus, Mary, Joseph,
Fr. Robert J. Fox

Such was the report I sent to Soufanieh. I can add here that about 4 p.m. the final day I was at Soufanieh I had become very sick for some reason. I was obliged to lie down to regain strength to be able to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass at 6 p.m. I offered the Eucharistic Sacrifice each day while there, before the original small miraculous Icon of Soufanieh which has often exuded olive oil.

While I had felt in good health and strength all the time I was in Australia, and the entire week in Soufanieh, it was with difficulty that I was able to celebrate the Sacrifice of the Mass the final evening at the House of the Virgin. Immediately after Mass I rested again for, however weak I had become, I did not want to miss the youth meeting Tuesday evening at 9:30. The youth had taken their inspiration for these youth prayer meetings in the House of the Virgin from Pope John Paul II and his gathering of young people for world youth days. When he came to Damascus in May 2001, the youth had gathered in strong numbers before the Pope chanting, "We want Unity"—meaning union of Christians, especially Catholics and Orthodox.

I joined the 9:30 p.m. youth prayer gathering. It was my final evening and I was scheduled to offer Mass in the upper terrace toward midnight as likely I would not be able to offer the Mass the next day traveling home. This meant offering two Masses within six hours when I was very weak and sick. I found difficulty standing.

Security would be very tight and traveling difficult after the terrorism acts of the World Trade Center and Pentagon, etc., just over a week before. It has been my prayerful hope to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass every day of my life, including my last day upon earth. I did not want to miss offering Jesus Christ's infinite act of worship, which perpetuates the Sacrifice of the Cross and brings His Real Presence, after a spiritual week in the Virgin House of Soufanieh. Mary does lead us to Jesus!

One night, after I had finished the Mass and still had the Mass vestments on, a young Syrian man of Christian faith, about 25 years of age, said to me, "Oh! I would want to have a priestly spirit like you have in your heart. He kissed my vestments in the area of the heart." He expressed a desire to come to America with me to study for the holy priesthood. I told him that he was needed in the East. The humility of this young man, his zeal and youthfulness was a great inspiration for me. But then the entire Soufanieh community impressed me with their charity and faith.

I have prayed, "Oh! dear heavenly Virgin, Mother of God, Mother of us all, bring the millions of Muslims the world over who are of the Islamic faith and believe in One true God as we do, as they recognized His greatness, bring them all to recognize Jesus Christ as the Son Incarnate of that one great God.

"They venerate you, O Mary, as the greatest Women in heaven. They believe in the Virgin Birth and the Immaculate Conception. Give



Shrine on terrace of Nazzour home marks spot of the apparitions of Our Lady of Soufanieh to Myrna. It is over the suffering face of Jesus formed from olive oil that fell from Myrna's hands.

them faith in Jesus Christ, as Lord, God and Savior. I know you want them to have faith in your Son, Jesus Christ so they too may be saved."

That night amidst the dim light with flickering candles, Myrna talked to the youth of her mission, after which I added some remarks. It was difficult to stand there and talk but I did and told of how, approximately 30 years ago, I went to Fatima and placed my hands on the very spot where the Mother of God had stood and given her message for the world. "There," I told the Syriac youth, "I asked our Lady, 'What do you want of me?' There I offered my hands and my heart to the Mother of God to do with me as she liked. Then I was inspired to do all I could to teach the fullness of true faith to youth wherever I could, using the

message of Fatima as a vehicle for communicating the fullness of true faith as Our Lady was a Catechist at Fatima."

Burning candles gave little light in the House of the Virgin as the youth prayerfully gathered and heard testimonies. Only those flickering candles shed a weak light in the house which was beaming a light from the East to the world. I was happy about that as perhaps in the dimness of light that evening the youth could detect less easily how weak and unsteady I felt from sickness as I gave my witness when called upon.

At the close of the youth meeting I immediately returned to rest. I felt it would be dangerous to attempt to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass near midnight, lest I faint, however much my heart desired to perpetuate Christ's greatest gift and His Sacrifice at the very sight of the apparitions of Soufanieh on my final night there where heaven has been calling for unity of family and Church.

It seemed the desire for Mass was nonetheless great and so I agreed to offer the Mass with the request that it be shortened, no singing and I'd give no homily. The Mass was completed; suddenly new energy returned to my body. I said that I was no longer sick. I expressed my

great appreciation to all. Then I said, “I do not know if you realize it but the shrine you have placed here where our Lady stood, with the pillar you have put here with the statue of Mary inside the glass, is very similar to the shrine at Fatima where God’s Mother appeared. I see that Soufanieh is to the East, what Fatima is to the West. Both are for the world. Both are the same heavenly Mother of us all.”

As I was placing my hands atop the pillar at Soufanieh before the image of Mary, while saying the above words, and showing how I placed my hands in offering at Fatima in the same manner, Fr. Elias Zahlaoui called to me, “Father, look, oil.” Myrna stood there somewhat shy with hands bubbling up with oil. There was an exclamation of joyful awe from the youth. Those present broke out in the song to “Our Lady of Soufanieh.” Then they lined up, each to be anointed.

The oil lasted until the last one was anointed. Finally I took the blue rosary which Nicolas had given me and asked Myrna to rub it in her hands for any remaining oil to go onto the rosary. It was at that very spot where our Lady first appeared. Our Lady had walked there on a stream of light from the eucalyptus tree. She came across the street to the upper patio exposed to the outdoors. There she had extended her rosary’s crucifix unto Myrna’s hands which then exuded olive oil, overflowing onto the floor. The oil on the floor formed the suffering face of Jesus Christ. The oil stains are still there under the pillar.

I remained feeling well that evening, until well past midnight. I got but little sleep before rising, long before sunrise, for the difficult journey home which took two days. The illness returned during my journey home, continuing for a couple weeks until some medical help was needed.

More than 20 years have passed, as this book begins to appear in the hands of readers, since the calls from heaven for Christian Unity began coming from the East—from the Virgin’s House of Soufanieh, in Damascus.

The House of Soufanieh continues to welcome pilgrims of all religious persuasions from throughout the world. In the home lives Nicolas and Myrna with their children, Miriam and John Emmanuel. Nicolas’s mother Alice also lives with them in their home, humble by American standards. They continue to welcome all who come, with the door always open from early morning until the evening hours.

God chooses whom He will for various missions. It is not a case of a certain person proving oneself to have great sanctity and then God saying, “I see this very holy person. Therefore I will chose that one for this special mission.” St. Paul, whose conversion and baptism took place near Soufanieh, was not a Christian, but a persecutor of Christians, when Christ Jesus called him to become a missionary to the Gentiles. He was chosen to be a “vessel of election” (Acts 9:15).

Myrna as a child and youth was ordinary. She spent these years between Beirut, Lebanon and Damascus according to family travels.

Myrna has two brothers and two sisters. She is reserved by nature, yet jovial with her face often breaking into smiles and brightness when something catches her interest. I noticed this during my time in Soufanieh. A physician in Damascus talking about her balanced nature, jokingly has said, "She is hopelessly normal."

Nicolas and Myrna did not begin their marriage to manifest themselves as any unique couple who are of special spiritual examples to all marriages. They had faith, right. One could say they were ordinary Christians entering marriage with the intention to live an ordinary married life, having children, living pretty much isolated from the world as far as their personal lives and family were concerned. They married on May 9, 1982. Myrna was born on May 3, 18 years previously.

Nicolas had worked some years in Germany and accumulated some savings before marriage. The Nazzour family is not rich; the house is very moderately furnished. I picked up the impression that finances for them are more difficult than many think. They wisely have a sign posted in their home, near the miraculous Icon, where people come to pray, that says, "No donations accepted." This restriction is necessary less they be misrepresented as using religion for self-profit or having concocted a supposed supernatural happening for their own gain. The contrary is true. The events of Soufanieh have caused them much suffering, removing most of their privacy, requiring untold patience and charity as the world comes to their door and into their living room, even without knocking.

For some years, I have worked with a man, who has the favor of his bishop, who has the wound marks in his hands. He agrees with my advice never to accept one cent from people who want to donate. He never has. The Nazzours struggle to tend to needs of their family and keep things modest in their manner of living.

Myrna belongs to the Greek-Melkite Catholic rite and Nicolas to the Antiochian Greek-Orthodox rite. In the Middle East, the woman generally goes to the religion of her husband. But Myrna explained to me that she preferred to adhere to the Melkite Catholic rite and such is favored by her children. At any rate, relations between Orthodox and Catholics in Damascus are excellent and there was no problem for Nicolas. The Vatican recognizes that there is a unique situation in Syria where the Catholic Church and the Syriac Orthodox are nearing complete union.

On a Sunday, September 16, 2001, I was able to meet George Jilo, Orthodox Archpriest of St. Elais Church which is near the Virgin's House of Soufanieh. He had just completed celebrating the divine liturgy for Sunday and came from the sacristy to meet me. When I asked him if he believed in Our Lady of Soufanieh, he was surprised at my question. He said, "What kind of question is that? Of course, who would not love her?" Then he quickly walked away.

I later discovered that he did not want to get involved as he knew I

was present to write a book on Soufanieh and feared my questions, for his patriarch had told him not to get involved publicly.

Nicolas told me that Archpriest Jilo and Archbishop Boulos Pandali were the first to see the oil on November 22, 1982. "We called them when it happened. The Icon used to be kept in our bedroom. [Both of them] took off their shoes before entering the bedroom. . . ."

Then Nicolas continued: "In January 1983, the Orthodox Patriarch decided to transfer the Icon to the Church. Forty-five days later, two other Orthodox priests brought it back. They were authorized by the patriarch to bring it back."

That is the way Nicolas told it to me and it is correct. But I was to discover there is more to it.

Nicolas has a special connection to the Icon. While traveling to Sofia, Bulgaria, Nicolas had bought ten small inexpensive replicas of an icon of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child. They were framed in cheap plastic. They were given as gifts to seven homes of his relatives. The small reproductions of the icon would become known throughout the world because of the way our Lord and his Mother would use it.

Beginning on November 22, 1982, the Nazzour home, in the Christian neighborhood of Soufanieh in Damascus, was to become the center for unusual and naturally unexplainable events. Myrna had been married to Nicolas only about six to seven months. She had just turned 18 when she married Nicolas (38). The phenomenon happened when she was praying with other members of her family while visiting her sick sister-in-law. Suddenly Myrna began shivering, some force seeming to be coming from inside her, as she described it. Oil had just started exuding from her hands.

The second time, Myrna was at her own home. It happened on the anniversary of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary to St. Catherine Labouré (at the rue du Bac in Paris, France) in 1830. Myrna was hardly aware of the coincidence of dates. When it was realized later they could find nothing in their native language written about the apparitions to St. Catherine concerning the miraculous medal. Oil this time started to exude from a small Icon (6 × 8cm; 2.4 × 3.2 inches) which Nicolas had bought in July 1980, at the Alexandre Nevsky Orthodox church when he was in Sofia, Bulgaria.

This small Icon replica, thought to be based on the Icon of the Virgin of Kazan, so popular in Russia, is made of paper, not like original icons painted on wood. The slowly oozing of oil from the Icon occurred according to the liturgical cycle of Christian feasts until November 26, 1990. During those years, the phenomenon was interrupted for approximately one year, from November 26, 1985, to November 26, 1986.

The atmosphere of peace and prayer never ceased at Soufanieh. Not one drop of oil exuded during this time and no apparitions occurred. Christ's message on November 26, 1985, had said: "... and if my absence

lasts, and the light disappears from you, do not fear; this will be for my glorification.”

It was on November 27, 1982, that Myrna, while doing her home duties, noticed two icons placed side by side. One of them was one of the ten small reproductions that Nicolas had bought from Bulgaria. She noticed it was very shiny. Taking it in her hands to study, she realized that drops of oil were forming on the glass cover protecting the image. Surprised, she ran with the image to her husband. Nicolas couldn't believe his eyes and trembled as he took the Icon from Myrna's hands and placed it on a little plate so that the oil would not fall to the floor. The plate quickly filled with olive oil. Then he placed the Icon in a larger tray. Both knelt down, overwhelmed, not knowing what to do. They wondered: how could oil flow so profusely out a picture of an icon printed on plain paper?

Nicolas then called for the rest of his family to come over. Myrna meanwhile remained alone, fearful. Then she heard a woman's voice:

“My daughter Mary, don't fear, I am with you. Open the doors, don't deprive anyone from my sight.” [Myrna's proper name is Mary.]

Returning with his family and friends, Nicolas became afraid of what would result because of this new experience which he could not explain nor understand. Then he demanded from all the people present that this experience must be kept a secret to keep away the curious. But Myrna interrupted:

“No, Nicolas, I heard a woman's voice telling me to open the doors and not to deprive anyone from her sight. . . .” Nicolas at that moment agreed to his wife's request. They would open the doors of their home.

The Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate was informed. The patriarch came quickly on November 27, 1982, accompanied by two priests. The archbishops and priests knelt with Myrna to pray. Then again oil appeared on Myrna's hands. The bishop had asked for a sign in his heart showing the presence of the Virgin Mary. So when the oil formed, the bishop was touched with emotion. As the bishop was about to leave, Myrna wanted to kiss his hands, but he refused, saying, “No, my daughter, we should be blessed by you.” It was then Myrna who exploded in tears, saying, “This is something that I don't deserve.”

News of the unusual events at Soufanieh spread rapidly through Damascus, even to the government. On Sunday, November 28, 1982, the Nazzour family received a visit from the state security. These times of the supernatural occurrences were troublesome times in Syria as there was an economic crisis, which required a considerable police network. It was felt, “This is not the time to attract attention!”

Police officer Akram Abboud entered the Soufanieh house to make his investigation. Mrs. Chahade Hanoun at that very time was explaining to Myrna how to pray the Rosary as several people were asking that the Rosary be recited before the Icon.

The security officer completed his report, took some photos, and later that afternoon came back with three of his colleagues and a physician, Dr. Saliba Abdel Ahad. They asked Myrna to wash her hands with soap in front of them and to wipe her hands with the white paper handkerchiefs they gave her. Returning to the living room, the four agents surrounded the young woman with the physician standing before her. They asked her to pray and she did at once. Myrna's hands were now covered with oil.

Dr. Saliba rubbed the palms of Myrna hands and for a long time, observed the oil oozing from them. One agent asked: "What do you think, doctor?" The doctor pointed to the heavens saying: "This is God's work."

There had been a rumor that the Icon was fed oil through small pipes; so one of the agents asked the family for permission to disassemble it. The agent, after carefully examining the wall, took the small Icon from its plastic setting. He accidentally tore the top right corner (which I observed yet in September, 2001 when I was there to do research for this book). Immediately afterwards, oil flowed from the small picture causing the agent to shake. He then placed the image into its original setting, prayed a short time and then all left. From that time on the house of Soufanieh has welcomed members of the government and of the army, not for investigation, but for prayer.

The same evening of November 28, Fr. Elias Zahlaoui arrived at the Nazzour home. He is well-known in Damascus, an academic at the university. He is vicar of Our Lady of Damascus Greek-Catholic rite parish. He enjoys the confidence and respect of his bishop. When I interviewed the Melkite Catholic Patriarch, Gregory III, he encouraged me to interview Fr. Elias Zahlaoui about the details of Soufanieh. I assured the Patriarch that I had already done so.

To review for readers who may not be acquainted with the initial events of Soufanieh, Fr. Elias Zahlaoui at first had refused to go to the Soufanieh house to investigate. Such is typical of priests when there is excitement about reported miraculous happenings. The Church, thus most priests, are always most cautious. Members of the parish choir which Fr. Elias had founded and organized encouraged him to go to see what his opinion would be. Fr. Zahlaoui said to me: "At first I did not believe supernatural things were happening here at Soufanieh and I kicked people from my office who insisted I go see. I did this twice."

Fr. Zahlaoui continued: "Finally I said, 'OK. I will go and see.' It was November 28, 1982, the second day, as it started November 27, 1982. When I came I saw many people, notably Myrna and Nicolas. All the people were surprised and shocked to see me. I noticed their honesty. I noticed from a sign they were refusing money. This touched me. Then I started to see signs, prayer, calmness, peace; not typical of Arab people. Then I saw oil come from the small Icon on my first visit. I asked for

cotton with oil. As usual we put it in a small plastic bag and when I looked around at all the people praying I started singing with them. I then looked at my hand, holding the plastic bag, with the cotton and now there was much oil in my hand. I thought it came out of the bag, but it was closed and the oil in the cotton was not sufficient for this.

"I then asked to meet Myrna and Nicolas. I noticed that they were honest but shocked, afraid themselves that this is happening. I asked to talk to Myrna alone. I found her simple, afraid and honest. After this I joined Myrna before the Icon for prayer. During the prayer the oil began to come from the Icon and come very strongly, like boiling, from Myrna's hands. There was so much oil it fell on the floor. Myrna was praying a very simple prayer: 'Virgin Mary, you are the source. People are coming for you, not for me. I kiss your feet [meaning, I beg you], don't allow the oil to come only from my hands. You are the first. Don't stop oil from the Icon.' She repeated this prayer."

Notice, it was after refusing twice, that Fr. Elias Zahlaoui finally went because of the insistence of the young persons, whom he knew to be serious and balanced. Still, he went only "to please them."

A more detailed account goes like this:

About 7 p.m., Fr. Elias arrived with the young people and found a crowd at the front of the house. Making his way in, Fr. Elias was taken to the young Nazzour couple's room. The first thing he noticed was the deep prayer atmosphere in the house. Entering the room the priest asked to see the Icon. He first noticed something like tears flowing slowly on the plastic covering the small Icon. He asked for a small piece of cotton moistened with oil. He placed it in a small nylon bag. The young people who came with Fr. Elias also received small pieces of cotton moistened with the oil. Joining the prayer group a few minutes later, Fr. Zahlaoui noticed the palm of his right hand was filled with oil and the nylon bag he had was not pierced.

When a hymn was completed, Fr. Zahlaoui was taken to the lounge where he asked to talk with Myrna. He wanted to test the sincerity and honesty of the young woman. Later he wrote in his diary: "These people were sincere and awe-struck by what happened under their eyes."

That same evening, while he was talking with Myrna, her sister Lina entered and asked: "Father, could you come in Myrna's room with Myrna to pray, because the oil has stopped oozing from the picture?"

Being tempted at first to decline, he accepted in order to get close to the Icon. Fr. Zahlaoui knelt behind Myrna facing the Icon. He prayed silently for several minutes. Then he heard Myrna saying a personal prayer:

"Oh, Virgin, you are the source. . . . People come for you, not for me. . . . Don't allow the oil to ooze from my hands and stop from your Icon. . . . Virgin, You are the source. . . . Don't permit that the oil stops oozing from your picture. . . ."

Fr. Zahlaoui was impressed with the innocence and depth of this prayer. Without turning around, Myrna said to the priest, "I feel that the Virgin has penetrated inside me."

Fr. Zahlaoui shook when he heard what the young woman was saying and which he did not quite understand. At the same time he saw oil appear abundantly on Myrna's palms and fingers, forming bubbles, as if boiling. Drops built up again on the glass cover of the Icon.

Fr. Zahlaoui said that he then felt like he was in another world.

That same evening, Fr. Elias Zahlaoui reported the facts to his bishop, Archbishop François Abou-Mokh. The latter listened attentively and said: "Pursue your observation, Fr. Elias, but I don't need to recommend to you to be prudent."

When I interviewed Fr. Elias Zahlaoui in September, 2001 he explained to me that the archbishop had said to him: "Keep me informed. Be involved, watch, careful for what is going on."

I interviewed Fr. Zahlaoui from within the Nazzour home where the unusual events had been taking place for about 20 years. He said: "For about a month I watched what is going on here. On December 29, 1982, I went to the same archbishop and reported what had happened during the month. It was then that this archbishop helped me to meet the Orthodox Patriarch and told him what was going on in the house of Soufanieh."

Fr. Zahlaoui continued: "On December 30, 1982, the archbishop met with the Orthodox patriarch at 8 a.m. Then Myrna and Nicolas met the patriarch at 9 a.m.

The Antiochian Greek-Orthodox patriarch received the young couple most graciously. He informed them that the Icon would be transferred to the Orthodox Byzantine Church of the Holy Cross which is about 500 meters from the Soufanieh house. Nicolas was saddened by this. He had hoped that the Icon would be exposed for veneration in several Christian churches in Damascus, not only Orthodox. However, Nicolas kept his disappointment to himself. Later he shared his disappointment with Fr. Zahlaoui who asked him to accept the decision in obedience to the hierarchy of the Church as to the Lord himself. The patriarch is Nicolas's ecclesiastical head. The patriarch said, "I'll make some flyers of declaration to tell all the priests and people."

Fr. Zahlaoui further explained that the transfer of the Icon to the church amounted to an official and a popular recognition of the phenomenon. The priest also explained that ecumenical prayer was resulting. People of all kinds, even non-believers, were coming to pray at the feet of the Virgin of Soufanieh, the Icon. Perhaps the Virgin Mary wanted that kind of prayer of unity at the Orthodox Church to prepare the unity of hearts, and especially a unity of hearts for Christians.

Fr. Zahlaoui gave me a copy of the communiqué which was issued by the Chancery Office of the Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus as translated from the original in Arabic. It follows:

So as to enlighten the minds of what has been and is still being said, on what is happening in one of our blessed families at Soufanieh, the Patriarchate deems it useful to explain the following:

1. Miracles are ordinary things for God, even if they do not appear so for us, because He is the Almighty, it is He who created the laws of nature, it is He who can override them whenever He decides. Without Him, can anything be blessed or any healing take place?

2. The home in which a vision out of the ordinary has occurred is a home of believers and of an Orthodox family proud of its faith and where nobody pretends to be a saint as many imagine. Mrs. Marie [baptismal name] is gentle and humble and her husband is an active worshipper and both of them see in God an outstanding benefactor of the home, which has been founded thanks to His blessings and complacency.

3. It has happened for the See of Antioch to witness several phenomena which strengthen the faith. Sednaya and Maaloula remain an active field of God's work. And all those phenomena would appear at times and then disappear, thus becoming a usual pattern in the life of the Holy Church. [Sednaya and Maloula: two villages north of Damascus (30 and 60 kms / 20 and 40 miles), where three famous pilgrimage centers are present. Sednaya is dedicated to the Blessed Mother.]

4. The acknowledgement of a miracle is a difficult and infinitely serious matter. To prove it, there are several objective criteria that can only be performed by medical specialists expressly designated by the Church in order to analyze the history of the illness so as to be able to prove, after a period of time, that the healing has indeed taken place and that it has been realized in a supernatural manner. One has to make sure that the healing is total, complete, and permanent, because the Lord does not accomplish things partially. If all these criteria are not realized, the Church cannot recognize the existence of a miracle. But in all cases, it acknowledges the favor of God and its misericord towards us, His creatures.

5. This is why, we address ourselves to the faithful requesting them to continue offering their thanksgiving to the Lord of heaven and earth and to stop any exaggeration in their words or any excitement in their behavior so that it does not turn against God, the Church, the blessed family Akhrass and Nazzour.

6. We also declare that the Holy Icon will be transferred from the house in which it is presently located to the Church of the Holy Cross, where a suitable place for praising the Lord and His Mother, the Holy Virgin is to be found.

We request the worshippers not to impose to Mrs. Marie (Nazzour) and to her husband what cannot be supported. May God maintain His grace upon you, strengthen you and bestow His blessings on our faithful people.

Damascus, 31 December 1982

Signed by: The Head of the Chancery
of the Antiochian Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate in Damascus

Stigmata Suffered during Holy Week, 2001



Myrna suffered wounds of the Stigmata (Holy Week, 2001). In top photo, notice position of hands early in suffering—fingers placed as in Eastern way of blessing. In bottom photo, she appears to sense a thorn wound in her head.

Stigmata Suffered during Holy Week, 2001




Wounds appear in her side, hands and feet, in imitation of Jesus' wounds upon the Cross.

Soon the first visitors began to arrive. Now, 20 years later, thousands of visitors have come to their modest home to pray, including people of various religious persuasions, priests, archbishops, papal nuncios, et al. Even patriarchs have shown favor.

The visits which began on Saturday, November 27, 1982, have never ceased. Their house of Soufanieh becomes the Virgin's House, a place of pilgrimage and prayer, just as requested by the Virgin Mary in her message.

In the days following, the prayer program became more organized. The *Acatnist* hymn and the Rosary became frequent prayers at Soufanieh. There was time for personal or spontaneous prayers. Supplications to the Mother of God in the Acatnist prayers were used plus others, frequently the following: "Hail, Source of the Holy Oil which brings about healing."

The first religious community that came to Soufanieh to observe the phenomenon was the *Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help*, led by Mother Monique Battikha, their superior general.

What about the sign of oil? Dr. Philippe Loron, neurologist, has made at Damascus a specific study and taken scientific tests. It is indeed 100 percent olive oil we experience at Soufanieh and other parts of the world associated with Our Lady of Soufanieh. 

Regarding the stigmata: it is to be noted that the very first time Myrna received this sign it was not Holy Week.

The first indication that stigmatization was about the enter into Myrna's life was on October 24, 1983. Myrna went into ecstasy about 2 p.m. and again about 7 p.m. She remembered nothing of what happened in these ecstasies.

However, four days later, Friday, October 28, 1983, Myrna spoke of feeling sensations in the palms of her hands as though they were being pierced by a sharp pointed object. That evening, from 6:20 until 6:50, she went into ecstasy during which she saw the Virgin Mary. Myrna's account of this is as follows:

"I was in the clouds and saw my Mother, the Virgin. She smiled at me and I smiled back as if she was my sister and companion. She was standing while I was nearly crouched down. Her smile changed to severity and she told me: 'Go down and tell them that you are my daughter before being theirs.' I obeyed immediately. I saw them all crying around my body lying on the bed. How did I see that? I don't know, and I told them: 'Nouha (name of Myrna's mother), I am her daughter before being yours' and I went back to the Virgin Mary. She then tells me: 'My heart has been consumed on my only Son and it won't be consumed on all my children.' I then came out of the ecstasy and opened my eyes."

It is important to remember that the Virgin's words were not spoken in English and the translation from Arabic is difficult at times and a literal translation into English does not always convey the message

accurately or adequately. As in all languages there is the written or classical language and the spoken language which has slang or colloquial ways of speaking.

It was explained to me from the Soufanieh community that the meaning of the Virgin's message was as follows: "When the Virgin Mary said: 'My heart has been consumed on my only Son and it won't be consumed on all my children' it is not that the Virgin Mother is unconcerned about her spiritual children in the order of grace. The meaning would rather be like this as used by the Virgin: 'When my Son died on the cross I could not help (but only offer Him to the Father for the salvation of souls). I could not do anything else and I was disabled but now I will not leave my children. I want to help save and deliver all of my children. I don't want my heart to be broken again.'"

"I am her daughter before being yours." This is not a put-down to one's own individual or biological mother. Holy Mary who is the Mother of Grace, the Mother of the Church, the Mother of us all in the order of grace, is a Motherhood that is something of a much higher and of the supernatural order. It is vastly superior over what biological motherhood could ever be.

On Monday, October 31 at 2:45 p.m., three days after Myrna experienced the sharp pains in her hands and being lifted up, oil appeared on her hands, feet, side and forehead. Small swellings of the flesh started to appear in the middle of her palms. At 7:04, oil exuded from Myrna again. She then experienced the same sensation in her hands of the previous Friday and now it also appeared on her feet.

On Friday, November 4, 1983, a slightly bloodied wound, .75 inch, appeared on her side. On Friday, November 24, 1983, at 4:15 p.m. the wound on her side bled again. Blood came from the palms of her hands and feet at about 5 p.m.—from the same places where she had felt the pains on October 28.

Physicians were called to come and observe the wounds. They were Drs. Jamil Marji, Joseph Nasrallah, Eli Barsa, Jean Siage, Joseph Massamiri, Georges Mounayer, Elie Farah. Dr. Massamire took blood samples for analysis. The blood was truly Myrna's. The wounds disappeared about 10 p.m., leaving no scars. For the next eight days small reddish stains similar to haematomas remained under the epidermis.

On this day, November 25, 1983, Myrna went into ecstasy from 8 p.m. until 8:20 and had a vision of the Virgin who was slightly elevated from the way she had appeared during previous ecstasies when the Virgin Mary and Myrna were at the same level. It is worth noting again that "heaven does nothing for nothing." There is a meaning in everything. This is how the Virgin Mother spoke on the occasion:

"This is all I want. I have not come to separate. Your married life will remain as it is." Then she had a magnificent serene smile and said: "Would you like to come to me?" Myrna answered positively matching

gestures with words. “Come . . . Your willingness to come to me is enough.” Myrna tried to reach her, but was not able to.”

Myrna is here reassured that her vocation in life is marriage and the Virgin would never separate a true Christian marriage. Attaining Mary in a physical way, like when Myrna once was able to touch Mary like a physical body, is not what is important. The desire to come to Mary, the desire for union with Jesus and Mary, to have them spiritually in our hearts, is already to have it accomplished in the order of grace. That is true for every Christian living in grace.

While the first signs of the stigmata on Myrna were not during Holy Week and were smaller, as if in preparation for what would occur on Holy Thursday, April 19, 1984, when the stigmata reappeared on her body and bleeding, the wound on her side measured four inches.

In Holy Week 2001 Dr. Philippe Loron went to Damascus again after 11 years since he first experienced the stigmata in Myrna. He desired to experience the expected stigmata and exuding of oil which occurs when Orthodox and Catholics celebrate Holy Week, the Feast of Easter, at the same time.

Of the events of Holy Week 2001 he wrote as follows:

“First of all, I attest as a scientist, with the same credibility as in 1990, to the following:

1. Myrna’s equilibrium and naturalness, a very simple person, is not subject to any pathological psychiatry, while her family life is steadily assumed, all year-long, irrespectively of the affluence of pilgrims in her home, while welcoming them whole heartedly (and in total gratuitousness).

2. The stigmata, which are authentic wounds, finely marked, with or without blood circulation, and whose healing (without infection) do not require any prior medical precaution.

3. The ecstasy is preceded by an oozing of oil on her skin—an unexplainable fact—during which Myrna is bathed into an interior celestial light, appears as a ‘living’ Icon.

“As to the small image, safely kept under key, its oozing cannot be explained: prior analyses had revealed it to yield olive oil that is incredibly pure.

“These three facts are amazingly coherent. Why after eleven years of absence? Because the stigmata, reminding us of the Passion of Our Lord, occurs on Holy Thursday in the body of Myrna, only during the years when the Feast of Easter is celebrated at the same date for the Catholics and for the Orthodox—that is, when their calendars take into account the usual discrepancy. This was the case in 1984, 1987, 1990 and finally 2001. The messages given to Myrna by the Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ from 1983 until 1990 insist on Christian unity, beginning

with the unification of the magnificent Feast of the Resurrection of Christ Jesus, foundation of our faith.

"The 'Paulinian' tint of the Messages, in the place of Paul's sudden conversion, strongly reminds us of the life of the early Christian communities. Our Pope invites to unity: 'That they may be one' (1995 encyclical), while referring to an image of a Church that should breathe with its two lungs, East and West. This unity is certainly urgent in this area of the world which is predominantly Muslim, and so close to the Holy Land that is in an explosive state and has been for years. It is only then—and only on this condition—as Jesus has prayed to His Father, that the world will recognize Him as the Messiah (John 17:21). But, peace is an important priority, while relying on numerous conversions.

"Myrna is already a sign of unity by the juxtaposition of the Catholic mystical phenomena (apparitions and stigmata) and the Orthodox ones (oozing of miraculous oil, icon); also by the example of her family, she is a Catholic married to an Orthodox, both of Byzantine rite.

"Christ's message this year impressed us tremendously. In Easter 1990, Jesus had told Myrna that she will not hear His voice until the Feast [of Easter] is unified, we must then welcome it as a firm and confident appeal to the full concordance of the dates in the future. The Greek-Catholic Church (of Byzantine rite, called Melkite) has recently been assigned a new patriarch in Damascus who would be (finally!) agreeable to a single date for the Feast of Easter—even if it means the adopting the Orthodox date as a sign of reconciliation among the sister churches.

"The last three Apostolic Nuncios in Syria were quite favorable towards Myrna, without, of course, implicating the Church in a final judgment, because Myrna, given the dispositions in the Middle-East, belongs, for the time given, to the Orthodox Patriarchate (through her husband). At the end of the Easter Mass, in company of an enthusiastic group of twelve pilgrims from Tahiti, we have received the wishes of the new Nuncio. He was quite impressed when some of the pilgrims told him the reason of their visit to Damascus: a pilgrimage at Soufanieh (the pilgrims from Tahiti had traveled some 22,000 kilometers!)

"Patience, wisdom and hope: these virtues re-emphasized in this last message are necessary in order to obtain peace in mutual respect. The Gospel in practice."

[Above from *Chrétiens Magazine*, No. 141, pp. 18-19 (France) and translated by *Association Notre-Dame-de-Soufanieh à Montréal (Canada)*.]

Fr. Elias Zahlaoui said that no one was able to see the actual oozing of oil that happened very early Saturday, thought to be around 1:30 a.m. This coincided with the arrival of Fr. Fadi Tabet from Beirut, Lebanon. "We were all very happy to see the presence of oil in the glass cupola placed under the Icon, three drops of oil are suspended to its modest

plastic base until today, April 21, 2001. This oozing occurred after a radical interruption of 11 years; that is, since the dawn of Easter 1990.”

All the above is non-rational to many intellectuals but the common man is edified at such signs. People who are open to signs from heaven and disposed to faith will be open to the signs at Soufanieh. People who pray are open to signs. What needs to be addressed for unity is the great need for more prayer “that all may be one.” One cannot be a true Christian without desiring unity. Pride must be put aside and prayer for unity must be constant. All must turn to prayer for without prayer love cannot escalate in their hearts. Without love, there cannot be harmony in a world so divided.

If the intellectual has deep faith and knows Scripture and is gifted with the important virtue of humility he is not scandalized but edified at signs for unity. Is not the Holy Virgin and Jesus reminding us that man himself is the greatest Icon of God. We can read this in Genesis 1:26. The Soufanieh Icon shedding oil is still a piece of paper imprinted with Mary and the Christ Child. Oil oozing from a living human body is a living Icon of God.

At the end of a century, and the beginning of a new millennium, when the great dignity of every human life is often forgotten, set aside, desecrated—the great importance of man, of human life, in God’s eyes and thoughts is made visible. If the intellectual wants to bristle so be it. His intelligence is less than a drop compared to the infinite divine intellect. How sad if the proud man does not use his intelligence properly.

Is it not interesting while some liturgists are anxious to do away with signs, our Lady is offering us signs that say: “The finger of God is here” (Luke 11:20). In the liturgy, as liturgists said, many signs used were not essential, e.g., salt at baptism, many gestures of adoration, such as the genuflection during the Credo or double genuflection before the Holy Eucharist in the monstrance. Yet Our Lady is offering us signs that are appealing to hundreds of thousands of Christians throughout the world in the form of oil and the stigmata.

Oil is rich in symbolism in the Middle East. The olive tree is seen as the tree of peace. It is sometimes said that if the olive tree is not harmed, it never dies. Oil is a symbol of light. It is a symbol also of strength and healing.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan where oil was poured on the wounds of the man injured and left to die on the road. Already in the Old Testament oil was a symbol of the royal and messianic unction.

Does not the outpouring of oil signify the sweetness of God? Does it not tell how the Holy Spirit penetrates our hearts and brings his power of healing? Does not the sweet odor tell of the overflowing of God’s love and gentleness? Would the intellectuals forbid God to use tangible signs of His presence and action?

There are people considered wise who scoff at the reports of oil issu-

ing from a human being or an icon. In some cases the “wise” meant here are theologians. Even some theologians today are unable to deal with the religious questions unless they look at them with the language and wisdom of natural science and mathematics. But miracles are above the laws of nature. God is not bound to his own laws he established in nature, in the world. He can give special signs of his presence and power when he so chooses. In the case of oil emanating from the Icon and Myrna, the oil has God for its source. It is obviously being created by God for the occasion.

It is a sign of God’s blessings descending upon his people. The verdant olive tree is in Scripture the symbol of the just man blessed with God (Pss. 52:10; 128:3; cf. Sir. 50:10). Oil is a symbol too of divine wisdom which reveals the way of justice and happiness (Sir. 24:14, 19-23).

In Zech. 4:11, 14 there is mention of two olive trees which provided oil for the lamps which represented the “two sons of oil,” the “two anointed of God”; the king and the high priest whose work was to teach the people. Oil was used to anoint the king (Ps. 45) and a sign of divine election which accompanies the outpouring of the Spirit (1 Sam. 10:1-10; 13, 16).

Oil is the sacramental sign of the multiple graces and gifts of the Spirit given to Christians. Jesus is the Anointed One *par excellence* (Heb. 1:9, Ps. 5:8) signifying and proclaiming the unity of Christ.

Oil associated with Soufanieh has been scientifically analyzed six times and in different laboratories in Europe and in Syria. Each time the analyses agree that it is 100 percent pure olive oil. Some cures have been reported through use of this oil. Some spiritual conversions have also happened in association with the oil.

Oil exudes from Myrna’s hands during ecstasies. The oil comes from the palm of the hand, right or left or both. Sometimes oil appears on the back of her hands. During private prayer, such as when Myrna and Fr. Elias Zahlaoui have prayed in front of the Icon, oil has appeared bubbling in Myrna’s hands. This happened on November 28, 1982. Oil has exuded in sufficient quantity to anoint all of the people that presented themselves before her, as many as 5,000 persons as was the case in Australia in 1993.

Oil once exuded from her feet during the ecstasy of November 26, 1984. Oil emanated from Myrna’s throat when she regurgitated fragrant oil three times and in quantity during the triduum on the sight loss in November, 1984. There were three days of total fasting, with loss of Myrna’s sight when she could see only religious objects and had a strong interior light. Her only food then was the daily Holy Eucharist.

Oil has also exuded from Myrna’s whole face and neck during ecstasies and sometimes on the anniversary date of the phenomenon of Soufanieh, November 26. Oil has exuded when in a rectory with priests and laity; also from a medal of the Virgin Mary around her neck at Bloudane and Hassake.

Oil has exuded from Myrna's face during ecstasies; sometimes on the anniversary date of the phenomenon of Soufanieh and during Eucharistic celebrations, generally during the common Holy Week among Catholics and Orthodox.

Oil has exuded from the eyes and from the face during ecstasies when Myrna sees Jesus Christ. Fr. Elias Zahlaoui explains it this way:

"Usually an ecstasy is preceded by an exudation of oil from the hands, face or neck of Myrna. When she is about to see Jesus Christ, oil comes out also through her eyes and burns them before she goes into ecstasy. This stage is followed by the ecstasy itself, that is to say, the state of disconnection with the external world. During this phase Myrna does not see, hear, nor feel. Her body is stiff. She sees Jesus Christ in the form of a Person made up of light without distinguishing His face, which is not the case with the Holy Virgin Mary. After having seen Jesus Christ, she returns to her normal state, and takes time to recover her normal sight: her interior light prevents her from seeing anything. She has remained in this state during 72 consecutive hours, from November 26 until 29, 1984, inclusive.

"Often, one to four physicians would be present during the ecstasies. A number of medical tests have been undertaken mainly on her sight, sensitivity and reflexes: all were negative. Besides the first two ecstasies of Monday, October 24, 1983, which have not been timed, the duration of the other ecstasies has varied between five and 75 minutes. Most of these ecstasies have been recorded on video tapes. These ecstasies were accompanied most of the time with messages summarizing the important Christian realities: The Trinity, the Incarnation, Divine Paternity, the mediation of the Virgin Mary, deserving the Kingdom of Heaven, repentance to the Lord, the necessity of constant prayer and fasting, the sanctity of marriage, a pressing appeal for the unity of the Church and the role of the laity in the work of unity."

This exudation of oil by Myrna has also happened when bishops of several rites (Catholic: Archbishop Georges Riachi and Orthodox: Archbishop Afram Aboody) participated in common prayer. This happened in Australia in 1993.

When is the oil especially known to exude from Myrna's hands? It first happened while giving her testimony to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch, Zakka I (Damascus). Also while giving her testimony to the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch, Shenouda III (Egypt). Likewise while giving her testimony to the Coptic Catholic Patriarch, Stephanos I (Egypt). It has happened in the presence of the Greek Melkite Catholic Patriarch, Maximos Hakim V.

The places and circumstances are many where the phenomenon has occurred. These include while praying the Rosary, while singing, giving her testimony or while distributing pictures of Our Lady of Soufanieh. It has happened in monasteries, in the private chapel of the Apostolic

Nuncio of Syria. It has happened in the presence of atheists, agnostics, Protestants, while giving her testimony on the terrace of the Apparitions; during baptisms, during marriages, while praying for a sick person. It happened during the funeral of Fr. Joseph Malouli in March, 2000. (Fr. Malouli, who was previously a spiritual director to Myrna, died on March 5, 2000.) The occasions are innumerable and are by no means all listed in this chapter or book.

One of the messages of the Virgin Mary given to Myrna on November 26, 1990, was:

“As to the oil, it will continue to appear on your hands for the glorification of My Son Jesus, whenever He wants it and wherever you go, because We are with you and with whoever wishes that the Feast (of Easter) is unified.”

The oil continued to exude from Myrna frequently during the 11 long years it did not flow from the Icon—from the dawn of Easter in 1990 until April 21, 2001, when the Orthodox and Catholics again celebrated the Feast of Easter at the same time.

God is making Himself intensely present. The Virgin is manifesting her powerful intercession today. All this in a world, even among many Christians, grown cold to God and whose faith, often, at best, is but a dead faith. God and his Mother are calling all back to a living faith and love. When at Damascus, minutes from where St. Paul the Apostle was converted, and from where he went on to change the world, God and His Mother are sending us the sign of oil and all that oil signifies. This is time for serious reflection. It is time for the scales to fall from the eyes of many who believe “God is Great” as well as from millions who call themselves Christian but give little evidence of a Christian life of faith and morals.

God is calling all to unity in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Why Oil as a Sign?

The phenomenon of oil associated with the Virgin of Soufanieh is not a first time in history. Miracles with oil are not new or unique in Catholic history but extend back for centuries. “Oil of Saints” has long existed in the Church. Oily substances which have been seen flowing from relics or burial places of certain saints have long been known. The oil that burns in their shrine lamps, and water that may come from wells near their graves, are recorded in history. Such oils, used by the faithful, have been known to have curative powers.

Among famous miraculous oils are those associated with St. Walburga, abbess of Heidenheim, Bavaria. She died in 780 and her body was brought to Eichstadt, Bavaria, May 1, 870. In 893, oil was discovered flowing intermittently from her relics which now rest at Eichstadt.

There is also the oil of St. Menas, which comes from a holy well at Mareotis in the Libyan desert near the saint's national shrine.

Oil has exuded at the shrine of St. Nicholas of Myra, a saint famous in both the East and the West. The oil has been seen to exude from his relics in Bari, Italy.

Three Kinds of Oils Used by the Church

There are three kinds of Holy Oils blessed by the bishop as sacramentals and used by the Church. There is the Oil of Catechumens, Holy Chrism, and Oil of the Sick. The holy oils are symbols of spiritual nourishment and the light of grace.

Oil is used in the administration of some of the Sacraments of the Church. Olive oil is blessed by the bishop of the diocese for use in the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. "Is there anyone sick among you? He should ask for the presbyters of the Church. They in turn are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Name of the Lord. This prayer uttered in faith will reclaim the one who is ill, and the Lord will restore him to health. If he has committed any sins, forgiveness will be his" (Jas. 5:15).

Consecrated oil is used in anointing the hands when a priest is ordained. The hands of the priest are used in dispensing the mysteries of Christ, through his hands the grace of Jesus Christ is bestowed.

The oil of Holy Chrism is used in the administration of Confirmation. Chrism is a consecrated mixture of olive oil and balsam, blessed by a bishop and used for Confirmation and Holy Orders. Confirmation brings the Holy Spirit to souls in a new and special way. The consecrated oil is essential for the validity of the Sacrament. It is also used in the blessing of tower bells, and in the consecration of churches, altars, chalices and patens.

Oil purifies and soothes. Oil is a sign of healing and comforting, the bringing of joy. It is used to strengthen the body and to bring light to men. Oil is a special sign of the Holy Spirit.

Soufanieh Is for the Family

In the use of the oil healings have taken place from cases of cancer, bone-related illnesses, complicated pregnancy, the crippled, etc. In homes where oil has been manifested it has the result in bringing the family back to communal family prayer. Soufanieh is very much associated with a call to the family for love and unity in Christ Jesus.

While the oil that comes from the body of Myrna does not stain the bed or personal clothing, it rather evaporates.

On Wednesday, February 20, 2002, a large reproduction of the Soufanieh Icon gave oil in unusual circumstances. It was about 11 p.m. before others joined in prayer in the Claire Saadi home before the Icon and photos with the oil exuding, after they had been alerted late in the day. The concern and experience, starting so late, would go into February 21, which would prove to be a special anniversary.

Claire Saadi called Maya Patsalides about 10:40 p.m. to report that in her house, in the sitting room where there is a big reproduction of Our Lady of Soufanieh Icon (30 × 40 cm.), it was shedding oil. The Soufanieh Icon was placed on a table with many other icons and pictures on the table.

At 9 p.m., February 20, Marlene, the sister of Claire, and Maryam (Ethiopian girl who lives in Claire's house) decided to pray the Rosary as they did every day. They went to the place of the Soufanieh reproduction and the other pictures. When the oil came, at first they were scared and thought it could be an illusion and that it was not oil; checking it out, they were sure that it was oil.

They then called Maya Patsalides who in turn phoned Myrna, Rita, Salwa. They all came and joined in prayer at the Claire home. While praying the Rosary, Myrna asked for a calendar to see if it was a special Church feast. Later she asked for the book of the Soufanieh messages. While looking at the book, Myrna started crying and asked Maya to read what happened on February 21, 1983, during the Virgin Mary's fourth apparition. With good reason Myrna wondered what Fr. Malouli was trying to say as oil appeared to come from his photo as well. The previous Holy Week, Myrna had seen Fr. Malouli in light while undergoing the sufferings of the passion of Jesus.

On February 21, 1983, 9:30 p.m., there had taken place the fourth apparition in which the Virgin Mary said:

My children, let it be said between us, I have come back here. Do not insult the haughty who are devoid of humility. The humble person craves other people's remarks to correct his shortcomings, while the corrupt and haughty neglects, rebels, becomes hostile. Forgiveness is the best thing.

He who pretends to be pure and loving before people, is impure before God. I would like to request something from you, a word that you will engrave in your memory. that you shall always repeat:

God saves me, Jesus enlightens me, the Holy Spirit is my life, thus I fear nothing.

Is it not so, my son Joseph?

Forbear and forgive. Forbear much less than the Father has forbore.

Back in February 1983, after the above message was first given, people were wondering who is "Joseph." Fr. Malaouli had remained quiet at first. He had never told those who knew him so well in Damascus, that his real proper name was "Joseph" although he did not go by that name. Finally, Fr. Malouli took out an identification card from his pocket to

show that his formal, proper name was “Joseph.”

It was then Myrna remembered that the same reproduction of Our Lady of Soufanieh had exuded oil on Saturday, November 26, 1989 (anniversary of Soufanieh).

Fr. Joseph Malouli had been a privileged witness from the first days of the apparitions and the signs that were manifested at Soufanieh. It was he who had faithfully transcribed the messages. He observed and noted meticulously everything that was happening in the house of Soufanieh. It seemed he practically never left that house. He ensured an impartial analysis of the events. He once said: “I have let myself be caught totally (body and soul) by the phenomenon of Soufanieh.”

When he desired to avoid mistakes, he had prayed and received from the Holy Virgin Mary an answer to his prayer: “*Holy Virgin, enlighten us, so as to avoid making a mistake which could prejudice your program.*” The answer then came a few minutes later during an apparition of the Virgin Mary on February 21, 1983: “God saves me, Jesus enlightens me, the Holy Spirit is my life, this is why I fear nothing, *isn't that so, my son Joseph?*”

To return to the February 21-22, 2001, incidences: Claire prays much every day. She averages praying the Rosary three times a day. She does much work to help poor people and does many charitable works. One example is helping Maryam, the Ethiopian girl, who stays at her home and with whom she prays every day. Maryam had been begging the Virgin Mary in prayer every day to permit her to see the oil.

The oil came down from the Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh, mainly to three other photos, to Fr. Malouli, who was also Claire's spiritual guide, and to St. Don Bosco and Mother Teresa, both of whom had worked with poor people. Claire worked with the associations of both of them under the instruction of Fr. Malouli.

The oil was exuding out of the reproduction profusely. It was plentiful. It came especially from the Virgin Mary's eyes and mouth. The oil went down onto the table and the other pictures there, especially that of the late Fr. Malouli (who had been Myrna's spiritual director), St. Don Bosco and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. There were some drops of oil appearing in the Fr. Malouli photos without showing any traces or lines, as was the case with the other pictures, where one could see the line drawn by the drops of oil coming down from the Soufanieh reproduction to those photos.

It would not be for the author of this book to know all the reasons why and when heaven gives signs. But I could not help but remember that the dates above (February 21-22, 2001) coincide perfectly with a cancellation in ecumenical talks between the Vatican and officials of the Orthodox Church in Russia, which is the largest Orthodox body in the world.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, was scheduled to travel to Moscow February

21-22 for meetings with Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexei II and other top officials. A request was given Cardinal Kasper February 13 to cancel his visit and the head of the Orthodox office for ecumenical relations said that the request to cancel his visit was related directly to the Vatican's February 11 announcement that it was transforming into dioceses the four Catholic apostolic administrations set up in the 1990s to minister to Catholics in Russia. (See chapter 10 for further details.)

Oil is a sign of the Holy Spirit and a further invitation to pray, in this case, especially for love and unity between families, between Christians.

Often people ask how they may obtain the miraculous oil from Soufanieh. There are thousands who would like some and it is a big world. There is only so much, according to God's will, although it has flowed in thousands of cases in various parts of the world and has been known to have curative results when it is God's holy will.

People write me for Soufanieh miraculous oil. *I do not have a supply to send.* I was instrumental in obtaining some for Mother Angelica of EWTN directly from Nicolas and Myrna who sent it to me through a woman traveling to the United States.

Obviously thousands of people write to Soufanieh for oil. They have a sign posted to the side of the miraculous Icon, "NO DONATION ACCEPTED." Fr. Elias Zahlaoui frequently mentions that although the Nazzours have opened their doors to the world and their home has



The foyer of the Virgin's House of Soufanieh, with inscribed messages and holy images on the walls.

become known as “the Virgin’s House”—yet everything is done gratuitously. When people send money, it is returned. I respect Fr. Zahlaoui for this and I too advise people whom I have ministered to with special charisms, never to accept one penny from anyone relative to your supernatural gifts. Otherwise it could be said it was all a sham for the sake of money.

The story has circulated that the Nazzours are wealthy. That is an exaggeration. They live simply and without luxuries. I saw their family car at the time which was 38-years-old. Their home is not even their own in a sense, it is the home of all Mary’s children. Legally the home belongs to Nicolas and his brothers and sisters who have families of their own. 🌀



The Nazzour family poses with the author before the miraculous Icon, behind John Emmanuel’s head. Daughter Miriam is between Myrna and Nicolas.



Myrna has gone to many parts of the world to evangelize as Jesus and Mary desire. When people are reverent and pray, often the oil comes.



Thousands often show up to hear Myrna as she travels to many countries.



People are anxious to be anointed when the oil comes.



Fr. Boulos Fadel, Myrna's spiritual director, is seen beside her as people come forth.

Chapter 4

Transfer of the Icon and Healings



HENEVER GOD USES certain souls in a special way to glorify him and lead many others to himself, those souls invariably have to suffer in a special way.

A *Victim Soul* is a person especially chosen by God to suffer more than most people during life, and is one who generously accepts the suffering in union with the Savior and after the example of Christ's own Passion and Death. The motive of a victim soul is a great love of God and the desire to make reparation for the sins of mankind.

A Christian couple united in Christ through the bonds of Holy Matrimony become one. What affects one, affects the other. What involves one, involves the other. Nicolas and Myrna did not have long to wait. The events clearly indicate that while Myrna is the one who undergoes special sufferings, stigmata, has ecstasies, apparitions, all this closely involves her husband who first obtained the Icon. It involves too her entire family which will be involved in opening the door of their home to Jesus Christ. While accepting the decision of the Patriarch, nonetheless, privately in their hearts, they were worried and saddened about the transfer of the Icon to take place on January 9, 1983.

The Icon was transferred to the Church of the Holy Cross with the ceremony beginning at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday, January 9, 1983. The glass of the Icon at that time was covered with many small oil droplets.

Just before the transfer began, Myrna and Nicolas stood in the middle of the patio of their home shedding tears, while holding the Icon in front of them so that many people present could kiss it hoping thus to receive a blessing.

The Orthodox Patriarchate assigned Fr. Joseph Zahlaoui (not related to Fr. Elias Zahlaoui) to carry the Icon in the procession. In the Orthodox way he would carry the Icon at arm's length above his head. The ceremony was simple but the people felt a great emotion while demonstrating a profound piety. Thousands of people from all confessions of faith formed along the 500 meters/yards between the house of Soufanieh and the Church of the Holy Cross.



Fr. Joseph Malouli, C.M., a key priest in Soufanieh events. He kept records from the beginning of the phenomena.

It is time to introduce our readers to Fr. Joseph Malouli, Melkite Catholic, a saintly priest who died March 5, 2000. His last name is based on the place of his origin, Maloula, Syria, where people still speak the language of Aramaic, which was spoken by Jesus Christ when he was on earth physically for 33 years. Fr. Malouli was a Lazarist priest in Damascus from the Congregation of the Mission. He began teaching at the Lazarist college of Bab Touma in Damascus in 1940. He became a witness from

the first days of the apparitions and the signs manifested in Soufanieh. He carefully transcribed the messages and noted meticulously everything that was happening in the house of Soufanieh where he spent much time. He became a spiritual guide to Myrna as well as offering guidance to the many pilgrims who visited the House. He said: "I have let myself be caught totally (body and soul) by the phenomenon of Soufanieh."

Fr. Malouli had been a priest most cautious to any reports of supernatural happenings. At first he too refused to go to the Soufanieh house to investigate. After the first report reached him, the day the Security Officers accompanied by their physician went to investigate Myrna, it was two weeks before he made his first visit to Soufanieh.

When Fr. Malouli finally went to Soufanieh he insisted it be with his Superior General, Fr. Farah, together with the Mother Superior of the Daughters of Charity. His concern was not to see oil but to meet Myrna. He asked her some theological questions and became convinced a supernatural happening was possible. From then on Fr. Malouli joined the crowd in prayer. Nicolas Nazzour told me of his great admiration of Fr. Malouli whom he considered a very holy man. They have a large picture of him to this day in their living room.

Fr. Joseph Malouli became very valuable in spiritual advice to the Nazzours and very instrumental in the events until his death March 5, 2000. When the Icon was to be moved to the Church of the Holy Cross, it was Fr. Malouli who was at the head of the procession leading the



Myrna during ecstasy of Holy Week 2001 sees deceased Fr. Joseph Malouli in light and points to where he used to sit.

Rosary. While Fr. Joseph Zahlaoui carried the Icon, Fr. Elias Zahlaoui was at his side. They were surrounded by two choirs, one a Greek-Catholic and the other, a Greek-Orthodox choir. One can see a certain unity in these very acts between the Orthodox and the Catholics. Myrna and Nicolas walked behind these with eyes red from tears.

As the procession entered the street leading to the Church of the Holy Cross, Fr. Joseph Zahlaoui, Orthodox, turned to Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, Catholic, and said: "It is a day that reminds us of the time of Constantinople."

The important spiritual place of Fr. Malouli in the Soufanieh events from the beginning is seen in the events of Holy Week, April 2001, a year after the priest's death. In 2001 the Orthodox and Catholic Church celebrated Easter at the same time. Myrna saw Fr. Malouli during the ecstasy of Holy Saturday, April 14, 2001. I've seen her on the film that was made and she is shown pointing to the place where Fr. Malouli used to sit during previous ecstasies. Myrna was pointing to inform people that she had seen him with the Holy Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ during the ecstasy. This was the only ecstasy where Myrna has seen both Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary at the same time.


While at Soufanieh I said to Myrna, "I noticed that at one point during the sufferings of Holy Week 2001 you noticed your son John Emmanuel, and he was crying. You extended your hand to embrace and give him comfort." It impressed me deeply that the mother undergoing the sufferings of Jesus Christ, the wound marks clearly visible,

thinks lovingly of her son and reaches out to him. “Myrna, what happened at that time?” Myrna smiled and told me, “John Emmanuel was crying and saying, ‘Mamma, I don’t want Christian unity.’” The boy understood that all the unusual happenings were for unity among Christians everywhere. But if it made his dear mother suffer so much, he gave a normal child’s reaction. Myrna added, “I said to him, ‘It is all right. I am happy.’”

Later I reminded John Emmanuel of this incident and asked him, “Do you still not want Christian unity?” He said, “Yes, Father, now I want Christian unity.”

Returning to our account of the transfer of the Icon from the Nazzour home to the church, it was finally placed on a special setting, a few meters from the Royal Door in front of the Iconostasis. It would remain there for 43 days during which time the church would be filled with prayerful people. During all this time, however, the Icon at the Church of the Holy Cross exuded no oil whatsoever.

While without the oil, there was an instantaneous healing of a Mrs. Alice Benilian on January 25, 1983. She and friends had come from Aleppo in Syria to Soufanieh. For 13 years she had suffered from paralysis of the right arm which was drying up. In prayer before the Icon, she felt three times pressures on her head. It was as if they were caused by a mysterious hand. At the third pressure Alice reported that it felt like a ball of fire going down through her head, hurling down to her chest. At that instant, her right arm became unbent, regaining color and vigor. Her physician, Dr. Pierre Salam from Aleppo, noted this extraordinary recovery, concluding, “Personally, I don’t have any scientific explanation to give about this healing.”

Meanwhile at their home, Nicolas and Myrna placed another Icon without glass in their room. It was like the one placed in the church. The paper reproduction in their home then oozed oil several times, the oil building up on the surface of the Icon while the original one which oozed oil at the church had discontinued giving forth oil. Prayer in the Virgin’s House in Soufanieh continued even while the Icon was in the Orthodox church. There appears to be a message in all this. Our Lord and his Mother are intent on giving special attention to the family at home; there is a call for our homes to become domestic churches, miniature mystical bodies, homes where Jesus is present by the faith and the spiritual lives of those who dwell there. Our Lord and His Mother are intent on calling families to prayer in their homes. 



(Above) The eucalyptus tree (far right) by the river, across the street from the Naz-zour home, taken from the terrace. The Virgin came from the tree to stand on the terrace before Myrna.

(Left) A close-up of the tree.

The Icon Is Returned

The Icon which was taken to the Church of the Holy Cross so ceremoniously was returned in a manner most unceremonious. On Monday, February 21, 1983, two Greek-Orthodox priests, Fathers Kfoury and Hosni, came to the Nazzour home without warning. They returned the Icon in a cheap, black plastic bag.

Nicolas became upset with the abrupt and undignified manner of its return. He had some loud words of opinion to express to these priests. Fr. Malouli who had arrived at this time, heard the loud talking from outside. He waited outside until a proper time to enter.

As soon as the Christian communities in Damascus learned of the manner of the return of the Icon, the majority of Christians were shocked. It is difficult to discover just what all happened or the reasons. I inquired why in Soufanieh. The most I heard, but not from the Nazzour family, was something to the effect that now the world comes into the Nazzour home. Some working at the church complained they had to clean it more often because of the crowds that were coming when the Icon was there. Whatever happened, it appears that after the incident, good Christians did not want to pass judgment and all is best forgotten regarding the manner and reasons for the return..

It seems that Our Lord and Our Lady want the house of Soufanieh, a family home, to be the center of the Soufanieh movement throughout the world. Our Lord and Our Lady wanted the Icon back in the Nazzour family home also, to give the message that Jesus and Mary desire to be in our homes. Soufanieh is a call not only for unity of all Christians; it is a call for the sanctification of the family. The center of the marvels of Soufanieh are best manifested in the house of Soufanieh. From the East comes the call for family love and unity. From the East comes the call for Christian unity.

The message to Myrna from the Virgin from the beginning had been "*... I am asking for love. ... I shall visit homes more often, because those who go to church, sometimes, do not go there to pray. I am not asking you to build me a church, but a shrine. Give. Do not turn away anyone who asks for help.*" The house of Soufanieh, a family home, has become a shrine, a place of prayer for the domestic church.

The Lazarist priest, Fr. Joseph Malouli, was obviously needed that he arrived at the home of the Nazzours shortly after the return of the Icon and the disturbance that ensued. He communicated with all involved the need to be reconciled and for everyone to pray.

At 9 that evening Fr. Malouli was praying with Myrna. His own prayer went: "Virgin Mary, enlighten us so that we don't make a mistake that can jeopardize your program."

After a few minutes of silent prayer, Myrna left the room hastily, without saying anything. She felt a force pulling on her shoulder and

went rapidly up the stairs to the terrace which is exposed to the outside air. Her brother-in-law Awad noticed Myrna going to the terrace where the previous apparition had taken place, that first one from which she had been frightened and ran away. Thus no message had been received during that first apparition.

Awad calls to Fr. Malouli: "Abouna (Father), Myrna went up on the terrace."

All in the Soufanieh house hurried to join Myrna on the terrace. They found her kneeling, her hands joined and her face shining brightly. She was speaking some words that seemed to be dictated by another person. The following is the message Myrna later confirmed was given her by the Virgin Mary in dialectal Arabic:

Let it be said between us,
I have come back here.
Do not insult the haughty
who are devoid of humility.
The humble person craves other people's remarks
to correct his shortcomings,
while the corrupt and haughty neglects,
rebels, becomes hostile.

Forgiveness is the best thing.
He who pretends to be pure
and loving before people,
is impure before God.


I would like to request something from you,
a word that you will engrave in your memory,
that you shall always repeat:
*God saves me, Jesus enlightens me,
the Holy Spirit is my life,
thus I fear nothing,*

Is it not so, my son Joseph?
Forbear and forgive.
Forbear much less than the Father has forborne.

After the apparition all went downstairs. They began to discuss the message and all wondered: "Who is Joseph whom Our Lady mentioned?" Fr. Malouli remained quiet, meditating. After about a half an hour he searched in one of the pockets of his cassock. There he found his identification and presented it to the people present. His name was "Joseph." This was not known in Damascus, but he was known by everyone in Syria as simply "Abouna Malouli." Fr. Malouli then told the

people what he had been praying before the message came. He was “Joseph” to whom the Virgin made reference.

Fathers Zahlaoui and Malouli have been called “the two pillars of Soufanieh” since their interest and guidance relative to the events existed from the early days of the phenomenon. These two well known and highly respected priests in Damascus did much to gain credibility from Church leaders. They did not get involved for their own sakes, for it meant problems for them.

Even some priests were not inclined to believe reports of the supernatural at Soufanieh. At the same time intellectuals in Syria, such as physicians, lawyers, teachers, became interested in the reported events at Soufanieh when they heard that the highly respected priests such as Fathers Malouli and Zahlaoui were often present there and favorable to Soufanieh. 

Healings

The first reported healing associated with Soufanieh is striking. On Saturday, December 11, 1982, Myrna and Nicolas were asked by a Hanna family to visit their son Samir, who had a serious case of thrombosis and doctors had said that he was in danger of death at any moment. Samir was also asking to receive our Lord in the Holy Eucharist. Myrna and Nicolas thus informed Fr. Elias Zahlaoui who agreed to go with them to bring Holy Communion to Samir.

When the three arrived at the room of the sick Samir they were surprised to see him rise from his bed, kneel down, and place his forehead on the ground. When Fr. Zahlaoui, concerned for his condition, tried to stop him from this, Samir said: “Father, God exists.”

Samir, once back in his bed, asked Nicolas to leave for he wanted to talk to Myrna. “My sister Mary, you are thinking of retiring to a convent, and the Virgin Mary does not want you to do that.” Myrna was astonished since she had thought about it much for several days, but had not talked about it to anyone. He had also called Myrna by her baptismal name, “*Mary*.” The Nazzour and Hanna families had previously not known each other.

A few days before these incidents, Samir had suffered an infarction followed by cerebral hemorrhage. A friend had hurried to Soufanieh and brought back a wad of cotton moistened with oil. Although Samir’s parents had protested, his friend placed the cotton into Samir’s mouth, forcing his jaws open with a spoon. It was then Samir opened his eyes, looked at his family with tears, and asked for Holy Communion and for Myrna and Nicolas to come. A reproduction of the image of the Virgin Mary, but different from the one of Soufanieh, had been hung above Samir’s bed and oozed oil repeatedly for three weeks.

On December 19, 1982, a Sunday, just eight days after his recovery,

Samir Hanna went to the House of Soufanieh. While getting out of the car, he joined hands which were suddenly covered with oil. He raised them into the air, spread his fingers, fearing that he would be accused of concealing cotton moistened with oil. He held his hands in the air as he entered the house. Those who had known the gravity of his illness were startled to see him alert, his face beaming with happiness. He prayed for a long time before the Icon. Then, in late afternoon, he participated in holy Mass offered by Fr. Zahlaoui at his parish Church of Our Lady of Damascus.

Something took place between the events of December 11 and 19, noted above, which is known as the "first healing at Soufanieh." On Thursday, December 16, 1982, a Dr. Jamil Marjithe visited the house of Soufanieh. He had been trying for an hour by rational arguments to prove that all these events associated with Soufanieh were subjective, since no modern science can prove them.

A woman clothed in black, kneeling before the Icon, suddenly began to scream. Other people close to her were shouting: "Oh, Virgin! She is healed."

She was taken to the lounge, incapable of talking for herself, for she was so emotionally shaken but she was moving her arms violently. Her son was with her and explained that she had had a paralysis of the right hand because of a calcification of the shoulder. Fr. Zahlaoui, suspecting that she had just been healed, requested medical certificates from her son as soon as possible. He had them with him. The day before he had come with his mother, Raquille Kilta, to visit Dr. Samir Roumani.

Fr. Zahlaoui took the certificate, shared it with Dr. Marjithe who was near him. The doctor browsed the certificate and finally examined Mrs. Kilta. A few minutes later, the physician came back, emotionally shaken, and said to Fr. Zahlaoui: "Father, I surrender. This is beyond me and beyond any human power. I am ready to testify before anyone. Let me keep this report for a while, in order that I can continue to observe this lady's progress in collaboration with Dr. Samir Roumani. . . ."

The doctor who had come into the house of Soufanieh with the intention of showing these people reasons why they were in error now left with a conviction that what was happening at Soufanieh was from a power above.

Dr. Marjithe, after leaving the house of Soufanieh, went to the district's chief policeman and the commander in chief of the police of Damascus, General Walid Hammamieh. The doctor informed them of the spontaneous recovery to which he was witness. Within half an hour the civil authorities came to the house of Soufanieh offering their services, should the ever-increasing crowd cause any trouble.

Damascus at this time was living under tension and fearing political manifestations on other accounts. Policemen had strict orders to forbid any gatherings. But this injunction did not apply to Soufanieh. In fact,

during these years in Soufanieh several popular processions, with thousands of people, took place, with no significant incident. Such is the account of the first healing that took place in the house of Soufanieh.

The second healing began on December 17, 1982, when Fr. Zahlaoui arrived at the house of Soufanieh and was introduced to Mrs. Ghalya Armouche who affirmed that she had been healed in an extraordinary way.

Ghalya had endured violent pain in her right hand for some months. Her daughter asked her to go to Soufanieh on the evening of December 16, 1982, but the pains were so sharp that she could not go. Instead, she asked for a piece of cotton impregnated with oil. In the evening, Ghalya slipped the cotton into her nightgown's sleeve, after having prayed. She fell asleep. That night she dreamed that a beautiful lady was pushing her shoulder while telling her: "Stand up, your pains are gone!"

The next day her pains had gone. On the evening of December 27, 1982, Fr. Zahlaoui asked to have an interview with Mrs. Armouche's physician, Dr. Toutounji. The priest asked the physician what he foresaw for his patient.

He presented an X-ray taken two and a half months earlier saying: "The poor woman is condemned to paralysis."

"Will it be possible to make an artificial joint?" the priest asked.


"Here, no. But if these people are wealthy, she may be operated on in Europe. Anyway, ask her to come and see me tomorrow."

"I think that she does not need your services anymore, doctor. Some other physician has healed her."

"What are you saying, Father?"

"The Virgin Mary has healed her, doctor!"

Dr. Toutounji performed a new X-ray on Tuesday, December 28, followed by a check-up. He observed that the calcification, since the previous X-ray, had increased in volume. Therefore full recovery could not be confirmed. The physician observed that his patient did not recover the total mobility of her hand. To this day, the pain has not come back and the calcification is static. Contrary to other healings which have taken place at Soufanieh with total disappearance of the illness or infirmity, in this case, the paralysis and pain disappeared although the calcification remained.

Many healings have been confirmed related to the events at Soufanieh. Many people have eye-witnessed most of the healings. The effect on the people has always been a joyful crowd praising God's glory for a long time. The number of Christians whose faith has been rekindled or strengthened by the events of Soufanieh is incalculable. 

Thousands of Witnesses on December 19, 1982

There were thousands of witnesses present on Sunday, December 19, 1982, gathered on the sidewalk and on Soufanieh streets and in the public garden, which is just across the road from the house of Soufanieh. The crowd was anywhere from five thousand to ten thousand, no one knows. Christians and Muslims were united in prayer.

Mohammed Al-Kahwaji, a young Muslim soldier, came carrying in his arms his bedridden father. His father had been struck by a hemiplegic when it had been announced to him that his son, a soldier in Lebanon, had been killed. The information was erroneous. It was his son, whom he believed dead, who had carried him in his arms to Soufanieh, as Myrna tells it:

"I approached the sick person and I told him: Pray, ask the Virgin Mary to heal you. Shortly after, he rose and stood up, initially with some difficulty, then he walked. His son Mohammed waited outside, praying for his father. And suddenly he saw his father before him, standing. He immediately knelt on the ground and shouted with joy: 'Thank you, thank you, Oh Virgin Mary.' The people shouted: 'He is healed. He is healed. Hail Mary. . . .' Some applauded, others joyfully shouted."

On the same day, a 25-year-old Muslim man, Fadi Bahem, came carrying his older brother in his arms to Soufanieh. A witness described it this way: "His legs were wobbly. Deep inside me, I asked the Lord to forgive me, because I did not know how this person would be healed. But when I saw him leave the house alone on his feet, I almost lost my mind. Was I hallucinating? No. He was walking by himself."

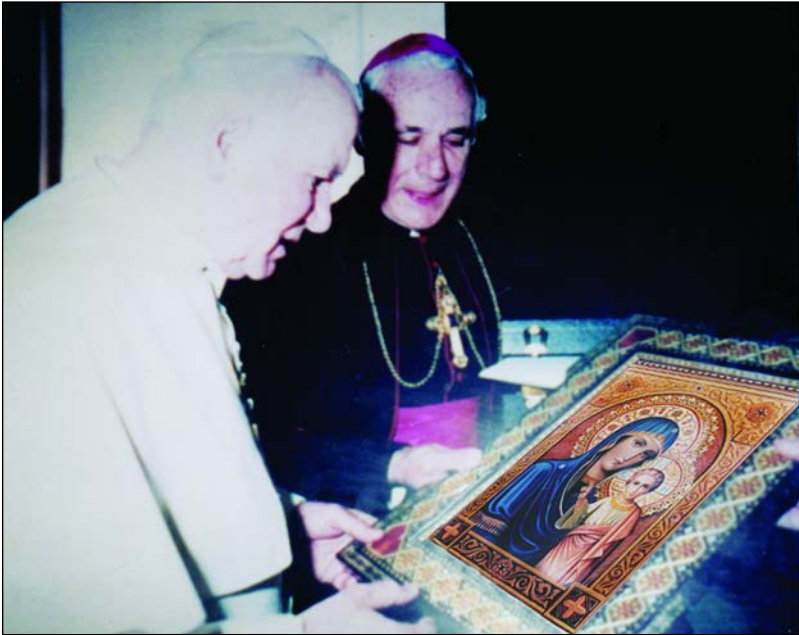
The crowd was filled with joy when it saw this young man walking slowly. They sang hymns to the honor of the Virgin Mary. When they were making their way home which is in Mnin, a village eight miles north of Damascus, his eldest brother, a military man, started shooting into the air with his revolver in jubilation, upon seeing his healed brother arriving.

When Jesus performed miracles of healing as recorded in the New Testament his motive was to bring people to faith. During his public life on earth Jesus Christ healed the sick, cured the deaf-mutes, paralytics, and the blind. He also delivered those possessed by the devil. Since early Christian times healing is of concern to the Church's care, for those sick and in physical or emotional need. Always in imitation of Jesus Christ, the Church's healing ministry has been understood as not stopping with people's bodily needs. The Church, as was Jesus Christ, is concerned with the whole person, body and soul, and seeks to alleviate every human pain or disability, whether physical, psychological, or spiritual.

The Sacraments of the Church, especially Penance (Reconciliation) and the Anointing of the Sick, are specially directed to healing. These

Sacraments are primarily to heal sickness of the soul and the anointing, if it be God's will, is to heal the body.

The miracles of Soufanieh exist, not simply to heal individuals. The message for Christians everywhere is that Jesus Christ founded one Church to last until the end of time. The miracles give testimony to the message of Soufanieh for love and unity between Christians, and love and unity in each family. ~



Bishop Luigi Accogli, former papal nuncio to Damascus giving Pope John Paul II Soufanieh Icon.

Chapter 5

Interview with Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, An Apostle of Soufanieh

Soufanieh Extends throughout the World



WE HAVE ALREADY introduced readers to Fr. Elias Zahlaoui in chapter 3. He is a Melkite Catholic priest and vicar of Our Lady of Damascus—a Greek-Catholic rite parish in Damascus. He is the priest who at first refused to look into the reported supernatural events at Soufanieh but finally came to investigate at the insistence of young persons, whom he knew to be serious and well balanced.

Fr. Zahlaoui was born in Damascus in 1932. His studies included the Greek-Melkite Catholic seminary of Ste. Anne in Jerusalem. He was ordained in Damascus in July 1959, devoting himself for much of his priesthood to university youth while teaching at the Damascus University. He has been the parish priest of Our Lady of Damascus since 1977 and founded the choir known as “Chœur-Joie” (“Choir of Joy”), consisting of over 450 members of the different Christian communities in Damascus.

He is known in Damascus as a very able spokesman with a reputation for integrity and search for truth while living a life in the spirit of poverty and abnegation. Soufanieh has definitely had its mark in the life of this priest with his involvements from the beginning.

The Virgin Mary is more than well aware of Fr. Zahlaoui's involvements with the Virgin House of Soufanieh and all the events connected with it. This is shown in the message received by Myrna in December, 1982 as follows:

“My son Elias, I myself have lifted you up from the ailing bed, and I made you leave your church to come here and serve Me. Carry on your work of spreading the faith. You are an apostle. You are good. I, myself, am aware of your long struggle since the holy month of July. I know you struggle with yourself and with all those who surround you and especially with your church and



Fr. Zahlaoui talks with the author, having anointed him with oil immediately before the Shrine marking the spot of the apparitions.

the other churches. You are an apostle. You are good. The unity which you are seeking will happen."

We must be careful in reading the messages in English that we do not misinterpret. It does not mean that Fr. Elias left the Catholic Church. A theologian in Australia told me that he did not think Soufanieh could be true for Our Lady would never say some of the things reported. The real problem he experienced I believe was from some translations and not going to original sources. It is important to understand what was the real message given in the Syriac language. This is one reason why, when it was suggested to me to write a book in English on Soufanieh, I replied, "I would never do that without going to Damascus, Syria and discovering things first-hand." And I had no intention of going to Syria nor did I think there would be any such possibility. Yet, things were arranged for me.

My personal interview with Fr. Zahlaoui was on September 17, 2001, at the House of Soufanieh, home to Nicolas and Myrna Nazzour and children. It went as follows:

"Father, tell me of your initial experiences."

"The second time I came here, November 28, 1982, I saw oil. For about a month I watched what was going on here. Archbishop François Abov-Mokh, Latin rite, had said to me, 'Keep me informed. Be involved, watch with caution what is going on.'

"On December 29, 1982, I went to this same archbishop and reported what happened during the month. The archbishop helped me to meet the Orthodox Patriarch and I told him what is going on in the House of Soufanieh."

On December 30, 1982, the archbishop met the Antiochian Greek-Orthodox Patriarch at 8 a.m. Myrna and Nicolas met him in Damascus at 9 a.m. He received the young couple kindly and said, "I'll make some flyers with a declaration to inform all the priests and people about what is going on." At this point Fr. Zahlaoui gave me the communication of the Patriarchate for priest and people as reported in chapter 3.

I next inquired, "Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, it seems that the Soufanieh message involves not only Church Unity but the family."

He replied: "Correct. But it requires the family to return to God. The first message was really given to her at the second apparition because of Myrna's state of panic at the first. [She had run away at the first apparition and did not stay to get a message.]

"Consider the first message that was given to Myrna, December 18, 1982:

My children, remember God, because God is with us. You know all things and yet you know nothing. Your knowledge is an incomplete knowledge. But the day will come when you will know all things, the way God knows Me. Do good to those who do evil. And do not harm anyone. I have given you oil more than you have asked for, but I shall give you something much more powerful than oil.

Repent and have faith, and remember me in your joy. Announce my Son the Emmanuel. He who announces Him is saved, and he who does not announce Him, his faith is vain. Love one another.

I am not asking for money to give to churches, nor for money to distribute to the poor. I am asking for love. Those who distribute their money to the poor and to churches, but have no love, those are nothing. I shall visit homes more often, because those who go to church, sometimes, do not go there to pray. I am not asking you to build Me a church, but a shrine. GIVE. Do not turn away anyone who asks for help.

This first message requires meditation. Our Lady is saying she will visit homes more often, that means *families*. She has given the sign of her visitations by the exuding of olive oil. Thousands of replicas of Our Lady with the Christ Child, as is present in the House of Soufanieh, the home of Nicolas and Myrna, have oozed oil around the world.

Myrna has traveled to many parts of the world and while people are praying often the oil has been experienced. When the Icon oozes oil in homes, that home becomes a special place of prayer for the family and friends. They come to realize that the home is to be a domestic church, a place of faith and prayer.

Fr. Zahlaoui continued to reply to my observation that Soufanieh contained a message for the *family* as well as for Christian unity.

"The new culture must be set aside for the spirituality of the family. This message goes further even for Islam. It is leading to dialogue with Islam. This message came for all in the Middle East in a special way, concerning the conflicts. It is for Christians and Muslims as Jesus

died for everyone. It is for the Middle East first, but also for the whole world because Jesus died for everyone.

"The holy Mother of God speaks for and to everybody. The Soufanieh message is for all people as Myrna was told: 'Tell it to all people.'"

I observed to Fr. Zahlaoui that Myrna was only in her 18th year when she married May 9, 1982. "Why would God pick such a young bride for this?"

The priest replied: "First, you have to ask God. I have a second answer. At the beginning of a new marriage, the Sacrament of Matrimony, which was recently given to them, is the moment of holiness. The holiness is great. The sacrament is new."

Nicolas, in whose home I was interviewing Fr. Zahlaoui, heard some of our interview and offered the following information.

"Our marriage was not an arranged thing. My brother had married her sister, so we knew each other. We had known each other for two years. She was 16-years-old when I met her for the first time. We were not dating like they do in America. There were family connections. We met in the context of the family. On September 13, eve of the Feast of the Exultation of the Cross, we were engaged in 1981. On May 9, 1982, we got married.

"I loved this girl. I liked to joke, dance and swim, and so did Myrna. It seemed we had the same hobbies. In our opinion it seemed that we liked each other, were happy with each other. First I asked Myrna if she agreed. She replied: 'OK. Ask my father.' Her brother hit her because I am older by 20 years. In the East the mother always goes along with the father. My father was dead. Syrian Christians among men usually marry at 27 or 28. Women are usually 10 or so years younger as a custom. If they are the same age, that is acceptable."

Nicolas had mentioned to me, while at Soufanieh, that the events of Soufanieh, the first vision, was at the same date and time as the first vision of St. Catherine Labouré who was shown the Miraculous Medal to make known to the world.

The Guardian Angel of St. Catherine Labouré, in the form of a child, awoke her during the night, led her to the chapel which was brightly lit. The Blessed Mother then sat in a chair before the altar. St. Catherine rested her arms on the lap of the Holy Mother for a long time and had intimate conversations with our heavenly Queen and Mother. In one vision the Holy Virgin stood on an image of the world.

The Miraculous Medal of the Blessed Virgin Mary contains a design revealed in 1830 to St. Catherine Labouré, a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul in Paris. In visions she had of Our Lady she was shown a medal which on one side had the image of Mary with arms outstretched with the words: "O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee." On the reverse side is the letter M with a

cross and 12 stars about it and the Hearts of Jesus and Mary underneath the Cross and M [see p. 132]. It is really an image of Mary as Mother of the Church, Queen of the Apostles and Mediatrix of all graces, while all grace originates for mankind with the redeeming death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Jesus is the sole essential Mediator. The image of the Miraculous Medal reminds us that the Hearts of Jesus and Mary are inseparable.

The number of miracles attached to the wearing of this medal gave it the popular description of "Miraculous." Its popularity is similar to the brown scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The Miraculous Medal is the badge of the Sodality of the Children of Mary.

There are numerous shrines and devotions dedicated to Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal. Weekly devotions to her are celebrated in thousands of Catholic churches throughout the world.

I asked Fr. Zahlaoui if he thought I should make mention of the Miraculous Medal in this book and its initiation corresponding as to dates with Soufanieh. His response was as follows:

"1830 ushered in the Marian Era of Our Lady. First it became known in Europe and now is becoming known in the Orient. A message from Jesus Christ (Maad, Lebanon) on Wednesday, July 22, 1987, was as follows: 'Do not fear, my daughter, in you I shall educate my generation. Pray, pray, and pray again!' And if you pray, say: 'O Father, through the merits of Your beloved Son's wounds, save us.'"

I asked Fr. Zahlaoui: "Why did Jesus say 'educate My generation?'"

The first period beginning on October 28, 1983, it was the Blessed Virgin Mary who said it. Now both Jesus and Mary say it.

Fr. Zahlaoui then showed me records of the message of ecstasies for the first period, October 28, 1983, to November 26, 1985. You will notice "educate My generation" more than once.

Message from the Holy Virgin Mary, Friday, October 28, 1983:

Do not fear, all this is happening to glorify the name of God. Do not fear, in you I shall educate my generation.

Message from the Holy Virgin Mary, Friday, November 4, 1983:

Go down and tell them that you are My daughter before being theirs . . . My heart has been consumed over My only Son. It will not be consumed over all My children.

Message from the Holy Virgin Mary, Friday, November 25, 1983:

This is all I want. I have not come to separate. Your married life will remain as it is . . . Would you like to come to Me? . . . Come . . . Your willingness (to come to Me) is enough.

Message from Jesus Christ, Thursday, May 31, 1984 (Ascension Day):

My daughter, I am the Beginning and the End. I am Truth, Freedom and Peace. My Peace I give you. Your peace shall not depend on what people say, be it good or bad, and think little of yourself. He who does not seek people's approval, and does not fear their disapproval, enjoys true peace. And this is achieved through Me.

Live your life, contented and independent. The pains you have incurred for Me shall not break you. Rather, rejoice. I am capable of rewarding you. Your hardships will not be prolonged, and your pains will not last. Pray with adoration, because eternal life is worth these sufferings.

Pray for God's will to be done in you, and say:

Beloved Jesus,
Grant that I rest in You above all things,
above all creatures,
above all Your angels,
above all praise,
above all rejoicing and exultation,
above all glory and honor,
above all heavenly hosts,
For You alone are the Most High,
You alone are the Almighty
and Good above all things.
May You come to me and relieve me,
and release me from my chains,
and grant me freedom,
because without You my joy is not complete,
without You my table is empty.

Only then will I come to say: Here I am, because you have invited me.

Message from the Holy Virgin Mary, Friday, September 7, 1984:

[The Virgin Mary entrusts Myrna with a secret. Myrna remembers from the message only the following words:]

Live your life, but let not life prevent you from continuing to pray.

Message from the Holy Virgin Mary, Wednesday, May 1, 1985:

My children, assemble. My heart is wounded. Do not allow My heart to break because of your divisions. My daughter, I shall give you a gift for your hardships.

Message from the Holy Virgin Mary (Hassake, Syria), Sunday, August 4, 1985:

The Church is the kingdom of Heaven on earth. He who has divided it has sinned. And he who has rejoiced from its division has also sinned. I am happy: do not fear, I am with you. In you I shall educate My generation.

Message from the Holy Virgin Mary, Wednesday, August 14, 1985:

Happy anniversary. It is always a feast for Me whenever I see you all gathered together. Your prayer is My feast. Your faith is My feast. The union of your hearts is My feast.

Message from Jesus Christ, Saturday, September 7, 1985:

I am the Creator. I created her, so that she could create Me. Rejoice from the joy of Heaven, because the Daughter of the Father and the Mother of God and the Spouse of the Spirit is born. Exult from the exultation of the earth.

Message from Jesus Christ, Tuesday, November 26th, 1985 [eve of the third anniversary of the phenomenon]:


My daughter, do you wish to be crucified or glorified?

Answer: Glorified.

Christ smiles and says:

Do you prefer to be glorified by the creature or the Creator?

Answer: By the Creator.

Christ: This is realized through Crucifixion. Because each time you look at the creatures, the eyes of the Creator move away from you. My daughter, I want you to apply yourself to praying and to humble yourself. He who humbles himself, God increases him in strength and in greatness. I was crucified out of love for you, and I want you to carry and bear your cross for Me, willingly, with love and patience, and (I want you) to await My arrival. He who participates in My suffering, I shall make him participate in My glory. And there is no salvation for the soul except through the Cross. Do not fear, My daughter, I shall give you from My wounds enough to repay the debts of the sinners. This is the source from which every soul may drink. And if My absence lasts, and the light disappears from you, do not fear, this will be for My glorification. Go to the land where corruption has prevailed, and remain in God's peace. 

Notice the words of the Mother of the Church message of May 1, 1985, "My children, assemble. My heart is wounded. Do not allow My heart to break because of your divisions." In reading this I could not help but think of the difficult times the Vatican and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch of Moscow have had in even agreeing to meet.

Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in March, 2002 delivered an address in which he said: "The more we come closer to one another, the more painful is the experience of not yet being in full communion among ourselves, which creates a certain dissatisfaction and frustration. . . . The new generation of faithful and priests has not lived through the Council and does not understand how things have changed."

In this context, Cardinal Kasper mentioned three key challenges:

"In the first place, we must promote ecumenical formation and the reception of ecumenical results. The results of ecumenical progress have yet to penetrate the heart and flesh of our Church and of the other Churches."

"In the second place, we must clarify and renew the ecumenical vision. We need a new ecumenical language and impulse. We run the risk of losing a whole generation of youths if we are not capable of giving them a vision."

Third, Cardinal Kasper appealed for the harmonizing of dialogue and identity. In this context, he emphasized, "One can see what the problem and advantages of 'Dominus Iesus' are, which highlighted the question of identity."

Dominus Iesus was the August, 2000 declaration by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the uniqueness and salvific universality of Jesus and the Church. Though criticized for sounding less than ecumenical, it basically reiterated magisterial teaching on the nature of the Catholic Church.

"We must underline clearly that serious ecumenism is something totally different from confessional indifference and relativism; it tends to gravitate around the highest common denominator," Cardinal Kasper states.

The Cardinal then reviewed the situation of relations between Catholics and other Christian confessions and made some startling pronouncements.

"We are increasingly conscious of the fact that an Orthodox Church does not really exist," he contended. "At the present stage, it does not seem that Constantinople is yet capable of integrating the different autocephalous Orthodox Churches; there are doubts about its primacy of honor, especially in Moscow."

He continued: "With Moscow, dialogue at the universal level at present is very difficult; the situation is improving with Greece; in the Middle East, in the territory of the ancient See of Antioch, the situation is completely different and there already is almost full communion."

This last statement was indeed precious. It reminded me of my interview with the Patriarch of Antioch who said to me: "The only difference [between Catholicism and Syriac Orthodox] was one of administration." It is indeed precious that in the very area where the Virgin's House of

Soufanieh is with a mission for Christian unity both the Patriarch of Antioch and the Vatican recognize “there already is almost full communion.” May that situation serve as a model for the rest of the world. How sad if Christians who have a valid priesthood and Holy Eucharist remain divided.

Cardinal Kasper said: “We must avoid giving the impression of ‘divide and conquer.’ We would engage in bad ecumenism if we created new divisions in the other churches or confessional families, or if we tended to a new form of ‘Uniatism.’ The latter—considered a pejorative term in the East—signifies the Eastern Christians who left the Orthodox Church to join Rome.

What is most important of all for Christian Unity is the opening of hearts in love and prayer. “I pray, Father, that they may be one . . .” was the prayer of Jesus at the First Eucharist and should still be ours today.

Returning to the messages which Fr. Zahlaoui pointed out to me during our interview, if anyone would object to the words “educate my generation” as hardly applicable for our Blessed Mother, I would respond: Look at her prayer the *Magnificat* in St. Luke 1 where Mary recites: “My soul does magnify the Lord. And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior, because he has regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth *all generations shall call me blessed*. God who is mighty has done great things for me, holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age on those who fear him. . . .”

Mary is Mother of the universal Church and every age, every generation is her generation. First, and foremost, every age, every generation is Jesus Christ’s and Mary’s generation. Jesus is Lord of lords and King of kings. Jeremiah 10:10 tells us: “But the Lord is the true God: he is the living God, and the everlasting king. . . .” Jesus is the Lord of history, of every age and generation. Every generation is His generation and He too, like Mary, with whom He is inseparable, can speak of “my generation.”

It was obvious to me that Fr. Zahlaoui had meditated well the accounts and messages of Soufanieh. Without hesitation he could quote, and even pinpoint, the date of messages exactly. He went on in my interview with him to say:

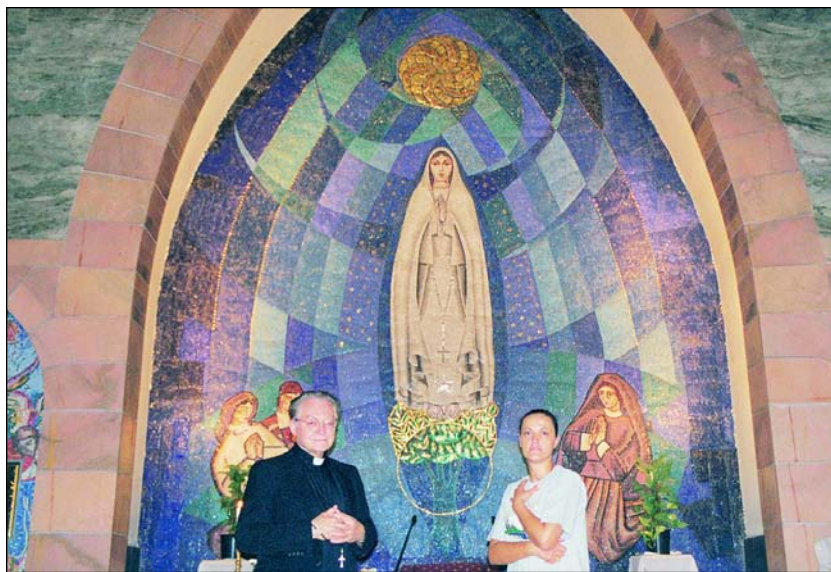
“Here in Syria, Mother Mary is important not only for Christians but also for Muslims. Mary is the most important woman for Muslims. This is why Muslims come to Soufanieh. Also, for Islam, Miriam is a Virgin. This spirit of Mary brings everybody, Christian and Muslim, together. It brings all kinds of Muslims together.

“The first healing was a Muslim.”

At this point Fr. Zahlaoui pointed out the account of the healing of Raquille Kilta and the conversion of Dr. Jamil Marjithe to the events of Soufanieh. [See chapter 4 for details.]

Fr. Zahlaoui then continued with the following observation:

“As 1830 began the Marian Era for the West, Soufanieh began the



Myrna with author at Our Lady of Fatima Church in Damascus.



The author interviews Fr. Boulos (Paul) Fadel, Myrna's spiritual director, as Myrna listens and joins in.

Marian Era for the East. But still, Soufanieh is for all the world. People come from Egypt, India, Iran, etc. Fatima is now the great one in the West and Myrna senses that Fatima is important. This indicates the unity of all in Mary. We call Mary our Mother of 'At-one-ment' through Mary at Fatima. She is working to bring all Christians and Muslims together in unity.

"It is clear from the first message given December 18, 1982. It is a clear message to love everyone, even those who do bad to you. 'I am asking for love. . . . I shall visit homes more often, because those who go to church, sometimes, do not go there to pray. I am not asking you to build me a church, but a shrine. . . .'

"This message is important for all and especially in the Middle East where there is much conflict."

Fr. Zahlaoui's insights and comparison with Fatima were very meaningful to me as I have studied Fatima in depth and have written countless articles and books. I have lectured on Fatima for years, having founded the *Fatima Family Apostolate*. The message of Our Lady of Fatima in the West is also for the entire world symbolized by the golden ball that hangs near our Lady's waist and under her Immaculate Heart. Fatima is a call to love as Mary loved. It is a call to imitate the virtues of Mary, the first and perfect Christian, she who is Mother and Model of the Church.

Years ago theologians met at Fatima to discuss the essence of the Fatima message. They came to the conclusion it was a call to devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and all that the Immaculate Heart of Mary means. Fatima means love. I personally know, starting with ten years ago when I first talked to Myrna by phone, her great love for Our Lady of Fatima. Fatima came up again in my discussions with Myrna in September, 2001.

"Do you think that when the message of Soufanieh becomes widely known in the Mid-East it can bring solutions to the violence and divisions?" I asked Fr. Zahlaoui.

"It is the same as when Jesus came to earth to bring love and peace. Mary comes at Soufanieh for the same purpose. If people would accept the message and live it, then violence would end. The attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, etc., on September 11, 2001, changed politics in the Middle East. The whole world is looking at the United States while Israel is killing Palestinians. No one seems to recognize that Israel's politics fosters terrorists. Israel has been acting like terrorists while America protects Israel. If people don't accept the message of Soufanieh for love and unity, the opposite is violence."


"Can you explain this," I asked Fr. Zahlaoui, "that the message given by Jesus Christ at Soufanieh on April 14, 2001, Holy Week, said something about the Church being on the right track to unity, to follow it or the doors would close?"

“It does not say anything about the Church being on the right track to unity but talks about unity of hearts. Here is what Jesus said in that message:

“I have given you a sign for My glorification. Stay on your path, and I am with you. Otherwise, I will close the gates of heaven in your faces. But here is Mother suffering . . . praying . . . saying to me: O Lord, You are love in its totality! And I say: Do not despair, O Gate of Heaven, because I love them and I want them to respond to this love with giving.

“My children: Strive to see yourselves as you truly are, and to see the extent of your faithfulness in achieving the unity of heart among yourselves. Adorn yourself with patience and wisdom. Don’t be afraid if you fail. Stay firm in hope. Trust Me. I will not abandon those who do My will.’

“As for you, My daughter, be careful, and be armed with My grace. Be patient, wise, and humble. Offer up these pains with joy. I have said to you, ‘Your pains will not last long.’ Look to Me. You shall find peace and rest. It is I who strengthen you. I who desert [*literally*, throw you], and I who pick you up to lead you to the joy of heaven.’

“Persevere in prayer, and let your fasting be accompanied by meditation and solitude, and you will hear My voice in your heart [*literally*, inside you]. Trust Me. I will not abandon you, your family, or anyone who participated with you in My name and for My sake.” 

“The message means,” said Fr. Zahlaoui, “that we have to continue with unity of hearts and then Jesus assured us that he will not leave us. If we don’t do what Jesus said he will close the doors of heaven. But there is a Mother (Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God) and she is feeling so much pain, praying, interceding with Jesus, reminding Him, ‘You are all love.’”

It is good to reflect that Soufanieh is not only for Christians but for Muslims too, as Fr. Zahlaoui has pointed out. Islam is one of the three great Semitic religions, along with Judaism and Christianity. They share roots in the Old Testament. The 99 attributes of God mentioned in the Koran are likewise mentioned in the Bible. The Koran, as mentioned previously, refers to Mary 34 times and is the only woman it names.

The pillars to Islam: 1) Declaration of Belief; 2) Prayer; 3) Fasting; 4) Almsgiving; 5) Pilgrimage to Mecca.

Islam in recent years has outpaced the growth of Christianity in the United States. For the first time in history, recently the number of Muslims throughout the world has exceeded the number of Catholics. The simplicity of Islam and its members’ intense devotion have helped its appeal. The convert to Catholicism, Peter Kreeft, has suggested in his book *Ecumenical Jihad*, that “Islam is growing faster than Christianity in America because Muslims want to be saints more than Christians do.” Also, abortion, adultery, fornications, artificial contraceptions, steriliza-

tion and euthanasia in countries they perceive to be Christian is a grave scandal to Muslims.

When Pope John Paul II wrote the book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, he quoted the words from the Vatican Declaration *Nostra Aetate* about those faithful to Islam: "The Church also has a high regard for the Muslims, who worship one God, living and subsistent, merciful and omnipotent, the Creator of heaven and earth." The Pope went on to say that as a result of their monotheism, "believers in Allah are particularly close to us. . . . It is impossible not to admire their *fidelity to prayer*."


In using an analogy with Islam it can be said that Mary's *fiat* ("Let it be done to me according to your word") is also her *islam*. You see, the ethico-religious significance of the word *Islam* is the "entire surrender to the will of God." *Muslim* then means "those who have surrendered themselves." A Muslim is thus one who has surrendered himself to the will of Allah (God).

Jihad, mentioned in the Koran, refers to a "Holy War" fought against unbelievers. Mohammed when alive led Jihads against alien people. Tribes that did not pledge their allegiance to Allah were often put to the sword. The idea of *Jihad* has been controversial and of intense concern to Christians for there have been Jihads against Christians (Battle of Lepanto, etc.).

Mohammed claimed he had received a succession of divine revelations given to him through the angel Gabriel and from this he founded Islam in 611. At that time his people had been worshiping 360 gods, one for each day of the Arabian year. The worship of one God became very effective in unifying the various tribes of Arabia. Jews and Christians were not willing to be converted to Islam and thus Mohammed spread his teachings through military conquests.

Muslim extremists have killed Christians even in recent years. This has been true of those slaughtered in the Moluccas and East Timor. In the past 15-year-long war of the Sudanese Muslim government, it is estimated that at least two million Christians have died, while many have fled to other countries. Iran has tortured people who converted from Islam to Christianity, etc. Saudi Arabia grants no religious freedom to its 400,000 Catholic Philippine workers. Not a single Catholic church exists in Saudi Arabia.

Some observations of the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen (1895-1979), internationally known as a scholar, author and Catholic orator throughout the world, may prove helpful concerning *Mary and the Moslems*. His cause in the Church is being promoted. The Pope met him at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City about two months before his death, October 2, 1979, and said to him: "You have written and spoken well of the Lord Jesus. You are a loyal son of the Church."

Many of Archbishop Sheen's writings seem prophetic today, approaching 25 years after his death. 

"The missionary effort of the Church toward this group has been, at least on the surface, a failure, for the Moslems are so far almost unconvertible. The reason is that for a follower of Mohammed to become a Christian is much like a Christian becoming a Jew. The Moslems believe that they have the final and definitive revelation of God to the world and that Christ was only a prophet announcing Mohammed, the last of God's real prophets.

"... Although the statesmen have not yet taken it into account, there is still grave danger that the temporal power of Islam may return and, with it, the menace that it may shake off a West that has ceased to be Christian and affirm itself as a great anti-Christian world power. . . .

"The Koran, which is the Bible of the Moslems, has many passages concerning the Blessed Virgin. First of all, the Koran believes in her Immaculate Conception and also in her Virgin Birth. The third chapter of the Koran places the history of Mary's family in a genealogy that goes back through Abraham, Noah, and Adam. When one compares the Koran's description of the birth of Mary with the apocryphal gospel of the birth of Mary, one is tempted to believe that Mohammed very much depended upon the latter. Both books describe the old age and the definite sterility of the mother of Mary. When, however, she conceives, the mother of Mary is made to say in the Koran: 'O Lord, I vow and I consecrate to you what is already within me. Accept it from me.'

"When Mary is born, the mother says: 'And I consecrate her with all of her posterity under thy protection, O Lord, against Satan!'

"The Koran passes over Joseph in the life of Mary, but the Moslem tradition knows his name and has some familiarity with him. In this tradition, Joseph is made to speak to Mary, who is a virgin. As he inquired how she conceived Jesus without a father, Mary answered: 'Do you now know that God when He created the wheat, had no need of seed, and that God by His power made the trees grow without the help of rain? All that God had to do was to say, "So be it," and it was done.'

"The Koran also has verses on the Annunciation, Visitation, and Nativity. Angels are pictured as accompanying the Blessed Mother and saying: 'Oh, Mary, God has chosen you and purified you, and elected you above all the women of the earth.' In the 19th chapter of the Koran there are 41 verses on Jesus and Mary. There is such a strong defense of the virginity of Mary here that the Koran, in the fourth book, attributes the condemnation of the Jews to their monstrous calumny against the Virgin Mary.

"Mary, then, is for the Moslems the true *Sayyida*, or Lady. The only possible serious rival to her in their creed would be Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed himself. But after the death of Fatima, Mohammed wrote: 'Thou shalt be the most blessed of all the women in Paradise, after Mary.' In a variant of the text, Fatima is made to say: 'I surpass all the women, except Mary.'

"This brings us to our second point, namely what the Blessed Mother, in this 20th century, should have revealed herself in the insignificant little village of Fatima, so that to all future generations she would be known as Our Lady of Fatima. Since nothing ever happens out of Heaven except with a finesse of all details, I believe that the Blessed Virgin chose to be known as "Our Lady of Fatima" as a pledge and a sign of hope to the Moslem people and as an assurance that they, who show her so much respect, will one day accept her Divine Son, too.


"Evidence to support these views is found in the historical fact that the Moslems occupied Portugal for centuries. At the time when they were finally driven out, the last Moslem chief had a beautiful daughter by the name of Fatima. A Catholic boy fell in love with her, and for him she not only stayed behind when the Moslems left but even embraced the Faith. The young husband was so much in love with her that he changed the name of the town where he lived to Fatima. Thus the very place where Our Lady appeared in 1917 bears a historical connection to Fatima, the daughter of Mohammed.

"The final evidence of the relationship of the village of Fatima to the Moslems is the enthusiastic reception that the Moslems in Africa and India and elsewhere gave to the pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima, as mentioned earlier. Moslems attended the church services in honor of Our Lady; they allowed religious processions and even prayers before their mosques; and in Mozambique the Moslems, who were unconverted, began to be Christian as soon as the statue of Our Lady of Fatima was erected.

"Missionaries in the future will, more and more, see that their apostolate among the Moslems will be successful in the measure that they preach Our Lady of Fatima. Mary is the advent of Christ, bringing Christ to the people before Christ Himself is born. In any apologetic endeavor, it is always best to start with that which people already accept. Because the Moslems have a devotion to Mary, our missionaries should be satisfied merely to expand and to develop that devotion, with the full realization that Our Blessed Lady will carry the Moslems the rest of the way to her Divine Son. She is forever a 'traitor' in the sense that she will not accept any devotion for herself, but will always bring anyone who is devoted to her to her Divine Son. As those who lose devotion to her lose belief in the Divinity of Christ, so those who intensify devotion to her gradually acquire that belief.

"Many of our great missionaries in Africa have already broken down the bitter hatred and prejudices of the Moslems against the Christ through their acts of charity, their schools and hospitals. It now remains to use another approach, namely, that of taking the forty-first chapter of the Koran and showing them that it was taken out of the Gospel of Luke, that Mary could not be, even in their own eyes, the most blessed of all women of Heaven if she had not also borne One Who was the

Savior of the world. If Judith and Esther of the Old Testament were pre-figures of Mary, then it may very well be that Fatima herself was a post-figure of Mary! The Moslems should be prepared to acknowledge that if Fatima must give way in honor to the Blessed Mother, it is because she is different from all the other mothers of the world and that without Christ she would be nothing.”

[Quotes above are from *The World's First Love*] 

“Are you the special Spiritual Director for Myrna?” I asked Fr. Zahlaoui. “No. Fr. Malouli (now deceased) had a close spiritual relationship. We sometimes traveled with Myrna.”

“The Pope has worked so hard for unity between Orthodox and Catholics. Does Pope John Paul II know about Soufanieh?”

“Yes,” answered Fr. Zahlaoui. “There have been papal nuncios in Damascus, all of whom were aware. There was Bishop Nicolas Rotunno (1987). [As the author of this book, I had become somewhat acquainted with Bishop Rotunno who then came to the United States for health reasons. He wrote the preface to the Fatima Family Apostolate’s book, *The Song of Three Shepherds*, written by James Hardiman and which is currently being considered for a major movie on Fatima, to be produced in Mexico.]

“Other papal nuncios aware of Soufanieh, who acted favorably, were: Bishop Luigi Accogli (1987-1996); Bishop Pier Giacomo De Nicolo, until 1999.

“Bishop Luigi Accogli on October 15, 1999, in Rome consecrated the Center of Our Lady of Soufanieh for the unity of Christians and for interreligious dialogue.”

How has being so close to the messages and events of Soufanieh changed Fr. Elias Zahlaoui as a priest? He answers, “A lot, yet very little.” He is, it seems, a complex person, which means, he is deep. The priest says that for him he now more fully understands that all initiatives always come from God. He now realizes that often the Lord has taken hold of him and this for a long time throughout his life.

Humbly, Fr. Elias says: “I am not seeking to glorify myself. I even have the impression that I have been an obstacle to Soufanieh, for a lot of people, and perhaps even for the high-ranking clergymen. Because I am against the major trend in the Church, not only of Damascus, but of all my community in the Middle East. And this is not to my credit. I have had a kind of intuition. The Lord certainly has a lot to do with it, probably with everything, and I have thought that I am able to follow this intuition. . . .”

Fr. Zahlaoui sees Soufanieh as having liberated him, and allowed him to ignore almost anything. “Of course, I have my personal weaknesses. And I sometimes reproach Jesus for not having delivered me from them. Each one of us, as St. Paul, has a splinter in the body. But

aside from that, Soufanieh has been for me like an immersion in God. A kind of immersion, already in eternity. But an immersion that also forced me to see reality in all its misery and to face this mysterious and painful question: 'But Lord, if you love man so much, why do you allow so much misery?' A question that every man asks, that even children ask. I still ask myself this question. Consequently, I try to answer it through my misery and my pettiness. Prayers have assumed a place in my life, not a large place but a little more than before. In the past, I had a hunger for prayer. But I wasn't responding to it. I used to let the work devour too much of me. I ardently wish to serve young people. And when you serve them, you need 48 hours in a day!

"However, since the beginning, Soufanieh has made me keenly feel the futility of our human efforts for the service of God, and the necessity of prayer. I told my bishop, on December 30, 1982, at the beginning of the phenomenon: 'Your Grace, I feel that I have to leave everything, to simply go and live in a cave and pray. Only God is capable of doing something.' He answered me, 'Fr. Elias, the day that the Lord wants you to do so, he will give you a sign, but for now, we need you.'

"So I have tried to pray more . . . Even if, for now, I do not always manage to have intense times of prayer, I feel the need to pray. . . .

"On the other hand, Soufanieh has really liberated me. Because for years, the phenomenon of Soufanieh put me in real confrontation with the Church, and with the society, which, in my country, despite its practical materialism, is very dependent on the Church. People—in our psychological structure—are like a pyramid. They depend on the top of the social pyramid. And if the one at the top does not give a sign, the mass does not move forward very much. . . .

"The messages of Soufanieh have brought about another very deep change. Because of these messages, people have henceforth realized that we no longer have the right to remain divided. We no longer have the right. The sin of division must cease. Besides, many people have started to say that enough is enough. Why are we divided and why do we maintain the division? Is there some truly theological reason, or is this simply a matter of ancient history?

"Unfortunately, among the clergy, some still seem to cling to what they believe to be privileges. But on the whole, despite some exceptions, as far as I can observe among my numerous friends in Damascus and elsewhere, the laity has by far exceeded the clergy in communion with the One Christ.

"Our desire now, what we work for, is precisely this minimum asked for Jesus and Mary, which is unification of the feast of Easter. For us, the unification of the feast of Easter is very symbolic. Without Easter, Christianity would not exist. St. Paul said so (cf. 1 Cor. 15:17). Also, how could we admit that Easter, which is the starting point of all Christianity, is now the symbol of the division of Christians? . . . How can we admit that? All

the more so since we know full well that the basis of this difference of dates is not a question of theology. It is a matter of the calendar. But, throughout this question of the calendar, there is an old historical conflict between the East and the West, a history of privileges to maintain, of prestige to safeguard, etc. We do not have the right to do so.”

The last evening I was in Damascus, at Soufanieh, having celebrated the Sacrifice of the Mass on the terrace where the apparitions of the Virgin have taken place—and I was speaking strongly and mentioned that the Church needs to celebrate Easter at the same time and the rest will follow—Fr. Elias Zahlaoui looked at me very pleased and nodded consent. Shortly thereafter the miracle of the oil, told elsewhere in this book, took place.

Perhaps Fr. Zahlaoui is too hard on himself for when I interviewed Patriarch Gregory III Laham—Melkite Patriarch on Soufanieh—while he graciously received me he also referred me to Fr. Elias Zahlaoui for more detailed information on Soufanieh.

Since 1986, Fr. Zahlaoui has periodically issued bulletins or collective letters to people in many countries to keep people informed on events connected with Soufanieh. Below are given some brief excerpts from Fr. Zahlaoui’s different bulletins through the years. A major book would be needed to publish in English all that he has written of events connected with Our Lady of Soufanieh.

Damascus, December 13, 1986:

“I am happy to tell you briefly what happened during the fourth anniversary, on November 26, 1986.

“On the morning of November 26th, oozing of oil from the Icon at 4:30, after an interruption of exactly one year, to the day, in the evening, during prayer, the ecstasy occurs. . . . On the morning of the 27th, the oil oozes again from the Icon, to such an extent that the marble cupola underneath it is about to fill up. It is as if the Virgin Mary is immersed in oil.”

Damascus, December 2, 1987:

“Most of you are informed about the extraordinary events that we lived for five years in Damascus, thanks to what is now called **Our Lady of Soufanieh**.

On November 20, 1987, immediately after the common prayer that has not been interrupted since November 27, 1982, oil starts oozing from the Holy Icon nearly filling entirely the marble container placed under it. A French group, led by Mr. Pierre Sorin, of Mayenne, witnessed it, along with the numerous faithful who were in the house. It was the vigil of the feast of the presentation of the Holy Virgin in the Temple.”

Paris—June 1989:

[Below are excerpts of Myrna's trip to the United States and happenings in Los Angeles.]

Fifth anniversary of Soufanieh (November 26-27, 1987)

On the 26th, in the evening, in the midst of prayers, Myrna fell into ecstasy. This was preceded and accompanied with an abundant oozing of oil from her face and hands, in the presence, among others, of Fr. René Laurentin who had been especially invited for the occasion (fifth anniversary).

At the end of the ecstasy, Myrna dictated the following message:

"My daughter,

I am pleased that you have chosen Me, not only in words.

I want you to join My Heart to your gentle heart so that our hearts will unite. By doing so, you will save suffering souls.

Do not hate anyone, so that your heart not be blinded by your love of Me. Love everyone as you have loved Me, especially those who have hated you and have spoken evil of you, because in so doing you will obtain glory.

Continue in your life as wife, mother and sister.

Do not worry about the difficulties and the pain that will afflict you. I want you to be stronger than them — because I am with you—otherwise you will lose My heart.

Go and preach to the whole world and tell them without fear to work for unity. Man is not condemned for the fruit of his hands, but for the fruit of his heart.

My peace in your heart will be a blessing for you and for all those who have cooperated with you."

Myrna's and Nicolas's visit to the United States:

Oil oozed on reproductions of Our Lady of Soufanieh in two churches only: a Greek-Orthodox one (parish of Fr. Paul Romley) and a Greek Catholic one (parish of Fr. Charles Aboody). As we know, Myrna is Greek Catholic and Nicolas is Greek-Orthodox.

On the evening of August 14, 1988, Myrna fell into ecstasy just after Holy Communion, which she received during the Holy Mass celebrated by two priests, one of whom was the Maronite priest Georges Khalli. The oil flooded her face and her hands throughout the ecstasy. When she came out of ecstasy, she dictated the following message from Jesus:

"My children,

My peace I gave you, but what have you given Me?

You are My Church and your heart belongs to Me, unless this heart has a god other than Me. I told you: The Church is the kingdom of Heaven on earth.

He who has divided it has sinned. And he who has rejoiced from its division has also sinned.

It is easier for Me (to accept) that an infidel believe in My name than that those who pretend to have faith and love swear by My name.

It is in God alone that you must place your pride.

Pray for the sinners who forgive in My name, and for those who deny My Mother. My children, I have given you all of My time, give Me a part of your time."

More than several hundred persons attended the Mass and the ecstasy, a number of whom were doctors who examined and observed Myrna, as is the custom in Damascus.

On the evening of September 7, the eve of the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, in the midst of a common prayer, she fell into ecstasy. When she came out of it, she relayed the following message:

"My daughter,

I told you to overcome all your difficulties and know that you have endured only a few. Tell My children that it is from them that I demand unity, and I do not want it from those who act as if they were working for unity.

Go and preach. And wherever you go, I am with you."

November 15, 1989 (in Damascus):

1. The daily prayer is as regular as always. It is held in absolute simplicity and gratuitousness. We note that some Moslems attend sometimes side by side with Christians from all confessions.

2. Since the eve of November 27, 1988, not one drop of oil has oozed from the Holy Icon. On the other hand, the three drops that were hanging at the bottom of the frame since that night are still there.

3. Furthermore, oil continues to appear frequently on the hands of Myrna, either during prayer or during a conversation on Soufanieh.

4. Myrna has been invited once more to the United States. She has spent nearly two months there with her husband, leaving her two children in Damascus. She has visited Detroit, Los Angeles, San Jose, Glendale and the Ukrainian monastery of Mount Tabor in Redwood Valley near Sacramento. Everywhere, oil has manifested itself on her hands, in numerous churches where she has prayed, and this in the presence of priests belonging to different "churches," as well as numerous houses. Oil has also oozed from many reproductions of Our Lady of Soufanieh. This double sign has no doubt triggered an intense movement of prayer.

5. In Los Angeles, on August 18, Myrna fell into ecstasy, in a private house in the presence of about 50 persons who came to pray. During this ecstasy, oil oozed from the face and hands of Myrna. She saw the Virgin Mary whom she had not seen since the ecstasy of the evening of August 14, 1985. She dictated to her the following message:

"Do not fear, My daughter. All this is happening to glorify the name of God. Rejoice, rather, because God has allowed you to come to Me so that I can tell you: Do not worry about what people say about you, but remain always in peace because the creatures turn towards Me through you. Tell everyone to pray more because they need prayer to please the Father. May the blessings of God be upon you and upon all those who have cooperated with you out of love for Him."

In Aleppo (Syria's second largest city):

Aleppo is located 350 km. north of Damascus. I had already advised you that oil was oozing out of four pictures, two of which represent Our Lady of Soufanieh, in two Armenian houses respectively since January 1988 and early July 1988. Public prayer is held in alternation, at the rhythm of three days per week and always in the strictest gratuity.

I was able to see the oil ooze in Aleppo on several occasions and in both houses. But on October 1, the day of the feast of St. Gregory the Illuminator, patron of Armenia, I saw the oil oozing in one of the two houses from three pictures at the same time, under the eyes of the praying crowd, and in the presence of Fr. Emile Assouad who was leading the prayers.

Damascus, April 15, 1990:

This Holy Week, friends have come from a bit of everywhere: France, Belgium, the United States, Canada, Germany, Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria of course and even from Burkina-Faso. Most of them came in the hope that "something" would happen under their own eyes, since this year Easter was common to all Christians. They were not disappointed.

On Holy Thursday, at 11 o'clock, the stigmata appeared, first on the forehead, then on the hands and onto the feet and the side of Myrna. Numerous persons, including doctors, were present and were literally on the lookout for the least gesture and word of Myrna. This enabled filming on video the various stages.

On Holy Saturday, at 3:10 p.m., oil started oozing from the forehead, the eyes and the hands of Myrna. Then came the ecstasy, during which Myrna saw a light and heard a deep and calm voice telling her:

"My children, you yourselves will teach the generations the WORD of unity, love and faith. I am with you. But you, My daughter, will not hear My voice until the Feast has been unified."

On Easter day, at dawn, towards 4:30, the marble cupola located under the Holy Icon, was found to be three-quarters full.

It goes without saying that personal or public prayers went on without interruption, especially during Holy Week.

Several telephone calls from France, the United States and Canada, assured us about their simultaneous prayers in unison with Soufanieh.

July 1, 1991:

Since November 1990, let me point out especially the permanence of prayer at Soufanieh as well as the numerous exudations of oil from the hands of Myrna (as had been promised by the Holy Virgin during her message of November 26, 1990) and from the various reproductions of the Miraculous Icon.

I am happy to tell you that I met in Damascus on the 10th the Syrian Orthodox bishop of Mosul (Iraq), Msgr. Isaak Saka. He assured me that a reproduction of Our Lady of Soufanieh was exuding oil since the beginning of January 1991, in a modest Christian house in Mosul. He has visited that house and witnessed the oozing of oil.

Prayer meetings, with groupings of Christians and Moslems alike, have been organized, and as always, in absolute gratuitousness. Early June, His Excellency had left Mosul for a short while. Nonetheless, the oil kept on oozing. On June 12, Msgr. Saka gave me his written and signed testimony.

You know by now that my memoirs on Soufanieh have been published in Arabic, in a voluminous book of 580 pages. It also includes 137 pages of meditations emanating from an Arab intellectual, Mr. Antoine Makdisi. It is distributed freely.

September 9—October 3, 1991 (Myrna's trip to Germany, Belgium, Holland and France):

Purposes of the trip—The first goal was the holding of a three-day symposium on Soufanieh, in Münster in Germany. This idea was that of a German priest, of Lebanese origin, after his first journey in Damascus, at the time of the seventh anniversary of Soufanieh, on the last week of November, 1989. He is Fr. Professor Adel Theodore Khoury, dean of the faculty of theology of Münster. This symposium would be preceded and followed by a small prayer tour through Germany. This date was set for between September 11-14, 1991. . . .

A question could be asked: Has anything special occurred during this symposium outside the usual program during the journey? YES, what happened was the oozing of oil; once from a picture of Our Lady of Soufanieh, and 26 times from Myrna's hands, in Germany as well as in Belgium, Holland, and France.

Damascus, September 29, 1993:

I shall happily enclose with this letter the report of our mission trips to France and Canada. This will help us all to strengthen our unity of heart and prayer.

And since you are used to entrusting yourself to the prayers of your Arab brothers and sisters of Soufanieh, I come to you today in order to also solicit your prayers for our personal intentions, as well as for the two major intentions that Jesus and Mary have entrusted us with in

Soufanieh: The Unity of the Church and Peace in the world, especially in the Near East. Thank you so heartily.

Before wishing you the best, I would like to advise you that a small chapel has been built on the terrace of the Apparitions in Soufanieh. Its inauguration, celebrated on the 26th, has been followed by abundant exudation of oil from the hands of Myrna. [Fr. Robert J. Fox, author, offered the Sacrifice of the Mass in this small chapel on the final evening of his stay at the House of the Virgin of Soufanieh, September 2001. The miracle of the oil occurred at the conclusion of this Mass.]

Furthermore, you will be glad to know also that Myrna has just come back from a month sojourn in Australia at the invitation of Msgr. Georges Riachi, Greek-Catholic bishop of Australia. He had come personally to Damascus in order to take her there. Only Fr. Boulos Fadel accompanied her. We were told that it was extraordinary. They spent one whole month, from August 19 to September 20. Praise the Lord.

Summary of Australian 1993 pilgrimage:

The most moving aspect of Myrna's mission consisted in the great number of people flocking into churches. She brought about and experimented a popular and religious revolution through which Australia never went before. Peaceful revolution aiming toward prayer and the unity of the church. In each church, she was able to bring together faithful from various rites, believing in unity. Even Moslems were present. I shall not forget the tears of men, women and youth alike when Myrna was talking or when the oil was exuding. I shall not forget what the crowd was singing at the Church of St. Charbel during Myrna's last encounter before her return to Syria. . . .

When the Lord says "a good tree bears good fruit," this applies to Soufanieh, in general and to her mission to Australia in particular. Its fruits are prayer, conversion, penance, faith revival, increase of charity, a more acute awareness that the unity of the Church is the responsibility of each of its members and that this unity must first pass through unity of hearts and love. . . .

In the evening (August 25, 1993), a Mass was held at the Latin Church of St. Thomas. . . . At the end of the Mass, Myrna was asked to relate her experience of the phenomenon. Msgr. Riachi translated. This is briefly what she said: "If you have come to see a miracle, this miracle has already occurred when the priest has converted the bread and wine into the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus. If you came to seek God, I tell you that he is within each of you. If you come to learn how to love God, I would tell you 'Love one another.' Your being together is the miracle. Myrna is an ordinary person. She is even inferior to you. I do not know why God has chosen me. What I am doing is what the Virgin Mary did when she said, 'I am the servant of the Lord,' so I pave the way to let God operate in me.

“The Virgin Mary does not belong to Myrna alone, but she belongs to each of us, which means that each of us is endowed with a mission. Pray for unity and peace. Pray for me so that I fulfill my mission as God wills. My love for my mission has made me leave my husband and my children. . . . God does not need any media to confirm what He wants. . . . God needs us. Pray for the divided families because the family is a small church.”

The people applauded at the end and then came up to be blessed with oil from Soufanieh.

In summary, the mission of Myrna has had its impact on tens of thousands of faithful. What the Lord has started in a modest house of Damascus, will one day spread to the whole world. The impact that Soufanieh leaves everywhere in the world is nothing but a sign that it is not a human work, regardless of how much people strive to make it a success.

Signed: Fr. Paul Fadel
(See p. 145 for an interview.)

Brief Recapitulation of Myrna's 1993 stay in Canada

The official line included the celebrations of the Eucharist which took place in different churches of Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec. For one who could closely follow the many meetings and celebrations, it would appear that a spiritual avalanche fell on the slopes of St. Joseph Oratory, where the first prayer with Myrna took place and also on most of the churches and congregations of the regions, stopping only with Myrna's departure.

As for the second line, which I would label as domestic, it includes the countless meetings at the house where Myrna and her family were welcomed in Montreal. It is the home of Mr. Emile Sara and his wife Marie. This house was also a replica of the Virgin's House in Damascus. This welcome for personal meetings with Myrna or for group prayers or for celebrations of the Eucharist was expressed day and night with great simplicity and joyfulness.

This resting-place was even spontaneously offered to some of Myrna's and Nicolas's many friends who came from different parts of the United States (Los Angeles, Detroit, Florida, San Francisco). The celebrations of the Eucharist and priests of different Oriental congregations, Catholic as well as Orthodox (without offending in any way the rule of ecclesiastic authorities concerning *communicatio in sacris*), gathered the faithful from all places who had but one concern: find God in the Unity of His Church.

The few prayer meetings, in which Myrna took part in other homes, occurred with the same simplicity and communion. Thank God signs

from heaven were not absent. The first in importance is the exudation of oil from Myrna's hands. While the Eucharist was celebrated, the oil invariably exuded during Holy Communion. But we waited imperatively for the end of the Divine Liturgy before announcing it.

The same thing happened again and again . . . in many homes, at moments we cannot but consider as providential. Beyond this tangible sign, there are many more we would certainly regret not having noticed. To my mind, the astonishing affluence of a crowd, mostly Canadians, is one worth mentioning. Behind a facade of self-sufficiency, perhaps even indifference, isn't there a sign of a deep quest for God? Also, I see another sign in the quality and length of the prayers. Isn't there a cry for spiritual hunger which all the imperatives of this famous consumer society has not yet succeeded to kill? There are even more signs of the bursting joy of many who experienced internal and spiritual healing.

However, without exaggerating, it seems to me and to many witnesses, that the most important sign is Myrna herself. Whether she prays, relates her experience or whether she is silent or busy taking care of her children or husband, Myrna is always consistent with herself: simple, humble with a total gratuitousness and availability. Such a sign does not lie and testimonies on this matter are numerous. Some people were pleased and had the courage to write about this.

Damascus, December 1, 1994 (12th Anniversary):

Worth mentioning also is the arrival of many pilgrims: from the Arab world of course, but also from Australia, Canada, the United States, France (a record of three groups), the Ivory Coast, Greece, Switzerland, Guinea and Egypt.

Letters, telegrams, faxes and telephone calls from Australia, Canada, the United States, France, Egypt, New Caledonia, Switzerland, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Peru, Germany, Holland and even from Saudi Arabia.

We can literally say that the Virgin Mary's impact is spreading like a stain of oil—and how!

Finally, the 12th anniversary was celebrated by a big family scattered throughout the world with the little family of Soufanieh. This celebration consisted merely of prayers. Isn't praying the mere essence of Soufanieh?

Friday, November 25, Bishop George Coueter, Greek-Catholic bishop of Sidon (South Lebanon), concelebrated the Divine Liturgy in St. Cyrillus Church in Damascus, along with the other priests. A compact and feverish crowd filled up the church, at the head of which one could see the Nuncio, His Excellency Msgr. Pier Giacomo de Nicolo.

A large Icon of Soufanieh adorned with flowers stood in front of the Iconostasis. The sign of the oil, so long awaited—let's be frank about it—appeared quite soon: during Communion, both hands of Myrna exuded so much oil that drops fell on the floor. Nevertheless, the Mass carried on with an overwhelming calm.

Once the Divine Liturgy was over, the people were about to receive the unction of the oil from the hands of Myrna, in front of the main gate of the church while Choeur-Joie was singing the hymns inspired by Soufanieh. The homily of Msgr. Coueter, after the Gospel, was full of the message of Soufanieh, centered around Unity, based on prayer, love and mutual forgiveness.

I am happy to mention that just before Mass, I accompanied Msgr. Coueter in his visit to His Holiness Zakka I, the Syrian-Orthodox Patriarch. This visit which lasted over one hour centered around the subject of Unity. Everyone knows that His Holiness is a big promoter of Soufanieh. [Fr. Elias Zahlaoui accompanied Fr. Fox, author, to interview this same Patriarch in September, 2001 as shown elsewhere in this book.]

Sunday November 27 (Anniversary Day of Soufanieh):

I was celebrating the baptism of a small Lebanese girl. Myrna had been requested to be her Godmother and Fr. Paul Fadel, the Godfather. Just at the end of the ceremony, while we were singing the well-known hymn celebrating Christ's baptism, oil covered both hands of Myrna.

On Monday, the 28th, a group of Greek pilgrims visited Soufanieh accompanied by a relative of Nicolas who lives in Greece, namely his cousin Samir Iliovits. They stayed there until after midnight. At the moment Samir Iliovits was narrating to them the opening of stigmata on the body of Myrna and was showing them the palms of Myrna's hands where the stigmata had appeared, oil literally pulsed from both her hands. I let you imagine the emotion of the Greeks. Some of them fell on their knees and wept.

On Wednesday, a friend whose family lives in Canada, phoned to tell me that oil had exuded from an enlarged image of Our Lady of Soufanieh in Canada on the same day of the feast, and this during the prayers that the "Children of Soufanieh" over there, were reciting in the house of Emile and Marie Sara who had received Myrna and her family during their stay in Canada (June-July 1993).

Will we ever thank enough our Lord Jesus and His Mother, full of grace, for so many of these signs that are nothing else but the signature, so to speak, of His Presence and His Love?

Permanence of the message of the Holy Virgin of November 26, 1990:

"As for the oil, it will continue to appear on your hands for the glorification of my Son Jesus, whenever He wishes and wherever you go . . . Because We are with you and with whoever wishes the Feast to be united."

As a matter of fact, oil appears frequently on the hands of Myrna, in the house itself or far away from home, when Myrna is traveling. We make it a point to record it regularly and [the late] Fr. Maloui is [was] a very faithful observer of this phenomenon.

Permanent welcoming in the strictest gratuity:

The house (of the Virgin or Nazzour family) remains always open, and throughout the day, to anyone, and with a permanent gratuity which continues to defy all slanders and calumnies. The welcome remains simple, frank and discreet at the same time. . . . Among the countless visitors, one should mention the Nuncio, Pier Giacomo de Nicolo, Georges Coueter, Greek-Catholic bishop of Sidon, Lebanon, and Georges Riachi, Greek-Catholic bishop of Australia. The latter expressed his very strong wish to see Myrna come back to Australia for a second stay, since the first one had proved so fruitful.

In Chicago, a New Soufanieh—Since July 14, 1994, an enlarged picture of Our Lady of Soufanieh exudes oil, without interruption, in the house of Mr. Daoud Hanna, a Syrian-Orthodox family originally from Hasake in Syria. The house has become a shrine for thousands of pilgrims from the United States and Canada, and this in the strictest gratuity.

Damascus, December 22, 1995 (Celebration of the 13th anniversary):

On Saturday, the 25th, his Excellency, Isidore Battikha, Greek Catholic Patriarchal Vicar in Damascus, celebrated the Anniversary Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Damascus. The bishop's homily centered around the Unity of the Church, on the basis of the messages of Soufanieh. It was a very touching homily and a lot of people were very moved by it, while others could not contain their tears, including the bishop himself. During Holy Communion, oil exuded from Myrna's hands abundantly. She anointed during 45 minutes all the faithful present. Throughout the evening, prayers continued at the House of the Virgin until two o'clock in the morning.

On Sunday, the 26th, the prayer in the House of the Virgin began at 4:45 p.m. Faithful, friends and supporters overflowed into the street. . . . At 7:45, just as the first prayer program was concluding, oil suddenly and abundantly covered Myrna's face, eyes and hands. She remained several minutes absent from the exterior world, helped by Fr. Johannes Touw and two young people. When she finally recovered, she happily anointed with the oil on their foreheads the people who were present.


At 11:00, I celebrated the Holy Mass with Fr. Paul Fadel. Then we all sang "happy birthday" to the Virgin Mary while cutting the anniversary cake. I left the House of the Virgin at 1:30 and it was still crowded with people. . . .

You know that Myrna receives numerous invitations, but she finally travels little. Before accepting any invitation, we pray a lot and we seek advice. If we ever discover the least risk of deviation or opposition to the purpose of Soufanieh, we politely apologize and refuse the invitation, even if it is at the last minute, as was the case in 1994 for the journey to the United States, and in 1993, to Puerto Rico.

Currently, there are numerous invitations: Poland, Switzerland, Canada, Germany, Rome and Sweden. However, two journeys are planned at the moment: France (end March 1996) and the United States, during June 1996.

Soufanieh Breakthroughs—In the scientific surroundings:

You know the scientific milieu is very allergic to phenomena like Soufanieh. You also know that some people hide themselves behind science, attempting to silence such phenomena, or to await an explanation from science one day. However, Soufanieh was the object of numerous researches led by scientists, some of which came with a critical prejudice, and then found themselves kneeling at the foot of the Icon, weeping.

Some scientists have been conquered by Soufanieh, to the extent of presenting Soufanieh in their scientific circles. One among them, psychoanalyst *Andre Pastalides*, has presented the phenomena at an international congress held in Santa Rosa, in California (USA), in October 1988. That was also the case with Dr. Johannes Touw, a Dutch Benedictine monk, who presented the phenomenon during two hours at a convention of psychology, held from July 12 to July 16, 1995 at Innsbruck, Austria. 

On Myrna's and Nicolas's Discreet Silence:

If you allow me, the fact that Myrna occupies the first rank in Soufanieh, is not her fault, given that she did nothing to deserve it and that she never wanted it to be so.

Anyone knowing Soufanieh would also know that Nicolas is an essential element of Soufanieh, although in the background. He is not offended by it at all; as a matter of fact he is very happy about it, and considers himself "out of the picture" sincerely.

But it was necessary that he realize one day that it is not so, and that he has something to say about what he has gone through, and is still experiencing in Soufanieh. He accepted therefore to write *his memoirs*. I was astonished about what he wrote in draft form, and trust me, it is quite enlightening. But Nicolas insists that not everything is to be known now.

Damascus, December 19, 1997:

A Declaration issued by His Excellency, Msgr. Isidore Battikha, Greek-Catholic Patriarchal Vicar.

During the solemn Mass he celebrated on Sunday, November 25, 1996, in St. Joseph's Church, in the parish of Douela in Damascus, during the 14th anniversary of Soufanieh, Msgr. Isidore started his homily with the following words:

"My beloved ones: This evening, before celebrating Mass, I was thinking

about what the Samaritans had told the Samaritan woman: "It is not because of your words that we believe, but because we have heard Him and we have been convinced that it is really He, Christ, the Savior of the world. We too, Myrna, we do not believe because of your words only, but also because we have heard and seen what has happened and is still happening in this good and holy town of Damascus. This is, very simply, a message from heaven."

November 26, 1997 (15th Anniversary Celebration):

"In the house of the Virgin" on Wednesday, November 26, prayers started at 5:00 p.m. and continued until 11:00. The Mass was celebrated at 11:00 p.m. by Msgr. Georges Riachi. Present were many priests including the Apostolic Nuncio, His Excellency, Msgr. Pier Giacomo de Nicolo.

At the end of the Mass, Myrna was asked to sing a special hymn: "The children of Mary are divided: they must not remain so." But before she started singing, and although her fists were clasped, oil was pouring out of her hands onto the wood of the lectern on which she was asked to stand.

I cannot find anything better than to select some paragraphs from the homily of Msgr. Khalil Abi-Nader during the Mass of November 28:

"The surprising fact is that the Almighty has chosen and continues to choose the simple ones, the weak, the poor and the humble, starting with His Mother Mary, Joseph the carpenter, the Apostle fishermen, all the way to Bernadette the shepherd from Lourdes as well as the shepherds from Fatima, to finish with our dear Myrna, with a humble heart, through the holy oil, so that they carry His message to the world in order to relay His will."

O Mother, Our Lady of Soufanieh, strengthened with your blessing, we say: it is only politics which has divided, scattered, spread and blown up the Church into churches and factions. As for Catholics and Orthodox, we have together one same faith which we incarnate every day on the Altar of the Lord, when we say: "This is My body, this is My blood" and when we express one same veneration for the Virgin Mary. This is enough for us. What remains does not concern us, we the worshippers. It concerns the professionals of politics and theology.

O Jesus, we suffer from our divisions. O Mary, through your intercession we will obtain through Jesus, as in Cana, the greatest and most beautiful miracle: The Unity of the Church. Then the flock will become one, with one Shepherd, Jesus.

O Jesus, I love you.

O Mary, Our Lady of Soufanieh, or rather Our Lady of the Universal Church, I love you. Your daughter, Myrna, with a humble heart, loves you. She has your blessing thanks to the oil which exudes and pours out of her innocent hands and her pure face, as we have witnessed it yesterday and before that day. . . .

My brothers, the Unity of the Church, wherever you are, is nothing but faith and love. Amen."

Damascus, January 5, 1999:

The doors of the Soufanieh house are still wide open and with no time restriction. The daily prayer continues. Gratuities are maintained with intransigence. Reproductions of the Icon, books and cotton wool soaked with the miraculous oil are distributed or sent out free of charge all over the world.

We declined all invitations to the United States in 1998. On the other hand, Myrna was invited by a Dutch family in April 1998 to go to Portugal and visit Fatima. She enjoyed it very much despite the shortness of the trip. She was fortunate to visit the Carmelite Sisters of Coimbra. The sign of the oil, which appeared on Myrna's hands, gave her the occasion of a short encounter with Sr. Lucia, to the immense joy of both. [See p. 142 where Fr. Fox, author, interviewed Myrna on this encounter with Sr. Lucia of Fatima.]

Diffusion of the messages:

The Internet site is developing in quality and quantity. One can listen to or watch over 50 hours of songs, testimonies and videos. There are over 45,000 accesses to the site of Our Lady of Soufanieh. One can find documentation in Arabic, Armenian, English, Greek, Creole, French, Rumanian, Vietnamese, Polish, Russian, Spanish and German on the Soufanieh phenomenon.

Celebrations of the 16th Anniversary:

Many friends from Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, France, Belgium, Canada and the United States were present. The bigger than expected attendance made it impossible for us to organize the two-day retreat that we had planned. We were to elaborate a common work plan destined to set up the international organization of the mission of Soufanieh, as well as to discuss the publication of a news bulletin.

Two celebrations took place in Damascus:

At the house of Our Lady, on November 26, communal prayers started at 4:00 p.m. and ended after midnight. It had been organized in coordination with prayer groups and choirs who came from Syria, Lebanon and France. At 11:00 p.m., Msgr. Georges Riachi, Melkite Catholic Bishop of Tripoli (Lebanon) celebrated Mass in the presence of Msgr. Isidore Battikha, patriarchal vicar of Damascus, as well as ten other priests from various communities, including Fr. Joseph Besnier, from France. At the end of the Mass, oil exuded from Myrna's hands.

A solemn Mass took place at the church of the Franciscan Fathers in Bab Touma (Damascus), on Friday, November 27 at 11:00 a.m. The Apostolic Nuncio himself, Msgr. Pierre Giacomo de Nicolo, celebrated it. Several other priests and four Catholic bishops concelebrated with him.

[Below is the sermon by His Excellency, the Apostolic Nuncio in

Syria, Msgr. Pier Giacomo de Nicolo, at the Latin church for the Franciscans in Bab-Touma (Damascus)—November 27, 1998]:

We have just lived together an intense hour of prayer during which the Divine Grace has overwhelmed us through the intercession of Our Lady, and during which the real joy, fruit of the Holy Spirit, has flooded our hearts.

This joy is all the more great since three bishops of this capital, Their Excellencies Msgr. Antoine Harrid Mourani, Maronite archbishop, Msgr. Joseph Arnaouti, Armenian Catholic archbishop, Msgrs. Isidore Battikha, Melkite Catholic Patriarchal Vicar and Msgr. Georges Riachi, Melkite Catholic bishop of Tripoli (Lebanon) have concelebrated this divine liturgy, thus proving once more their pastoral zeal. To each of them, grateful thanks from all of us. Don't we find there a beautiful expression of Unity in Christ to which Our Lady of Soufanieh has been calling us all for the past sixteen years?

In this respect, and more specifically, as far as all the phenomena which have revolved around Soufanieh are concerned—one must declare it clearly, above everything else—we do not wish in any way to anticipate the final judgment of the Church, but we simply appeal to a prudent Christian discernment, sustained by faith and the teachings of that same Church.

Aren't we answering this maternal call with our prayers throughout the Holy Mass, a fact which is expressed so deeply by the Arabic saying: "Al Oum bit limm—The mother gathers"?

Let us thank Our Lord Jesus for having sent us His Mother, the Theotokos, in order to bring us all back to the unique Home of Our Father in Heaven, through prayer, penance, love and contrition. Let us thank Him to have made use of such a small Icon representing His great and humble Mother, so as to remind us all, without exception, that we are children of Our Father in Heaven. . . .

Let us thank Him also for having chosen Damascus in order to show the strength of His Mercy, the way he showed it two thousand years ago, when St. Paul was stricken and filled with His Light, to become later His great apostle and missionary.

Let us thank Him also for having chosen a young couple, six months only after the celebration of their wedding, in order to remind us that marriage is and still remains a Divine Sacrament, namely an aspect of life so desired by God the Father since the beginnings of time and consecrated by the grace of His Son Jesus Christ, the Savior, at a time when known forces as well as occult powers try in every way to destroy it.

Let us thank Him for having reminded us through the voice of His All-Holy Mother that the child, within marriage, is a "gift from Heaven," at a time when in millions of cases life is aborted at its beginning, either in a criminal way or in an unfair legalized fashion.

Let us thank Him also for having blessed the whole Arab world through the exceptional presence of the Virgin Mary in Damascus, thus reminding us that the mystery of Redemption concerns all people, regardless of their origin

and of their social or religious adherence.

Let us thank Him finally for the beautiful network of friendship, faith and prayer, that His Holy Mother weaves, throughout the world, from that modest house of Soufanieh, which is always open to prayer, in the most obvious gratuitousness, in order to remind the world that the wealth of mankind is God alone and that the family cannot blossom in equilibrium and joy without primarily searching for God through prayer.

Blessed are You, Lord Jesus, for having wanted to show Your presence, in the Church of Damascus and of Syria, through the protective solicitude of Your Mother, who fills our hearts with joy and peace. Amen.

The Testimonial Trips of Myrna (January 2000):

Myrna was invited to Portugal by the *Association of the Renewal of the Christian Family*, located in the town of Coimbra with the approval of its bishop. I accompanied her during that three-stage trip:

Holland (January 14-16)—We spent two days in Holland as guests of the Benedictine Monks of Vaals, whose Prior has long been interested in Soufanieh and has travelled there several times. Two noticeable events occurred during that visit: oil exuded abundantly from Myrna's hands, towards the end of a prayer held jointly by Fr. Johannes M. Touw and 30 other members of his community, in the visitor's section of the abbey itself.

A meeting took place that same evening between Myrna and a group of about 15 monks. During the exchange, one was impressed by the depth of the monks' questions as well as by the transparency of Myrna's answers. I acted as a translator.

Portugal (January 16-22)—The program included four conferences: two in Lisbon on January 17 and 21, a third one in Coimbra on the 19th and a fourth one in Porto on the 20th. Each of these four conferences ended with abundant exudation of oil from Myrna's hands.

The deep and simple faith of the Portuguese impressed us. Their country is rich in pilgrimage sites. However, Fatima remains, undoubtedly, the most beautiful and impressive one.

We had the grace of celebrating several Masses with numerous Portuguese priests in the Carmel in Coimbra, where Sr. Lucia, one of the three visionaries of Fatima, is living. A long profound interview was granted to us by the Carmelites, but it was impossible for us to see Sr. Lucia, even during Mass, because she was bed-ridden [at the time].

Nicolas, Myrna's Husband, Undergoes Heart Surgery:

On June 2, Nicolas suffered a serious cardiac malaise. It was quickly decided that he must be operated on. This took place in the Jordanian capital, Amman, on June 14. He first convalesced in Amman, then in Damascus and finally in Lebanon. On September 1, he resumed work at the "Oasis of Hope."

I mention this fact for two reasons:

Nicolas does not belong to himself anymore. He tries, since the beginning of the Soufanieh events, to adjust himself loyally to the Will of the Lord. This has been and still is a very costly endeavor.

The spiritual experience which Nicolas, Myrna and some Soufanieh faithful have gone through, during that trial, far exceeds the weight of the trial itself, when one discovers the permanent and delicate care that God has been bestowing upon them.

Celebrations of the 17th Anniversary (1999):

Numerous Soufanieh faithful attended this anniversary. The network of faith, love and unity woven by the Virgin Mary throughout the world, in such a short time, is very impressive. However, let me briefly mention the celebrations which took place in Damascus and in Montreal (Canada):

Damascus—the first celebration took place on Thursday, November 25 at 5 p.m. at St. Joseph's Church in Douela, on the southern outskirts of Damascus. The Vicar Melkite Patriarchate presided. Msgr. Isidore Battikha's homily was entirely focused on the Soufanieh messages related to the unity of the Church and the unity of the Feast of Easter. Also present were a Coptic-Orthodox priest as well as the Archmandrite Msgr. Eugene N. Pappas from Brooklyn (United States), one of the main assistants to the Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople. At the end of the Mass, Msgr. Pappas delivered a speech on the main message of Soufanieh, namely unity. Then he began to sing a hymn to the Holy Spirit. Just before the end of the hymn, oil exuded abundantly from Myrna's hands.

The second celebration took place at the "House of the Virgin Mary" on Wednesday, November 26; the prayer was continuous from 4-11 p.m. At 11 p.m., Fr. Paul Fadel, surrounded by several priests, celebrated the Holy Mass in the patio of the house.

At the end of the Mass, the anniversary cake was cut and people started to sing: "Happy Birthday Mary" in several languages when, all of a sudden, oil oozed abundantly from Myrna's hands. It was 25 minutes past midnight.

Montreal, Canada (1999):

When one sees the program established to celebrate the 17th anniversary of Soufanieh, between November 24 and December 15, one may think that it is not Montreal but Damascus, which had the privilege to live such a phenomenon since 1982. Judge for yourself.

October 15, 1999:

The inauguration of the Center "Nostra Signora di Soufanieh" (and the blessing of the statue of St. Francis Forgione [Padre Pio]) for

Christian unity and inter-religious dialogue on the threshold of the third millennium” in Rome (Via Aurelia 737).

This Center of Our Lady of Soufanieh for Christian unity was the personal initiative of Msgr. Luigi Accogli, former Apostolic Nuncio in Damascus. The idea sprung up while celebrating his farewell Mass in Soufanieh itself.

Myrna was invited to this. During that week of prayers and meetings, oil exuded several times from Myrna’s hands.

Holy Week 2001 at Soufanieh, Damascus, Syria:

At the level of the *signs*, three facts are noteworthy to report:

1. The opening of the Stigmata wounds:

On Holy Thursday, at 1:45 p.m., the wounds appeared on Myrna’s forehead, in her palms, on her flank (12 cm.) and on the top of her feet. The wounds were preceded, for several minutes, by a sudden and substantial trembling in all of Myrna’s body. Blood appeared on all the wounds, except on her feet. [See photos on pp. 58-59.]

Obviously, Myrna suffered atrociously. Yet, she endured those sufferings with great control and modesty. Afterwards, she was taken to her bedroom, she had her shoes removed, then laid on her bed. She remained in her bed until 9 p.m. She was later able to get up with some difficulty.

Everything was witnessed by numerous persons from Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, France, Holland, Denmark, Canada, United States, Australia, Tahiti and Ile de la Réunion.

Among these witnesses, medical doctors of various specialties were present. I have asked them their written testimonial.

With the crowd in prayer, one could find the following priests around Myrna’s bed: Fr. Paul Fadel, Antoine Mousleh, Jean-Paul Devedeux (from France) and myself.

Around 3 p.m., the Melkite Catholic Bishop from Tripoly (Lebanon), Msgr. Georges Riachi, arrived. He had celebrated the Holy Mass earlier that day (11 a.m.) in the patio of the house. He stayed half an hour next to the bed, praying. Before leaving, he confided to me: “Father, tell Myrna that I prayed intensely for her, and I have asked from Our Lord and the Virgin Mary to give Myrna the needed strength and courage in order for her to remain faithful to her mission, and to triumph against the temptations of the devil.”

2. The oozing of oil from the miraculous Icon:

No one was able to see the actual oozing of oil that occurred very early Saturday morning. It was around 1:30 a.m., coinciding with the arrival of Fr. Fadi Tabet from Beirut (Lebanon). We were all very happy to see the presence of oil in the glass cupola placed under the Icon; three drops of oil are suspended to its modest plastic base until today—April 21.

This oozing occurred after a radical interruption of eleven years; that is, since the dawn of Easter 1990.


3. The ecstasy and Message of Holy Saturday, April 14:

The ecstasy started at 2:15 p.m. Myrna's face and hands were suddenly covered with oil. She was in the patio singing with the crowd. She was then taken to her bed. After several long and painful minutes of evident eye irritations, she entered into a state of ecstasy that lasted thirty-five minutes.

At the end of the ecstasy, Myrna told us that she saw the Holy Virgin and Fr. Joseph Malouli (who had been her spiritual director) and had died on March 5, 2000. The Virgin Mary was holding her left hand while Fr. Malouli, the right. Both of them took her towards Jesus. They were all bathing in a bright light, especially Jesus.

Jesus gave her the following message, transcribed by Fr. Paul Fadel, a message that I translated (into French) with the collaboration of the French and Arabic group of pilgrims who were present.

Among the large crowd that was present, medical doctors and the following priests were also present: Frs. Paul Fadel, Fadi Tabet, Antoine Mousleh, Elias Francis, Joseph Besnier, Jean-Paul Devedeux and myself.

Please note that all the events of these past couple days were videotaped by several cameramen from Denmark, Canada, Australia, France, Egypt, Lebanon, Tahiti and Syria. 

The author of this book has merely summarized the above or taken excerpts he considered highlights from the extensive periodicals or collective letters of Fr. Zahlaoui. It is the way this priest, so closely associated with Soufanieh, keeps people around the world informed of Soufanieh. The excerpts will give readers at least some idea of the extensive mission of Soufanieh for Christian love and unity in the family and heaven's call for Unity of Christians in the Church.

In each case they are signed by Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, Our Lady of Damascus Parish, Koussour, Damascus, Syria. 



(Left) Myrna explains the statue brought to Damascus from Portugal. Myrna has a special love for Our Lady of Fatima. While in Portugal, she met Sr. Lucia. (Bottom) Myrna with son John Emmanuel demonstrated their love for the children of Fatima, Blessed Francisco and Jacinta, as they stand below the immense mural icon in their House of the Virgin.



Chapter 6

Interviews with Myrna and the Soufanieh Family



WHILE IN DAMASCUS at Soufanieh, I interviewed close friends of Myrna and the Nazzour Family. A good wife's closest friend on earth will be her husband, in this case Nicolas Nazzour. He told me that the events of Soufanieh turned his planned married life entirely around. Information he shared with me is already contained in previous chapters. Nicolas explained that the events have brought him to Jesus Christ and an awareness of what is needed for salvation.

"While the events started in November," said Nicolas, "by December, that is, within five or six weeks, I was totally convinced of the supernatural character of Soufanieh. We opened the doors to Jesus Christ in our home." Nicolas, who at first wanted to keep the unusual events private, soon learned from Myrna that the will of the Mother of God was to open the door of their home to all who cared to enter, visit, pray before the Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh.

If there was any sign of worldliness in Nicolas before the events of Soufanieh, such as desiring always to dress well, the importance of such waned away. One day in discussing Myrna with Nicolas, he said to me, "Myrna is a gem." He offered to show me the oil on the floor, under the pillar of the terrace where Our Lady appeared and the oil overflowed from Myrna's hands onto the floor.

The events of Soufanieh made significant changes in their lives. We made some reference to this in chapter 1. The first event took place on Monday, November 22, 1982. Myrna was accompanied by Alice, her mother-in-law, who still lived with Nicolas.

They were at the bedside of Leila, Nicolas's sister. She had been bedridden because of sharp pains which made her scream at times. Several other women, who included relatives, neighbors and Leila's mother,



Alice, were present. The latter suggested that all present pray for the sick person.

After several minutes of prayer, says Myrna, "Suddenly I felt a strange, indescribable thing; all my body shivered, as if a force had come out of me. A young Muslim woman named Mayada Kozaly shouted: 'Myrna, what's on your hands?' Oil was oozing from my hands."

When this happened Myrna came close to fainting. Everyone shouted: "Oh! Virgin, help us."

Myrna then rubbed the aching places on Leila's body with her oil-filled hands. Immediately Leila's pain stopped.

Later, Myrna and Nicolas expressed their worry, shocked by the event and they kept asking themselves: "Why would we have been chosen by God?" They were not particularly religious people. They fulfilled their religious obligations in going to Church. Nicolas said, "I was a believer but I thought about God only when in need!"

Nothing extraordinary had marked Myrna's childhood or adolescence. Her travels with her family were between Beirut, Lebanon and Damascus. She was reserved by nature, yet of a joyful character with her face brightening into a beautiful smile, something I observed repeatedly while at Soufanieh. She has two brothers and two sisters.

As previously noted, a physician in Damascus found no pathological shortcomings in Myrna and said, "She is hopelessly normal."

God does nothing for nothing. Why did He choose Myrna and Nicolas for this mission (and we must name both of them)? "Have you not read that at the beginning 'the Creator made them male and female and declared . . . the two shall be as one?'" (Mt. 19, 3-6).

Initially I was aware of heaven's call for unity in the Church even before I went to Damascus to discover for myself a reportedly ideal Christian Community that had formed about Soufanieh. While there, the strong realization in learning more about the events firsthand was that it was also a call for love and unity in the family and in the Church. But the family is the first Church (the domestic Church). That love and unity must exist in the millions and millions of miniature mystical bodies, or the domestic churches, the little churches which make up our families.

It seems God is intervening directly at Soufanieh for the individual family and for the universal family of His Church. The two great Christian bodies are the Catholics and Orthodox. God wants them to be one, as he wants all Christians to be one. At Soufanieh he chooses a family where the wife, Myrna, is Melkite Catholic in union with Rome or Peter's successor and Nicolas is Orthodox.

Pope John Paul II has called the Orthodox Church our "sister Church" and said that the Church needs two lungs with which to breathe. Eastern-rite Catholics in many respects understand the Orthodox better than Western-rite, or Roman Catholics, but they are every bit as much "Catholic" as all other Catholics in union with the Pope. And




Myrna and Nicolas receive the Holy Eucharist at their marriage. This Sacrament keeps good Christian couples one in Jesus Christ.

Nicolas is of the Syriac Orthodox whose patriarch has such strong ties with the Pope, has met with the Pope and has come to mutual understanding (as explained in the first chapter). This patriarch could look at me when I visited his headquarters in Damascus and say that the only difference between us is one of administration.

Myrna and Nicolas gradually came to realize that God was asking something special of them. It came at a time when the

family was, and still is, in crisis, when many marriages are failing. It came when the pain of division among Christians is so pronounced and more greatly realized since the Second Vatican Council (1963-65). And yet, it came at a time when at least among Western Christians, more than one new denomination, on the average, is being formed daily, bringing the total as I write this book to near 30,000. Amidst all this confusion the unique events began 20 years ago in the Middle East before the release of this book.

What an impact it would have on the world if Catholics in union with His Holiness, the Pope at Rome, were to be totally united with the millions of Orthodox Christians throughout the world, especially Orthodox in the East. A loud and clear message would go out to the thousands of non-Catholic denominations about the origins of Christianity, the union that once existed between East and West. All could come to appreciate and live the Will of Jesus Christ Who, when He instituted the Holy Eucharist, which is valid and true for both Catholics and Orthodox, prayed, "that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me" (John 17:21).

With the union of these two lungs into Christ's true Church, would not the Protestant denominations realize more clearly what they have lost by separation and division? 

The First Interview (with Salwa Naassan)

Salwa, will you give me a brief background of yourself?

I was born in 1960, obtained a bachelor's degree in French literature. Married Imad Farah (Melkite Catholic). We have two sons, Elie was born in 1987 and Eddie was born in 1989.

What is your relationship to Myrna Nazzour and how long have you known her?

Myrna is my neighbor and has been my friend for 19 years. I see her almost every day.

Does Myrna ever confide spiritual experiences with you?

Yes, she does. For example: in 1984, a few days before Myrna lost her sight, I was with her and noticed that she was worried about something. I asked her, "Why do you look tired and anxious?" She answered, "I heard a voice saying: 'I will take the light of your eyes?'" ["Light of your eyes" is an Arabic expression that means someone will lose his sight.]

Myrna was scared and worried, not about herself but about her husband and family. How would they feel and react if she became blind? She asked me to keep this as a secret and not to tell anyone about it.

Have you often witnessed the oil?

Yes, I have been a witness of the oil both from the Icon and from Myrna on many occasions.

Have you witnessed the stigmata in Myrna?

Yes. I was a witness for the four times that Myrna has received the stigmata of Jesus Christ in 1983, 1984, 1987 and 2001. In all these years, except for 1983, Easter was unified between the Orthodox and Catholics. To see the stigmata of Jesus Christ is a great gift. It touched me very deeply in the heart to witness the suffering and pain of Jesus through Myrna. As for me, suffering and pain of Jesus equals his love for us. Jesus loves us to such an extent that he wants us to be with him in heaven. And this salvation leading to heaven cannot be except through his blood.

In your relationship to Myrna, outside the time when she actually experiences supernatural happenings, does she seem like a different person than before?

I knew Myrna since the beginning of the phenomena. Her personality has not changed except her spiritual side has developed into more maturity and depth. Otherwise Myrna is still the good, amiable, humble, lively and vivacious person as before.



Myrna is present while the author interviews her friend, Salwa Naassan.

What has Soufanieh done for you personally, being so closely associated?

I was always a believer (in God, in the Church), but in Soufanieh I have touched the presence of Jesus through material signs. Through Soufanieh I became a stronger believer in the Holy Eucharist and now I more strongly believe that Jesus exists in the Holy Eucharist. Jesus is with us and he will still be with us until the end of the world. Jesus is present in every baptized person (by faith and grace) because every human person is created in the image and likeness of God.

Following the events of what I have seen and lived in Soufanieh, I feel that I have been taken back 2000 years, and that I live again at the time of Jesus.

What effect has Soufanieh had on your family, your children, and others?

My children and I pray and read the Bible almost every night before going to bed. Also, we participate in the Saturday Mass and the Tuesday night youth prayer meetings which take place in Myrna's home. Sometimes my children come with me to participate in the daily prayer in the later afternoon in Myrna's home. They have a great faith and it is growing more and more in them.

Do you think that Muslim people who are aware of Soufanieh are now more open to Jesus Christ and who he is?

Every person, whatever his religion, even if he is an atheist, who gets to know Soufanieh will be touched in his heart and change for the better.

Are your children and the children of Myrna and Nicolas friends? Does our

Lady of Soufanieh seem to deepen their faith and does it have an influence on the children's relationship to each other?

Yes, they are friends with Myrna's children and especially with John Emmanuel, because they are all boys. They play and spend a lot of time together. As for the rest of the question, it was answered above.

Do you think Soufanieh has earned a higher respect for Christianity among Muslim peoples?

Those who have heard about Soufanieh, and believe in this supernatural phenomenon, have received a higher respect for Christianity. Soufanieh has enhanced their love for the Virgin Mary. We can see them from time to time praying before the Holy Icon.

What do you think is the greatest difficulty for Christians living in a Muslim land?

As a Christian living in Syria, I can tell you frankly and honesty that we have almost no problems. I cannot talk about other countries. As Syrians, we do love each other and there is a remarkable, astonishing coexistence between Muslims and Christians. We have the liberty to celebrate our feasts, traditions, prayers. Believe me when I say that the celebrations of Easter and Christmas in Syria are greater than any other place of the world. You have to come and see it. Then you will understand what I mean.

Has Soufanieh had an effect of bringing Orthodox and Catholic Christians into closer understanding?

As you know, Soufanieh's motto is: "Unity, Love, Faith." Let me discuss each one separately.

Unity: The unity of Easter between Orthodox and Catholics is a first step toward the entire unity of the Church.

Love: We have to love each other as human brothers and sisters.


Faith: We all have to believe in God.

Because of Soufanieh there are already attempts on the way to unity and what is remarkable is that the new generations never talk about Orthodox and Catholics. They pray in whatever church they desire and they ask for unity.

Do most Christians who are aware of Soufanieh believe in it?

As of every supernatural phenomena, there are always believers and non-believers.

Do you have any concluding remarks?

There is no easy way, but since Jesus and his Mother are with us we will continue until the end. Since Jesus wants unity, so he will be the victorious One by the victory of his Church. Definitely the Church will be unified one day since this is the will and desire of Jesus and Jesus never starts a work without finishing it. 

Maya Patsalides of Damascus, 25-years-old at the time, single, gave me the following information before I interviewed her.

“I first came to Soufanieh to pray with my mother when I was 11 years old when Myrna received the stigmata for the second time. The first time I saw her suffering with the stigmata I believed.

“There were three and a half years when my father, who is a civil engineer, had some problems with the government. Then the problem ceased and they declared my father innocent. Then our family asked Myrna to come and pray at our home. While she was praying oil came from her hands.

“I can say that I have a great relationship with Myrna. She gave me great spiritual support. She and Fr. Malouli taught me how to pray and they were saying that we should have hard times in order to come close to Jesus. At the time when all this started I and my friends were still very young, 11 or 12-years-old, yet Fr. Malouli tried to develop a little prayer group with us and we would ask questions of Fr. Malouli. Being so young we were ignorant of many things. We had six to eight meetings. Then I was the only one who kept coming to Soufanieh.

“I have thus had the opportunity to be a witness to many spiritual happenings here, like the oil, the stigmata, the message during the ecstasies. Myrna does not see while in ecstasy. If one would hit her during ecstasy her senses would not respond. When she forms her hands and fingers like the priest in blessing it is not possible to move her hands, feet or head. Even big men cannot lift her at such a time. Myrna remembers nothing of what happens around her of things like this.

“There are three phases to what happens when Myrna undergoes spiritual transformation:

1. Apparitions or visions that only Myrna sees.

“Until this time (September 2001) Myrna has had five apparitions. These take place upstairs, on the balcony or terrace. The first time the Virgin appeared suddenly. The second and future times the Virgin appeared she came from the tree to Myrna on the terrace.

2. Ecstasy. There have been 34 ecstasies until now. [Another took place the following November 27, 2001.]

3. Stigmata.

“Last Holy Week of 2001 the stigmata came at 1:35 p.m. on Holy Thursday and lasted until around midnight, going into Good Friday.

“Many with afflictions come here to pray and many with afflictions have been healed here, regardless of their religion. This includes Muslims, etc. Both Christians and Muslims come here.

“The very large Icon one can see on the wall [of the Soufanieh Virgin’s House] was painted in three days by three men: 1. a Muslim, 2. a Christian, and 3. a Sharkas (a division of Islam).

I asked further questions of Maya Patsalides, a close friend of Myrna, adept at secretarial work. She attended the American University in Egypt. She is the photographer who supplied the Fatima Family Apostolate and others with many Soufanieh pictures. Her interview follows.

I understood Nicolas to say to me that the first time Myrna was drawn up the steps to the terrace is when our Lady with the crucifix of her Rosary touched Myrna’s hands. At that moment from Myrna’s hands oil overflowed unto the floor and formed the suffering face of Jesus Christ? Is that correct?

Yes, what you understood is correct. The first one to see this face was the previous Apostolic Nuncio in Damascus, Luigi Accogli, on September 8, 1987. And he asked to take a picture of the oil and the face.

I understood Nicolas to say that the oil is still there, under the pillar, and the petitions that are dropped into the pillar, which is over the spot of the apparition. Is the stain of the oil still there?

Yes. The stain of the oil is still there, on the floor of the terrace. [Another floor was built over the original concrete floor on the terrace that existed at the time but the pillar is now over the spot of apparitions and maintains the original floor, beneath and within the pillar.]

Emphasis has been put on the first apparition taking place at the same time as Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, that is, regarding the appearance of the Mother of God to St. Catherine Labouré. You celebrate the anniversary of the apparition, however, on November 26. My research on the Miraculous Medal tells me the first apparition at rue de Bac in Paris was at 11:30 p.m. on July 18, 1830, when her Guardian Angel led her to Our Lady in the chapel. Our Lady appeared to St. Catherine again on November 27, not the 26th? Was that the first apparition of Our Lady to Myrna? How does it coincide with the apparition of St. Catherine Labouré and the Miraculous Medal?

We celebrate the Mass on the night of November 26th at 11:00 p.m. and then at the end of the Mass, at and after midnight, we celebrate the anniversary. We sing “Happy Birthday, Virgin Mary” and we share the cake with everyone. Because the first time the oil exuded from the holy Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh was on the morning of November 27,



The Medal of St. Catherine Labouré. The front side shows Our Lady crushing the serpent. On the back side, the cross and bar intertwined with the M signify the close relationship of Jesus and Mary.

1982, at 8:15. It is due to the oriental church, because for them the day begins with the sunset.

I was pleased that I was able to witness the oil at the very site of the apparitions at Soufanieh. Am I correct that the apparitions to Myrna have taken place only on the terrace?

Yes. The apparitions of the Virgin Mary have taken place only on that terrace.

Myrna had asked me to consecrate extra altar breads at that Mass I offered on the terrace where the apparitions of the Virgin have taken place. I believe the consecrated hosts were to take to the sick. The Real Presence of Jesus Christ was still in the small chapel then where I had just offered the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass on the final evening, very late, where the miracle of the oil came. When I asked Myrna if any messages she had ever received concerned the Holy Eucharist, she answered, "Not yet."

Indirectly those of St. Catherine did concern the Holy Eucharist as her Guardian Angel took her to Mary seated by the altar and tells her to come to the foot of the altar to ask for things, graces needed. That means, come to Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, in the Blessed Sacrament. I wonder if perhaps there has not been some indirect associations in the Soufanieh message with Jesus present in the Holy Eucharist?

When Myrna answered you that day "not yet," it was because neither Jesus Christ nor the Virgin Mary had yet explicitly talked about the Holy Eucharist. But, in Jesus' last message, November 27, 2001 (just over two months after you were here) during the Ecstasy of the 19th anniversary, Jesus had talked directly and clearly about the Holy Eucharist.

Do you know of examples, since Soufanieh concerns the family, as well as unity in the Church, where families were saved, that is, where marriages were saved or strengthened because of Our Lady of Soufanieh?

Yes. Myrna has brought together many families that had either physical or spiritual problems. She went to them and prayed with them. She has prevented many divorces by her prayers with these families.

Do you have any concluding remarks?


I'll tell you a bit of our news in Soufanieh: concerning the Youth Prayer meeting every Tuesday at 9 p.m. [like the one you attended]. The gathering is getting bigger and the number of people praying increases every day. On Tuesday, November 6, 2001, when the theme of the prayer meeting that night was unity, one of the young men, while he was praying loudly, suggested to all that there be created some kind of organization for Soufanieh. So, Myrna then talked to everyone and told them about you, Fr. Fox, and your *Fatima Family Apostolate*. We then decided to create the Soufanieh Family. What is surprising in this account is that a few days previously, Myrna, Rita, Salwa and I were talking about creating a Soufanieh Family and to ask you to send us your magazine [*Immaculate Heart Messenger*] and to ask you to also send your internal law [*Charter of the Fatima Family Apostolate*]. But we were not sure where to start.

Well, on Tuesday, November 13, 2001, after prayers, we celebrated the birthday of the Soufanieh Family. Two weeks later during the



Myrna is getting ready the temporary altar for the evening Sacrifice of the Mass (Divine Liturgy).

message of the Ecstasy on the 29th anniversary, Jesus Christ blessed our prayers and Soufanieh family. I'll send you the English translation of the message as soon as we have finished a good translation.

Could you please send us your magazine, the *Immaculate Heart Messenger* and the *Charter of the Fatima Family Apostolate* and your ideas for our youth Soufanieh Family? For the 19th anniversary there were pilgrims from different countries, such as France, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt. They have celebrated this occasion and prayed with us on Tuesday. We have told them about the Soufanieh Family so they ask us to participate in this Family and to send them by e-mail our program and theme of Tuesday prayer sessions so they can participate with us, and send us their prayers and meditations. So, every Tuesday there is a group of French people who pray with us the same prayers. Tobias, the German young man you know, participates with us in a prayer group in Germany, because we send him every week the program and the theme of the prayer via internet. [End of Interview.] 

I had many conversations with Myrna during the week I was a guest at the Virgin's House of Soufanieh. When I asked Myrna if I understood correctly that the Soufanieh message concerns as well the unity for all Christians in One Church as Jesus intended from the beginning, *if it also concerned holiness of the family*.

Myrna's response was: "Yes. One of Jesus' messages was: "deepen your life as a wife, mother and sister."

Who arranged that Pope John Paul II was able to use your chalice when he came to Damascus in May 2001? Myrna's response: "At first it seemed that I would not be allowed to meet the Pope because my husband is Orthodox. In Syria when a Catholic marries an Orthodox, the Orthodox control the family." [Myrna remained Catholic.]

I went to all of the Pope's Masses in Damascus. The chalice I have for use for Masses here in the home was an American gift to me. When there was going to be a Mass offered by the Pope on May 5, 2001, the Salesian Sisters helped find many chalices (so people could receive under both species). They borrowed mine. People could not all get into the Church and many were outside. The Salesian Sisters saw me standing among all the people outside and arranged for me to come into the Church. Thus I was near the middle aisle when the Pope came.

With all the chalices on the altar I was most pleased when at the elevation I saw that the Pope was using my chalice. I looked up with delight at the elevation and said to myself, "He is using my chalice." The Pope was asked afterwards if I could keep this chalice here in Damascus and the Pope agreed.

With the location of Myrna in the Church, she explained to me, she was able to kiss the Pope's hand twice; once while His Holiness Pope John Paul II was entering for the Solemn Mass and again while the Pope was leaving the altar, that is, going out of the church in procession as he passed her place in the pews of the Church.

Did Our Lady look like the painting in your living room which was done by a Belgium artist?

The clothes do. The way she is standing is the same. Only it is not true for the face. I could not describe her face. I agree with Sr. Lucia who said, "No matter how beautiful you [an artist] make the image, it will never be as beautiful as Mary is."

Was Mary's body entirely of light?

In the first vision our Mother was wearing sun-diamonds (like diamonds shining in the sun). She was shining like real diamonds (in the light). I touched her and she felt the same as when one is touching a physical human body.

Has the Blessed Mother always had the rosary when she has appeared to you?

Always.

Has Our Lady appeared to you all five times in the balcony [terrace]?

Always.

How many countries have you traveled to for Our Lady of Soufanieh?

Many. America, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Cyprus and to Cairo, Egypt many times, etc.

What do you do in these countries?

I am always invited by the Church. I speak on unity and Our Lady of Soufanieh. I speak of unity of the Church and of the family. For unity of the Church we must begin by having unity in the family. That means unity with husband, wife, children—that they all be together.

The Lady Mary said to me, "I give you a gift for what you have done for me." The gift was my first child, Miriam, now 15-years-old. I always say, Miriam is a gift from heaven.

Do you pray with people in the countries you visit?

I speak and pray in Arabic and someone translates. I sing songs. When oil comes in other countries the priests ask me to put oil on the people. I tell them, "Pay attention, not to the oil, but to the Holy Spirit, to Jesus and Mary. The great miracle is not the oil but that bread and wine (at holy Mass) becomes the Body and Blood of Jesus. If you are searching for a sign, look to the Resurrection of Jesus. If you are looking for proof, the big proof is in the Bible." The oil often has come when the people are receiving Holy Communion. This is the way it is sometimes, but not always then. I try to hide it (like at Holy Communion time) to keep people from being distracted (during the Mass).


Has this oil happened in every country?

In every country there has been oil. In some churches, however, the oil does not come.

What does Our Lady of Soufanieh say about prayer?

If you read the messages, you will find her often talking about prayer.

Does Our Lady speak about the Holy Eucharist?

Not yet. The messages are ongoing. 

I found it interesting and edifying that at the very next message Myrna was to receive from Jesus while in ecstasy, November 26, 2001, there was mention of the Holy Eucharist as follows:

"... But the whole is incomplete without your unity at the altar. I am giving you My Body and My Blood as a proof of My fidelity and love. Receive from Me this Sacrament with trust and faith, because this Sacrament comforts you, provides you with strength and wisdom and increases you in grace. . . ."

The above message of Jesus reminds one of the efforts of Pope John Paul II for the reunion of Orthodox and Catholics and his words that the Church needs two lungs to breathe, that of the East and the West. The Orthodox also have a valid priesthood and therefore a valid Eucharist of Sacrifice and Sacrament. But Orthodox and Catholics are without total unity with each other when both have the same Eucharist of Sacrifice and Sacrament. The same Sacrifice of the Cross is perpetuated in the divine liturgy and the same real presence of the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ occurs with

Catholics and Orthodox yet, “the whole is incomplete without your unity at the altar.”

While Orthodox clergy may be present in recognition of their common faith in the Holy Eucharist, yet Orthodox and Catholic clergy do not concelebrate at the same altar.

Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I, supreme head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, as this book is written, has made great strides in “a healing touch” toward total reunion with Rome. Brief mention is made below of historical background:

Already during the reign of the late Moran Mor Jacob III efforts were made to narrow the differences in explaining Christology between the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The result was a joint declaration issued in the Vatican on October 27, 1971, signed by Patriarch Jacob and Pope Paul VI.

Included in the 1971 document, jointly signed were the words:

“The Pope and the Patriarch have recognized the deep spiritual communion which already exists between their Churches. The celebration of the sacraments of the Lord, the common profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God made Flesh for man’s salvation, the apostolic traditions which form part of the common heritage of both Churches, the great Fathers and Doctors, including St. Cyril of Alexandria, who are their common masters in the faith—all these testify to the action of the Holy Spirit who has continued to work in their Churches even when there have been human weakness and failings. The period of mutual recrimination and condemnation has given place to a willingness to meet together in sincere efforts to lighten and eventually remove the burden of history which still weighs heavily upon Christians.

“Progress has already been made and Pope Paul VI and the Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Jacob III are in agreement that there is no difference in the faith they profess concerning the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become really man, even if over the centuries difficulties have arisen out of the different theological expressions by which this faith was expressed. They therefore encourage the clergy and faithful of their Churches to even greater endeavors at removing the obstacles which still prevent complete communion among them. This should be done with love, with openness to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and with mutual respect for each other and each other’s Church. They particularly exhort the scholars of their Churches, and of all Christian communities, to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of Christ with humility and fidelity to the Apostolic traditions so that the fruits of their reflections may help the Church in her service to the world which the Incarnate Son of God has redeemed.

Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I, presently reigning and with whom I was able to meet, has gone even further than his predecessor in working for Unity. He spoke to me of the joint signed agreement in

1984 between himself and Pope John Paul II. Below are excerpts of his greeting Pope John Paul II on Monday, June 18, 1984, which was little more than a year and a half after the beginning of the Soufanieh events.

"Your Holiness, it is with profound Christian joy and great esteem that I greet Your Holiness. St. Paul's feelings of joyful anticipation when preparing to visit the Church of Rome, were mine, as I was contemplating my visit to this venerable See, where Your Holiness presides in charity over the largest communion of Christian people on earth. 'I long to see you' said St. Paul, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith" (Rom. 1:11, 12). I have pleasure to convey to Your Holiness and the Roman Catholic Church the greetings of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, the Catholics of the East, Metropolitans, monks, nuns, clergy and the faithful all over the world.

"As Your Holiness is well aware, the Syrian Orthodox Church has an unbroken chain from St. Peter to me who has been called to be his 121st legitimate successor in Antioch. At one time the Church of Antioch extended its sway from the eastern shores of the Mediterranean right across Asia to India and China. However, today it bears the painful imprints of history. But powers of the world could not overcome or destroy the Church, because the Master of the Church Jesus Christ has always been with it.

"... Your Holiness, the stresses and strains of human unity, up and down the world, weigh heavily on our search for Christian unity today. It has become necessary, therefore, not only to search for a common understanding in matters of faith, but also to evolve a common Christian approach to the world and its problems. Ecumenical concern, and action, should necessarily converge on both these today. . . .

"Our faith, and yours, have been tested in the crucible of fire, and we are very conscious, that the world today is too strong for a divided Church. The Christian response to the world today cannot be less than a powerful and united witness of Christian faith and Christian living. May our dialogues and activities converge to this ecumenical end. To this common task we humbly re-affirm our commitment. Our visit to Your Holiness and our enriching experience in this great city will strengthen our resolve to continue to tread the path of fraternal ecclesiastical relations and Christian solidarity, so that our closeness may be perfected in one communion, according to the will of our Lord. . . .

"We once again greet Your Holiness with profound joy and brotherly love, in the firm belief that we shall together overcome the misunderstandings inherited from the past, and move forward, under divine guidance, to full communion and unity in our common Lord. May the blessed Trinity, the source of all life and all holiness, bless us. Thank you."

St. Peter went to Antioch to minister as the Rock chosen by Jesus before going on to continue his ministry from Rome. Thus this Patriarch can well speak of himself as the successor of St. Peter of Antioch.

On Saturday, June 23, 1985, there took place the second and final session of the summit between the Patriarch of Rome (Pope John Paul II) and the Patriarch of Antioch (Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I), at which the following [excerpts] Joint Communiqué was signed by both:

“His Holiness John Paul II, Bishop of Rome and Pope of the Catholic Church, and His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East and Supreme head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church, kneel down with full humility in front of the exalted and extolled Heavenly Throne of our Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks for this glorious opportunity which has been granted them to meet together in His love in order to strengthen further the relationship between their two sister Churches, the Church of Rome and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch—the relationship already excellent through the joint initiative of their Holinesses of blessed memory Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Jacob III. . . .

“First of all, their Holinesses confess the faith of their two Churches, formulated by the Nicene Council of 325 A.D. and generally known as ‘the Nicene Creed.’ The confusions and schisms that occurred between their Churches in the later centuries, they realize today, in no way affect or touch the substance of their faith, since these arose only because of differences in terminology and culture and in the various formulae adopted by different theological schools, to express the same matter. Accordingly, we find today no real basis for the sad divisions and schism that subsequently arose between us concerning the doctrine of Incarnation. In words and life we confess the true doctrine concerning Christ our Lord, notwithstanding the differences in interpretation of such a doctrine which arose at the time of the Council of Chalcedon.

“Hence we wish to reaffirm solemnly our profession of common faith in the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, as Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Jacob III did in 1971. They denied that there was any difference in the faith they confessed in the mystery of the Word of God made flesh and become truly man. In our turn we confess that He became incarnate for us, taking to himself a real body with a rational soul. He shared our humanity in all things except sin. We confess that our Lord and our God, our Savior and the King of all, Jesus Christ, is perfect God as to His divinity and perfect man as to His humanity. In Him His divinity is united to His humanity. This union is real, perfect, without blending or mingling, without confusion, without alteration, without division, without the least separation. He who is God eternal and indivisible, became visible in the flesh and took the form of servant. In him are united, in a real, perfect indivisible and inseparable way, divinity and humanity, and in Him all their properties are present and active.

“Having the same conception of Christ, we confess also the same conception of His mystery. Incarnate, dead and risen again, our Lord,

God and Savior has conquered sin and death. Through him during the time between Pentecost and the Second Coming, the period which is also the last phase of time, it is given to man to experience the new creation, the kingdom of God, the transforming ferment (cf. Matt. 13:33) already present in our midst. For this God has chosen a new people, His holy Church which is the body of Christ. Through the Word and through the Sacraments the Holy Spirit acts in the Church to call everybody and make them members of this Body of Christ. Those who believe are baptized in the Holy Spirit in the name of the Holy Trinity to form one body and through the Holy Sacrament of the anointing of Confirmation their faith is perfected and strengthened by the same Spirit.


"Sacramental life finds in the Holy Eucharist its fulfillment and its summit, in such a way that it is through the Eucharist that the Church most profoundly realizes and reveals its nature. Through the Holy Eucharist the event of Christ's Pasch expands throughout the Church. Through Holy Baptism and Confirmation, indeed, the members of Christ are anointed by the Holy Spirit, grafted on to Christ; and through the Holy Eucharist the Church becomes what she is destined to be through Baptism and Confirmation. By communion with the body and blood of Christ the faithful grow in that mysterious divinization which by the Holy Spirit makes them dwell in the Son as children of the Father.

"The other Sacraments, which the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch hold together in one and the same succession of Apostolic ministry, i.e., Holy Orders, Matrimony, Reconciliation of penitents and Anointing of the Sick, are ordered to that celebration of the Holy Eucharist which is the center of sacramental life and the chief visible expression of ecclesial communion. This communion of Christians with each other and of local Churches united around their lawful bishops is realized in the gathered community which confesses the same faith, which reaches forward in hope of the world to come and in expectation of the Savior's return and is anointed by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in it with charity that never fails.

"Since it is the chief expression of Christian unity between the faithful and between bishops and priests, the Holy Eucharist cannot yet be concelebrated by us. Such celebration supposes a complete identity of faith such as does not yet exist between us. Certain questions, in fact, still need to be resolved touching the Lord's will for His Church, as also the doctrinal implications and canonical details of the traditions proper to our communities which have been too long separated.

"Our identity in faith, though not yet complete, entitles us to envisage collaboration between our Churches in pastoral care, in situations which nowadays are frequent both because of the dispersion of our faithful throughout the world and because of the precarious conditions of these difficult times. It is not rare, in fact, for our faithful to find access to a priest of their own Church materially or morally impossible. Anxi-

ous to meet their needs and with their spiritual benefit in mind, we authorize them in such cases to ask for the Sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick from lawful priests of either of our two sister Churches, when they need them. It would be a logical corollary of collaboration in pastoral care to cooperate in priestly formation and theological education. Bishops are encouraged to promote sharing of facilities for theological education where they judge it to be advisable. While doing this we do not forget that we must still do all in our power to achieve the full visible communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and ceaselessly implore our Lord to grant us that unity which alone will enable us to give to the world a fully unanimous Gospel witness.

“Thanking the Lord who has allowed us to meet and enjoy the consolation of the faith we hold in common (cf. Rom.1:12) and to proclaim before the world the mystery of the Person of the Word incarnate and of His saving work, the unshakeable foundation of that common faith, we pledge ourselves solemnly to do all that in us lies to remove the last obstacles still hindering full communion between the Catholic Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch, so that with one heart and voice we may preach the word: The True Light that enlightens every man and ‘that all who believe in His name may become the children of God’ (cf. John 1:9-12).” 

Having met and talked to Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I, and his having said to me in September 2001 that the only difference between us is administration, and studying the joint communique [above] which he signed together with Pope John Paul II, I get the distinct feeling that this Patriarch is ready for full union and is perhaps waiting for fuller cooperation with the Patriarchs of other eastern Sees. Then too the message from Jesus through Myrna on November 26, 2001, becomes all the more meaningful:

“... But the whole is incomplete without your unity at the altar. I am giving you my Body and my Blood as a proof of my fidelity and love. Receive from me this Sacrament with trust and faith, because this Sacrament comforts you, provides you with strength and wisdom and increases you in grace. . . .”

At a time of the great acts of terrorism [September 11, 2001], credited to extremists among Muslim people, but in no way representing the Muslim people as a whole or the way they perceive Islam, it was a joy to read in the book which this Patriarch of Antioch gave me, the following:

“The effect of the Christological controversies was disastrous to church and state. By the close of the sixth century the Roman state church of the East had been rent, and separated churches, Nestorian and Monophysite, had been torn from it. Egypt and Syria were profoundly disaffected toward the government and religion of Constantinople—a

fact that largely accounts for the rapid conquest of those lands by Mohammedanism in the seventh century”—*The Quest for Unity*.

At the point of the interview with Myrna noted above, after the question whether in the message there had been mention of the Holy Eucharist, there came into the house of Soufanieh a young adult Protestant man and a beautiful Greek Orthodox woman, 29 and 27 years of age respectively. They were from America and had come to Soufanieh to pray to Our Lord and Our Lady. The young man recognized that I was a priest from America. He came over and sat beside me announcing, “I am Protestant. She is Greek Orthodox.” At this point I explained to him that for Protestants the Apostolic Chain had been broken. Thus their ministers did not have the supernatural powers of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ to effect the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. He listened intensely and told me he would think about all this.

“How much time did you spend in Fatima?” I asked Myrna.

“I was in Fatima for three days in January 1998. I met Sr. Lucia one time for a short time.”

“How did that happen that you met Sr. Lucia?”

“Mother Prioress of Carmel in Coimbra, Portugal, asked me to tell her and the Novice Mistress about Our Lady of Soufanieh. When I started, the Prioress stopped me and went to invite all of the sisters to come and hear me. All of them came. When I was telling about the Virgin of Soufanieh, sometimes the sisters reminded me of something about Soufanieh I had forgotten to say. They had already read a book about Soufanieh.

“Sr. Lucia was not present. I was told that she was sick and in bed. Mother Prioress then gave me a rosary as a gift from Sr. Lucia. When I finished the talk to the sisters on Our Lady of Soufanieh I led the Rosary for the sisters. While we were on the road driving to Coimbra a friend had taught me how to pray the Rosary in Portuguese so I could lead the Rosary in Portuguese for the sisters.

“Then I sang the Lourdes Ave for the sisters at Coimbra and while singing oil came to my hands. The sisters put their hands through the grill to touch the oil on my hands. I was with my translator who noticed at that time an old sister looking from a partially open door while all the sisters were getting the oil through the grill.

“Then the translator said to me: ‘Look, Sr. Lucia is looking toward us through the partially open door.’ I looked and motioned to the Mother Prioress to come. The prioress then goes to Sr. Lucia and tells the people who were with me to leave. Then the Mother Prioress had Sr. Lucia come in to the speak room. She had been listening behind the door. They then opened a big window so that I could put my hands to join hands with Sr. Lucia who wanted to be anointed with the oil.

“Sr. Lucia was smiling but I was trembling. I felt that I don’t deserve

this favor to meet Sr. Lucia. Oil was put on Sr. Lucia's hands. I said to Sr. Lucia 'Pray for the Church, especially in the Orient, in the Middle East and pray for the unity of the Church and for the unity of families and for me.'

"I spoke this in English and the translator transposed into Portuguese. When Sr. Lucia understood what I was saying she nodded and smiled. I could have stayed longer with Sr. Lucia but out of respect and awe I did not."

One day while I was asking Myrna questions, such as the above questions, to gain an understanding for this book on Soufanieh, four women came into the Soufanieh House from Sri Lanka. They were Buddhist and prayed before the Icon but soon one woman began to act as if she were having an epileptic seizure. She would make different rapid, almost violent movements. She even threw herself on the floor. Nicolas said to me, "You need to pray over her."

With the rapid swinging of her arms I was surprised she did not harm the Icon enclosed in a glass globe as her jerking arms came close to it. I prayed over her as did Myrna too. Calmness came over her and then she said, "I feel better." The woman having the seizures then came and sat beside me. I asked her to repeat after me a short prayer to Jesus, St. Michael and St. Raphael the Archangels. She did without hesitation. Others present were frightened but Myrna did not seem to be. The other women said that the lady with the affliction had been traveling out of country and since she came home she has had this affliction. The three left calmly and it was the last I heard of them.

We can see in the above accounts the simplicity and humility of Myrna. She is in awe at meeting Sr. Lucia and does not feel that she should take special time with her. It seems that Sr. Lucia, already advanced in age, learning that Myrna was a guest to all the sisters, arose to come to the speak room too, even if only from behind the partially opened door. That the Carmelites were informed about Soufanieh was in evidence while Myrna was delivering an account to them as the Sisters would tell Myrna what she had forgotten as they had already read about it.

I was impressed with the common faith which I as a Roman Catholic priest shared with the Soufanieh community in Damascus. The Catholics were Melkite rite Catholics and of course Orthodox would be present too when I spoke to the people through a translator. Some understood English. The homilies I gave were obviously expressing the same faith as they had.

At the Sacrifice of the Mass which I celebrated at the Soufanieh house on September 14, the Feast of the Exultation of the Cross, besides others from Damascus there were about 70 people present who had come from Iran and Iraq. I mentioned that the Pope had said upon becoming pope in his first address to the world from the balcony of St. Peter's

Basilica, “Be not afraid. Be not afraid to open the doors to Christ.” And this is what the Virgin told Myrna—to open the doors of their home to all who wanted to come to Christ there. I noted that Myrna and Nicolas have, after the initiation of the Soufanieh supernatural events, carried their cross with acceptance in joy. Since doing so, Nicolas acknowledged a great peace he experiences in their home, the house of the Virgin.

It was impressive to see that September 14 for these Christians was also in their divine Liturgy of the eastern rite, the feast of the Exultation of the Cross. The young people had a special way to celebrate this day. They shot off firecrackers.

On Sunday, September 16, 2001, I met the Archpriest or Arch-pastor George Jilo at St. Elias Church in Damascus. This church is a short walking distance from the Soufanieh home. He had just finished the divine liturgy for Sunday. He came from the sacristy to meet me. He asked me in a rather direct manner, “What did you want to know?” I had not expected him to start the conversation this way and was taken by surprise. Not being able to think of any other question, and knowing how open the Orthodox Syriac Patriarch had been to me, but having no information on this archpriest I responded to him with this question: “Do you believe in Soufanieh?” His response was rather abrupt. “What kind of question is that? Who would not believe in her.” And he turned and walked away from me.

I then learned that this archpriest was the first with his archbishop to see the oil on November 27, 1982, which was the first time of the miracle of the oil. He had come with Archbishop Bolos Bandalay.

Nicolas said: “We called them when it happened. The Icon used to be kept in our bedroom. Both the archbishop and the archpriest took off their shoes before entering the room where the icon was.”

In January, 1983 the Orthodox Patriarch decided to transfer the Icon to the church. Forty-five days later two Orthodox priests brought it back. They were authorized by the Patriarch to bring it back (see Chapter 4).

When I responded to the Archpriest George Jilo at St. Elias Church as I did, I was later informed, “He was afraid, he did not want to get involved as he knew I was present to write a book on Soufanieh. His Patriarch had told him not to get involved publicly.” At least I learned that the Archpriest believed in Soufanieh. Also, it was an opportunity to see his beautiful Orthodox church.

Amidst meeting and interviewing people of the Soufanieh community I was able to go to the Omayyad Mosque in Damascus where there is a shrine reportedly where the head of St. John the Baptist is buried. It was a Christian Basilica in early centuries before Islam largely took over Syria. It is somewhat a miracle in itself that the limited number of Christians have survived in Syria. That Jesus and his Mother have not forgotten these good Christians is testified by the development of the

Soufanieh family and the naturally unexplainable phenomena so frequent since 1982. Pope John Paul II, while in Damascus May 2001, visited the Omayyad Mosque to pay tribute to St. John the Baptist. To enter the mosque one must take off his shoes.

Fr. Boulos (Paul) Fadel, ordained in 1984 and a Catholic of the Melkite rite, is now Myrna's main spiritual director, since the death of Fr. Malouli (March 5, 2000). He has known her since July, 1986. But even before this time he went with her to Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, etc. He would go along to help in whichever way he could. He was always close to the hearts of Myrna and Nicolas. He answered my questions as follows:

Have you always believed Soufanieh to be supernatural?

At first, no, because I lived in Lebanon. There was civil war there and so many were saying "I have seen Mary." With so many false mystics I thought Soufanieh is only another one of them.

In 1986 I left Lebanon and came here to see and hear all what was happening. I concluded that God is truly in this home. Why? For three reasons: 1. There is prayer here. 2. The house is always open. 3. No money is accepted. I came to Soufanieh and could see this home was open then already for four years. I saw that it was open to all, and that no money or donations were requested or accepted.

How often do you speak to Myrna of spiritual things?

Whenever we meet, or by phone when she has questions to ask. Also when I go with her when she is invited to other countries.

Do you agree that Soufanieh is for the holiness of the family as well as for union of the churches?

The main idea is that there be unity of the Church and then to bring the whole world to unity in Jesus Christ. In the Arabic world the Church is based on the family, the family which is the basic unit of society. To have unity of the Church we must have unity in families. Unity of the family means first that every true family is based on love, faith, sacrifice and communication. If millions of families are living true Christian lives, the Church would become united.

In the Arabic world the divisions like Orthodox, Catholic, Syriac, etc., we don't call them divisions but families. We don't speak of divisions but of families. Every family has its own personality. By using the word family we exclude the word division. We try to soften the impact of the word division.

When you say “we,” who do you mean?

In oriental theology, the word “community” means family. Before divisions we called every Church a “family” and every community was called a “family.” Here the family means every Church has its own personality, customs, etc. For this reason the new language we use for conversations and dialogue among Christians is “family” because to love demands to respect differences. This spirit is growing among the churches. One of the biggest obstacles to the unity of the Church is where there is not respect for each other.

It was the Second Vatican Council which started this spirit. It was a great step but they did not secure the Oriental Church, this includes Catholic Orientals.

How does Myrna fit into all this?

Myrna comes in at this very point. Everyone comes to Soufanieh to pray. All kinds of Christians and even Muslims come to pray at Soufanieh. Many people pray and their prayers are centered on unity.

Do you think all these different kinds of people who are praying, pray for unity or personal favors?


Concerning Myrna she is not aware of all the complex issues but she believes, since God asked for unity.

Myrna who was listening to this interview joined in at this time and added: “Certainly the people who come pray for personal things but when they learn what is the meaning of Soufanieh they pray for unity. You see the messages painted on the walls (circling the main room where the Icon is and where people pray). All these messages concern unity, so they do learn of unity here.”

Fr. Fadel, how do you see the mission of Myrna?

Myrna is similar to the first apostles. She holds Jesus and the ideal of Christianity in her heart and desires everyone to know about it. The truth of unity exists in her heart. She goes throughout the world to give the message of unity of the Church. She does not know what will become of all this.

Do you think something is going to explode among Muslims to bring them to Christ Jesus?

Muslims love the Virgin Mary. They must get something in their heart from all this. 

Each day mail comes from people who don't know the address. They simply write on the envelope, "Lady of Soufanieh," "House of Mary," or, "House of the Virgin," —Damascus, and it gets here.

I noticed at the Soufanieh House many holy cards are given out with images of the Icon on one side and two prayers on the reverse side. The cards are often covered with plastic to make them durable.

The Soufanieh family, informed of the origin of these prayers, prays them each evening when people from the community come to the Virgin's Home to pray. They are also recited daily by many throughout the world.

The top prayer was given by the Virgin when Fr. Malouli was praying for enlightenment. The lower part of the prayer was given by Jesus on Ascension Thursday, May 31, 1984, as a prayer.

The Icon had just been returned to the Soufanieh home and Nicolas was angry because of the way it was returned. It had been taken to the church in a solemn manner. Fr. Malouli was praying for enlightenment as to what we should do. Myrna was called by the Virgin to go upstairs to the terrace and the Virgin gave Fr. Malouli the answer which forms the top part of the prayer on the card: *"God saves me, Jesus enlightens me, the Holy Spirit is my life, this is why I fear nothing."*

What does the Virgin's prayer mean? God works things out. Often we want to take things in our own hands and think things should be worked out differently. We do not save ourselves. We must simply be willing instruments of Jesus and let him work out the details. God is the one who saves us by sending us Jesus, the Light of the world. The Holy Spirit which is the Soul of the Church, dwells in us by grace which is a sharing in the life of God. Keep this in mind and fear nothing.

The longer prayer, second on the card, came from Jesus Christ on Ascension Day, May 31, 1984, but first Jesus said:

"My daughter, I am the Beginning and the End. I am Truth, Freedom and Peace. My Peace, I give you. Your peace shall not depend on what people say, be it good or bad, and think little of yourself. He who does not seek people's approval, and does not fear their disapproval, enjoys true peace. And this is achieved through me. Live your life, contented and independent. The pains you have incurred for me shall not break you. Rather, rejoice. I am capable of rewarding you. Your hardships will not be prolonged, and your pains will not last. Pray with adoration, because eternal life is worth these sufferings. Pray for God's will to be done in you, and say: [then is given the lower prayer of the card]

*Grant that I rest in you above anything else,
 above all creation,
 above all your angels,
 above all praise,
 above all rejoicing and exultation,
 above all glory and honor,
 above all heavenly hosts.*

*For you alone are the Most High,
 You alone are the Almighty and Good above all things.
 May you come to me and relieve me and release me from
 my chains and grant me freedom, because without you my
 joy is not complete, without you my table is empty."*

The above prayer card as distributed at Soufanieh has slight differences in translations from Arabic than is often seen in the United States and Canada. For instance, "anything else" is rendered as "all things" and "all creation" is rendered "all creatures." The official message with the above prayer adds: "Only then will I come to say '*Here I am*' because you have invited me."


The prayer card adds the short prayer from another message, reading:

"O Father, through the merits of your Son's wounds, save us."

When I was asked if I was praying to experience the oil at Soufanieh while I was there, I thought, "I believe in Soufanieh without witnessing the oil. I've talked to the Orthodox Archbishop who experienced it, to the Orthodox Syriac Patriarch who witnessed it, to Fr. Zahlaoui, who witnessed it, and others: 'Dear Lord, dear Mother, if you want me to witness the oil so that your Soufanieh message will be more credible and effective through the book I am to write, that is your concern, your decision, not mine. I accept either way. And I will go home content that you are working here.'"

On the Feast of the Exultation of the Cross, which is a major feast for Christians of Eastern Catholic and Orthodox rites, I spoke of Adam and Eve and their sin and that there had caused an infinite gap between God and man as a result. The sin was of infinite malice, not that man could do anything infinite, but the One against whom mankind had sinned, was the infinite God. The reparation, the satisfaction needed, must be of infinite value. And it must be done by man because man had committed the offense.

What was needed was one who was both God and man. Jesus Christ is the answer. Jesus Christ bridged the infinite gap between heaven and earth, between God and man by dying on the Cross to redeem us, to save us from sin. Since Jesus is God he can make infinite satisfaction. Since Jesus is also man, in Jesus Christ a man makes the

satisfaction. The God-Man bridges the infinite gap between heaven and earth. 

One of the Soufanieh community had asked me, “Father, are you not praying that while you are in Damascus and at the Virgin’s House, that you will witness the miracle of the oil?”


I answered, “Not really. I believe in Soufanieh and it suffices for me the testimonies I have heard.” I did not know that I would deserve to witness such. I’ve talked to the Orthodox Archbishop who experienced it, to the Orthodox Syriac Patriarch who witnessed it, to Fr. Zahlaoui, who witnessed it, and others. ‘Dear Lord, dear Mother, if you want me to witness the oil so that your Soufanieh message will be more credible and effective through the book I am to write, that is your concern, your decision, not mine. I accept either way. And I will go home content that you are working here.’”

My interviews with Myrna were on various days in September, 2001 whenever she was free to talk with me.

“Do you suffer pain of the wounds often, even outside of Holy Week when the wounds are not visible?” I asked Myrna.

At this question Myrna looked most surprised, opening her eyes widely. She appeared a little bewildered at how to answer.

“Yes, but no one knows about this [until now] except my spiritual guide. It happens especially when someone hurts me, insults me, or I see someone ill. When I feel this pain God reminds me of his sufferings and pain. It happens if someone is really suffering and I cannot do anything, like when I go to the hospital to visit the sick.

“From time to time there is pain, God reminds me of His sufferings then. He told me, ‘whatever you suffer is nothing compared to Jesus’ sufferings for humanity.’” 

Meditating on Myrna’s response, I thought what a beautiful way the Lord is forming Myrna to be united with Christ Crucified. In the morning offering we are to offer up all our prayers, works, joys and sufferings of the day in union with the Sacrifice of the Mass (which is the same as that of the Cross) throughout the world. When Myrna is hurt, the Lord reminds her to unite her suffering to that of Jesus. When she sees others suffering, she is reminded that Christ Jesus is suffering in them.

I then reviewed a bit of simple history as about ten years previously. I had written of Soufanieh in the *Messenger* magazine of which I am editor: “Myrna, about ten years ago you told me by phone, ‘I love Our Lady of Fatima so much.’ Now you have gone to Fatima. Tell me about it.”

“I’ve been to Rue de Bac [miraculous medal], to Lourdes and Fatima. At Rue de Bac I felt the presence of Mary and prayed from the bottom of my heart. I went to Lisieux [St. Thérèse—Little Flower] and to the place of Curé d’Ars also. At Lourdes—I do not say anything bad

about it—I could not pray there except at the grotto (where the Mother of God appeared). This was because there were too many people who don't show respect for Our Lady, people who drank, smoked, small talk. This was not done near the grotto.

"Of all the places I have been, I experienced Mary especially at Fatima. I could see that everyone is there to pray and I cried, walking on my knees [penitential path]. Fatima was for me the best place I went to. I am pleased about youth praying at Fatima."

[It was some days later, late in the evening, when immediately after Mass with mostly youth present that I was telling about Fatima and how I placed my hands on the very spot where Our Lady appeared and stood at Fatima and offered my hands and heart for her service there. Now I did the same thing at Soufanieh, in the upper terrace of apparitions, and while I had my hands where Our Lady of Soufanieh stood, explaining the similarities of Soufanieh and Fatima, Fr. Zahlaoui called to me that Myrna's hands were exuding oil.]

"Myrna, you have said that the messages are ongoing. Will you explain?"

"After Pope John Paul II came to Damascus in May 2001, getting the idea from the Pope, every Tuesday night we have youth night for prayer. Many youth come. We became so happy the Pope used my chalice. These meetings start at 9:30 (when the youth can be present). We have a prayer theme for the different nights. Sample of themes: 'To love God you must love one another.'

"When I was there for youth night September 17, 2001, the theme was: 'How to give yourself totally to God.'"

Myrna now returned to explain how her love for Our Lady of Fatima was initiated.

"I started to love Our Lady of Fatima so much because I went to the Church of Our Lady of Fatima here in Damascus. I was so attracted to the statue of Fatima and loved Our Lady of Fatima so much through that statue."

Later Myrna took me by car to the Church of Our Lady of Fatima in Damascus. It was a beautiful church and there was a shrine to Our Lady of Fatima at the back of the church as well as a beautiful mosaic background over the main altar at the front of the church (see p. 96).

The beautiful statue in the Fatima Shrine of the Church had come from Fatima. The first month it was in Damascus, this statue reportedly shed tears.

I said to Myrna: "You said to me, 'Not yet,' when I asked you about the Soufanieh messages speaking about the Eucharist. It seems to imply that later messages will concern the Holy Eucharist. How do you know this?"

"It is a feeling deep inside of me. In the last message Jesus told me: 'I will never leave you' and he asked me to pray, pray. It is like this that I

can hear Jesus inside me.”

“Have you received any message regarding my book and intention to talk about Soufanieh on television [EWTN]?”

“When I first met you I said a whole Rosary that the book would be for the glory of God and Mary and not for me. I know God works through you. I know you will be helped because in one message Jesus told me, ‘Don’t choose your way; I’ve chosen it for you.’”

“In October, 2001 there will be a big conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for unity. The former papal nuncio of Damascus will be there, Bishop Luigi Accogli. He is now at the Vatican.” [The meeting had to be cancelled because of traveling restrictions so soon after the World Trade Center destruction, September 11, 2001].

Myrna then stressed with me that had the Soufanieh events started before she was married she would have remained celibate and became a religious sister. “For one year after the events started we (Nicolas and Myrna) lived as brother and sister. I thought it was not right to make love with Nicolas. Then the Virgin Mother told me, ‘You are to live a normal married life.’ Later Mary said, ‘I am giving you a gift.’” The gift was her daughter Miriam.

Myrna had earlier told me that Soufanieh concerned holiness of family life, for Jesus had told her, “Deepen your life as a wife, mother and sister.” ~



Pope John Paul II embraces His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I, Prince Patriarch of Antioch and all the East, Supreme Head of the universal Syrian Orthodox Church, as the Patriarch arrives at the Vatican in Rome.



Chapter 7

The Family Is Called to be a Domestic Church

Soufanieh House Becomes a Little Church



ONE DAY WHEN I was visiting with Myrna at Soufanieh concerning the family, that is family life today, Myrna mentioned that *if she had known* that God was going to give to her the great mission bestowed upon her that then she would have considered becoming a nun. In fact, with the supernatural happenings of Soufanieh beginning hardly more than six months after marriage, Myrna then wondered seriously if she should still separate from Nicolas and become a nun. This thought did not seem impossible to Nicolas for after all his recently claimed wife was being used by God in a most unusual way. The signs connected with the mission given her were extraordinary indeed. It hardly seemed that they could live as husband and wife under these conditions.

Those who study Soufanieh must realize that the call for love and unity is not simply love and unity of all Christians, for “one flock and one Shepherd,” the call is also for love and unity in the family. This means the family of husband and wife; the family of father and mother and their children. At a time when a crisis of family life was exploding throughout the entire globe, heaven intervenes with the family at Soufanieh in the very shadow of the place where St. Paul was converted, baptized and became a Christian.

God and His Mother did not use a single person, He did not use a religious in a convent or monastery, or a priest or bishop, to manifests the great signs confirming His call for love and unity of Church and family. Heaven used a young married women and is using her husband and family.

Is it possible for one young woman, still in her late thirties as this book is written, and after 20 years of the message and supernatural events, is it possible that beginning with such humble beginnings, a

message for the individual family and the universal family of all Christians reaches around the world?

“With God all things are possible” (Mt. 19:26). “For my thoughts are not your thoughts: nor your ways my ways, said the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways, and my thoughts above your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8-9).

God used one person to change the world when he chose St. Paul. This is what St. Paul (died c. 67) did to a large degree. He is doubtlessly one person used to change the world, more so than anyone since Jesus lived upon the earth just over 2000 years ago. He spread the Good News about Jesus throughout most of the known world at that time. Many responded to this man and his words, to his strong convictions, to the love in his heart, and these included Jews and Gentiles.

His missionary journeys were more than enough for one human person. But St. Paul also wrote letters, read today as part of Sacred Scripture, integrated into the divine liturgy, and which the Church describes as divinely inspired. St. Paul wrote a great portion of the New Testament of the Bible.

All this was made possible, of course, by the Holy Spirit who gave Paul His gifts of understanding, understanding of Jesus and His followers. Paul was given understanding about what must be done and also the strength and courage from the Holy Spirit to do it.

With St. Paul his world was turned around and upside down and all his worldwide work and influence began to happen in an instant. It was much the same for Myrna and Nicolas Nazzour, whose supernatural encounters began in Damascus, Syria, a few minutes’ walk to where it began for St. Paul.

We read about the conversion and baptism of St. Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 9. His name was first Saul, a Roman citizen, born in Tarsus in Cilicia. He was well instructed early on in the Mosaic Law. His zeal for it could hardly be matched and so he persecuted those of the new faith in Jesus Christ with a vengeance.

Saul would drag Christians out of their homes, bind them with chains and thrust them into prison. He applied for a commission to take up all the Jews in Damascus who confessed Jesus Christ, in order to bring them to Jerusalem, where they would serve as an example to others not to embrace faith in Jesus Christ.

Saul’s life and intended future underwent a dramatic transformation while he was on his way to Damascus. A blinding light suddenly shone from heaven on Saul and his companions. Saul was knocked to the ground in this blinding light. He heard a mysterious voice: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”

Saul asked: “Who are you, Sir?” “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goad.”

And Saul, trembling and astonished, said: "Lord, what will you have me to do?"

And the Lord said to him: "Arise, and go into the city, and there it shall be told you what you must do." The men who were in Saul's company stood amazed, hearing indeed a voice, but seeing no man.

Saul arose from the ground but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. But his companions leading him by the hands, brought him to Damascus.

"Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias. And the Lord said to him in a vision: Ananias. And he said: Behold I am here, Lord.

"And the Lord said to him: Arise, and go into the street that is called Strait, and seek in the house of Judas, one named Saul of Tarsus. For behold he prays.

"And he saw a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hands upon him, that he might receive his sight.

"But Ananias answered: Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all that invoke your name.

"And the Lord said to him: Go your way; for this man is to be a vessel of election, to carry my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.

"For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

"And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house. And laying his hands upon him, he said: Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus has sent me, he that appeared to you in the way as you came; that you may receive your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

"And immediately there fell from his eyes as it were scales, and he received his sight; and rising up, he was baptized.

"And when he had taken meat, he was strengthened. And he was with the disciples that were at Damascus, for some days.

"And immediately he preached Jesus in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

"And all that heard him, were astonished, and said: Is not this he who persecuted in Jerusalem those that called upon this name: and came here for that intent, that he might carry them bound to the chief priests?"

"But Saul increased much more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt at Damascus, affirming that this is the Christ" (Acts 9:1-30).

Eventually they conspired to kill Saul. But he and his disciples learned of the plot and his friends lowered Saul in a basket through an opening in the wall. After that he made his way back to Jerusalem. There Saul became known as Paul (cf. Acts 13:9) and he reported on his mystifying conversion. "He moved about freely with them in Jerusalem

and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord” (Acts 9:28).

Paul never forgot what he had been and how God saved him. Years after his conversion Paul wrote: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the foremost of sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul never took credit for his transformation. He knew he owed everything to the absolute mercy and forgiveness of God. “I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him, but I received mercy . . . and the grace of our Lord overflowed” (1 Tim. 1:13-14).

We know that the grace and mercy which transformed the “Terror of Tarsus” into the heroic St. Paul are still working today. When St. Paul wrote of “the grace of our Lord overflowed” it reminds one of the first apparition of Our Lady of Soufanieh when the oil overflowed from Myrna’s hands unto the concrete floor and formed the suffering face of Jesus Christ. One thinks too of the abundant oil given throughout the world through Jesus and the Virgin of Soufanieh. Is Jesus Christ not suffering today, not simply from his followers being persecuted, but from the divisions among Christians themselves?

The great Apostle St. Paul in his scriptural writings speaks both of marriage and unity in the Church. As director of the Fatima Family Apostolate, dedicated to the sanctification of the family in particular and all individuals in general, I believe that the message of Our Lady of Soufanieh is especially endearing. At a time when family life is in crisis, God has chosen a couple in Damascus, in the very vicinity of St. Paul’s conversion, to call the family to love and unity and all Christians so that “they may be one.”

When Myrna was chosen for a divine mission she seriously considered becoming a nun. She and Nicolas did not touch each other for a long time after the supernatural happenings began. When Myrna asked Fr. Elias Zahlaoui about becoming a nun since she was given this mission he responded: “Myrna, if the Lord had wanted to choose a single woman, He had a wide choice because the world is full of single girls and nuns. And if He has chosen a newly-wed woman, and especially a young bride, it is because he has things to tell us about marriage. Marriage is sacred. And St. Paul compares the relationship between a man and a woman to that between Christ and the Church. It is a sacred relationship. Therefore, why are you thinking about leaving Nicolas?”

While Myrna was having overwhelming thoughts, so was Nicolas. He said, “At the beginning of the events, I spent one year not daring even to think about Myrna as my wife. I felt in a state of sin each time I even thought about her. And, in spite of all that was said to me, despite what priests told me, it was only very slowly that I was finally able to accept the fact that Myrna, although if chosen by the Lord, and because she was chosen by the Lord, is, to a higher degree, my wife.”

Many people, without direction from the Church, were saying: “But, if Myrna really is an object of divine choice, she cannot continue her

married life or her social life.” The fact is that Myrna was already leading a life in many ways more recluse than many nuns in a convent. It seems the difficulty some people were having in accepting such profound mysteries taking place in the home of a married couple and with a young married wife, could possibly be a failure to have a high enough regard for the sanctity of marriage.

Nicolas told me that both Myrna and he loved children. Myrna was very sad that she had no children after several years of marriage. This was even after our Blessed Mother told Myrna that she was to live as a normal wife. She used to show affection for other mothers’ children. Myrna spent several years without becoming pregnant.

Our Blessed Mother and Jesus handled the matter of those who thought Myrna must become a nun. They answered the question too of the concerns of Nicolas and Myrna. On November 25, 1983, the Holy Virgin said to Myrna: “I have not come to separate. Your married life will remain as it is. . . .” On September 7, 1984, the Holy Virgin said to her: “Live your life, but let not life prevent you from continuing to pray.” Jesus was even more explicit. He gave Myrna a very long message that very same evening: The message included: “Continue in your life as wife, mother and sister.”

When I asked Myrna if she was convinced that the call of Soufanieh was also a call for good family life as well as Church Unity she answered, “I believe so. For Jesus told me to continue my life as wife, mother and sister.”

Finally, Myrna’s desire for children would be answered. On May 1, 1985, the Holy Virgin, after delivering a message calling for unity, held Myrna’s hand in hers. Myrna said she was looking to the ground, had a very sad face. Then the Virgin said to Myrna: “My (small) children, assemble. My heart is wounded. Do not allow My heart to break because of your divisions. My daughter, I shall give you a gift for your hardships.”

On October 15, 1986, Myrna gave birth to a baby girl which the parents named Miriam. Myrna received the “gift” which the Virgin had promised her. Forty days later, on November 26, 1986, Myrna had an ecstasy. She would live as a normal wife and mother and still fulfill the mission from heaven while testifying too to the goodness and sanctity of marriage.

In Western countries marriages have been breaking up with ever-greater frequency for decades and the same was beginning to happen in Middle Eastern countries, namely, more frequent divorces and separations.

When I would be giving homilies at Soufanieh during Mass time, with the altar set up immediately before the Icon with the container to catch the oil, I found myself accidentally speaking of Nicolas as Joseph. I found out I was not the first to do so.


Each day at Soufanieh, at the House of the Virgin, I celebrated the

Holy Sacrifice of the Mass according to the Latin rite, whereas those present were used to the Melkite Catholic rite, but all present seemed to understand it was the very same Holy Eucharist, very same Real Presence of Jesus Christ, and very same Sacrifice of the Cross perpetuated, as in their own Eastern rite. I discovered that instead of saying, “Lord have mercy . . . Christ have mercy . . .” If I said “*Kyrie eleison . . . Christe eleison*” there would come an enthusiastic response.

All this took place within the home of the Nazzours when on occasion more than 100 people would participate and receive Holy Communion. The singing of hymns in Arabic at each holy Mass was indeed an edification. For me, and for the participants, it was a real experience in Unity. I was from the West and a priest of the Latin rite. At times a Melkite rite Catholic priest would assist me at the time of Holy Communion. Participants were from the East. Yet, we knew we had the same faith, the same Real Presence and same action of Jesus Christ in the Divine Liturgy, whether it be of the Western tradition or Byzantine rite of the East. Some Orthodox would also be present.

It was a delightful experience when after each holy Sacrifice of the Mass those present would line up and I would be presented a large Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh, first to bless all with it and then the people would come forth to kiss the Icon of the Virgin and Christ Child.

I made the statement that at Fatima I would experience the presence of our heavenly Mother Mary in the Cova da Iria. Here at Soufanieh, it was an experience of the presence of both Jesus and Mary at the same time. Of course, I experience Jesus in the Holy Eucharist always at Fatima and every holy Sacrifice of the Mass. In both places, East and West, Mary leads to her Son, Jesus Christ.

One can add that offering the Sacrifice of the Mass in the home of the Nazzour family, one truly experiences the family as a little church, a miniature Mystical Body of Christ. The family is the domestic church. Pope John Paul II wrote of the family in this manner in his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*, in response to the World Synod of Bishops, September 26 to October 25, 1980. 

We quote below from this Apostolic document.

The Church’s Sanctuary in the Home

¶55. The proclamation of the Gospel and its acceptance in faith reach their fullness in the celebration of the sacraments. The Church which is a believing and evangelizing community is also a priestly people invested with the dignity and sharing in the power of Christ the High Priest of the New and Eternal Covenant.

The Christian family too is part of this priestly people which is the Church. By means of the sacrament of marriage, in which it is rooted and from which it draws its nourishment, the Christian family is continuously vivified by the Lord Jesus and called and engaged by Him in a dialogue with God through the sacraments, through the offering of one's life, and through prayer.

This is the *priestly role* which the Christian family can and ought to exercise in intimate communion with the whole Church, through the daily realities of married and family life. In this way the Christian family is *called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community of the world*.


¶56. The sacrament of marriage is the specific source and original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of Baptism. By virtue of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is purified and made holy: "This love the Lord has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity" (*Gaudium et spes*, 49).

The gift of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in the actual celebration of the sacrament of marriage, but rather accompanies the married couple throughout their lives. This fact is explicitly recalled by the Second Vatican Council when it says that Jesus Christ "abides with them so that, just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal. . . . For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance towards their own perfection, as well as towards their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God" (*Ibid.*, 48).

Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life (*Lumen Gentium*, 41). This gives rise to the grace and requirement of an authentic and profound *conjugal and family spirituality* that draws its inspiration from the themes of creation, covenant, cross, resurrection, and sign, which were stressed more than once by the Synod.


Christian marriage, like the other sacraments, "whose purpose is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God" (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, 59), is in itself a liturgical action glorifying God in Jesus Christ and in the Church. By celebrating it, Christian spouses profess their gratitude to God for the sublime gift bestowed on them of being able to live in their married and family lives

the very love of God for people and that of the Lord Jesus for the Church, His bride.

Just as husbands and wives receive from the sacrament the gift and responsibility of translating into daily living the sanctification bestowed on them, so the same sacrament confers on them the grace and moral obligation of transforming their whole lives into a “spiritual sacrifice.” What the Council says of the laity applies also to Christian spouses and parents, especially with regard to the earthly and temporal realities that characterize their lives: “As worshippers leading holy lives in every place, the laity consecrate the world itself to God” (*Lumen gentium*, 34). 

Marriage and the Holy Eucharist

¶57. The Christian family’s sanctifying role is grounded in Baptism and has its highest expression in the Eucharist, to which Christian marriage is intimately connected. The Second Vatican Council drew attention to the unique relationship between the Eucharist and marriage by requesting that “marriage normally be celebrated with the Mass” (*Sacrosanctum concilium*, 78). To understand better and live more intensely the graces and responsibilities of Christian marriage and family life, it is altogether necessary to rediscover and strengthen this relationship.

The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ’s covenant of love with the Church, sealed with His blood on the Cross (John 19:34). In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its “communion” and its “mission”: by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is “given up” and in His Blood that is “shed” becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family. [End of quotations from *Familiaris Consortio*] 

The supernatural events of Soufanieh began just one year after this Apostolic Document was signed by Pope John Paul II on November 22, 1981. It soon becomes clear it is heaven’s call for love and unity in the family and in the Church.

To review: I observed to Fr. Elias Zahlaoui that Myrna was only in her 18th year when she married May 9, 1982. “Why would God pick such a young bride for this?”

The priest replied: "First, you have to ask God. I have a second answer. At the beginning of a new marriage, the Sacrament of Matrimony which was recently given to them is the moment of holiness. The holiness is great. The Sacrament is new."

Nicolas had made mention to me while at Soufanieh that the events of Soufanieh, the first vision, was at the same date and time as the first vision of St. Catherine Labouré who was shown the Miraculous Medal to make known to the world (see p. 132).

Fr. Zahlaoui describes Nicolas this way:

"Nicolas is really surprising. Somewhat like St. Joseph. People often tell him that. And he replies humbly, 'Who am I?' One must have seen and known Nicolas before. As for me, I did not know him. But at the beginning of the phenomenon, he was always very well-dressed, always worried about his appearance. And then, slowly, this man has been transformed by the Holy Virgin, by Jesus, and has gradually become more and more familiar with God, and has bared himself before God. Now, you feel his presence, but it is a very humble presence. Silent, very considerate, very concerned with safeguarding the primacy of God and prayer. He does not allow anything to hamper the atmosphere of prayer. But he never seeks to glorify himself. Never. If he ever suspected anyone from profiting from the prayers at Soufanieh, either by words or manners, he immediately remedied the situation. With utmost discretion. . . .

"Nicolas has truly changed, and in a surprising manner! Here are some of his reactions. At the beginning of the phenomenon, an important official of the Syrian secret service came to Soufanieh. He took Nicolas aside for a moment and told him, 'Nicolas, I pity you. Now, it is only the beginning of the phenomenon, and your home is no longer yours. What will things be like in a few years? You will have to close your door.' Nicolas replied, 'I did not open this door. The One who opened it will close it.'

"A second reaction, the Defense Minister himself, General Mustapha Tlass, had come. He had seen oil oozing. Afterwards, he returned with the staff of the Syrian army to pray at Soufanieh. He took Nicolas aside and told him, 'Nicolas, I think that your home will become a place of pilgrimage. You can no longer live here. The government is offering you an apartment that you will choose wherever you want, to be comfortable. Nicolas replied, 'What God has blessed, I would not exchange for anything in the world.'

"This was at the beginning of the phenomenon. After that, on Holy Thursday, April 16, 1984, when the Stigmata opened for the second time, the wound on Myrna's side measured exactly 10 cm. 2mm. (.5 inch). It was so deep that one of ten physicians there said to Nicolas, 'We must stitch the wounds.' Nicolas replied spontaneously, 'Doctor, the One who opened it will close it.' And that same evening, the wound was completely healed."

Fr. Zahlaoui explained how on November 22, 1987, after he had been to France, he returned to go to Soufanieh. He found the patio and rooftop terrace newly renovated, in a very simple manner for the fifth anniversary of the phenomenon. Nicolas was happy to show this priest to the rooftop terrace where the Holy Virgin had appeared to Myrna. Now the entire floor was paved with cement, except the very spot where oil had oozed from Myrna's hands and where the Holy Virgin had stood. A pedestal or pillar was placed at this spot with a beautiful statue of the Holy Virgin.

Nicolas explained: "While we were repairing the patio, we used to gather here daily for prayers." The priest asked, "Were there many people?" Nicolas replied, "Sometimes about seventy. Sometimes more, sometimes less." Fr. Zahlaoui said: "But you are mad! Nicolas, this is an old house. With the concrete that you have added, plus the tiles for the paving, the pedestal and the [solid] statue, all this could collapse with 70 people!" Nicolas looked at the priest and said, "But, Father, you don't really think that! The walls are not supporting the Holy Virgin. She is supporting all of us!" Fr. Zahlaoui said he felt small before him at this evidence of a religious evolution.

Nicolas had offered to show me the oil stains still under the pedestal where the image of Our Lady stood and into which petitions were placed. It was on this rooftop patio where I was privileged to offer the holy sacrifice of the Mass on my final evening in 2001 in Soufanieh with many people, especially youth, present when the phenomenon of the oil occurred.

I placed my own petition into the pillar asking Our Lady of Soufanieh for the success in writing this book to help make this heavenly movement properly known among more English-speaking peoples and for which I felt called to Soufanieh. I placed onto the pillar by the beautiful statue enclosed in glass also, holy cards with images of Our Lady of Soufanieh and prayer on the reverse side. These I would take with me when I returned to America to share with people.

I myself was honored one day to show visitors to the rooftop terrace where Our Lady appeared and stood, touching Myrna's hands with the crucifix of her rosary whereupon oil overflowed onto the floor. I was in the main room where pilgrims enter when they arrive at the Virgin's house, see the Icon in the glass globe, the paintings and prayerful inscriptions on the wall of this main room of their home and then pray.

English-speaking people arrived, none of the Nazzour family happened to be present at the moment and I asked the visitors if they knew that the apparitions of Our Lady had taken place on the upper terrace. They were deeply grateful when I took them to the rooftop terrace and explained what happened there. It seems many people who come and pray in the lower main room do not go to the upper terrace, either not knowing about it, or not wanting to take too much for granted. What is important is they pray before the Icon.

The main room, near the entrance door which is open daily, and before the Icon, is where many people gather each evening for prayer. It is where Mass is offered, especially on Saturday evenings. I was privileged to offer Mass there daily the full week I was present in the Soufanieh home. In this same main room the Nazzours set up a portable table when they are to eat together. I noticed one Sunday when we were all eating together, people still came during the meal to stand and pray before the Icon in the same room.

Nicolas now says the house no longer belongs to him and his family. It belongs to the Virgin and our Lord. It reminds me of what the father of Jacinta and Francisco of Fatima said on the occasion when the bodies of the children were exhumed and moved after death. "The children now belong to the world."

Nicolas said to me one day, as we sat in the large room near the entrance as he extended his hands, "Isn't there a peace here? I feel so much peace here." I agreed, for I felt the same way, much like I had for years in Fatima in the Cova da Iria which Bishop Serafim of Fatima translates "Cradle of peace."

Fr. Zahlaoui says that one day when he was in his office Nicolas unexpectedly showed up. After they had chatted for a short time, suddenly Nicolas said, "Father, it is obvious for me that the Lord wants to strip me from everything. He wants me to throw myself at His feet, completely naked, on just a small mat. Since the beginning of the phenomenon, I have not succeeded at any of my projects. I am sure that the Lord wants to bare me completely in order that I become His prisoner. And I am ready."

Some years ago Nicolas had heart surgery. He mentioned to me one day he does not know his future. "I could die tomorrow." The home legally belongs to the various members of his family, his brothers, et al. It seemed obvious they live trusting in divine providence.

Nicolas's and Myrna's immediate family are most cooperative. Nicolas's mother was still living, advanced in age, when I was there in 2001. She used to make herself available to keep the house clean for Mary's visitors. Nicolas's sisters and their husbands, their children and neighbors, the family members of Myrna's side as well, all are gracious to the people who come to the Virgin's House for prayer.

Soufanieh has had to contend with the same traffic and commotion as other sites of apparitions and heavenly messages, however authentic. There always seems to be those who try to profit for themselves from unusual phenomena. Some claim they have had visions too, and thus attempt to get people's interest and respect for themselves.

While some will make great efforts to gain notice and notoriety, I found the opposite true of Myrna and Nicolas. I would await opportunities when I could interview them in a quiet way, when I felt it was a proper time. It never seemed that they came forward or ever pushed

themselves for notice. Each time, when I inquired, they would tell me no more than I asked. Nicolas did say that I would have to stay much longer to experience all the things that took place and seemed anxious I return for Easter. I had reliable resources for research, however, and spent what time I could.

Most people in Syria, including those in government, are Muslims. When the events of Soufanieh began, there was a violent and even bloody clash between the government and the Muslim fundamentalists (called the Muslim brothers). The Syrian government, however, was wise enough in a religious sense to send a delegation, formed of a physician and four officers from the secret service. Two officers identified themselves while two others mingled informally in the crowd. That was their mission.

At the end of their investigation, it was summarized by these words of the physician to the officers: "God is great!" Before leaving, each one took a small piece of cotton saturated with oil, placed it in a small plastic bag. Ever since the government has had a very respectful attitude toward the phenomenon of Soufanieh.

In Jesus' own time there were people who believed, and those who did not. There were those who made derogatory remarks, thinking themselves intelligent and especially enlightened. Soufanieh has not been different. But there have been many expressions of faith and conversions. What is most important is that the events of Soufanieh have been the occasion of a massive prayer movement which is spreading throughout the world.

Among the rich, and even among some clergy, there have been the doubtful cases. Some of these think there is a so-called physiological or psychological, perhaps physical, explanation to the phenomenon. But no one has been able to explain what is happening with images throughout the world that exude oil. Those who would attribute such phenomenon to the devil seem forgetful of what Jesus said about a house divided. The fruits are what count. And there have been many conversions and turning to prayerful faith in Jesus and to His Church. As the papal nuncio said to me, "It does not matter whether there are miracles or not, important is that people go there and pray."

While Fr. Malouli was still living, he and Fr. Zahlaoui used to speak of the phenomenon of Soufanieh, and its results, as "an evangelical experience." There would be a shock in people who experienced the oil, a reaction of prayer, followed by a certain humility on the part of many. Then, in a modest way, the phenomenon would enter the heart. God works gently and discreetly in souls.

Since Nicolas seemed to have real interest that Myrna's supernatural experiences began on the anniversary and hour of the supernatural events associated with St. Catherine Labouré and the Miraculous Medal, I asked Fr. Zahlaoui what association he saw in this. His reply:

“As 1830 began the Marian Era for the West, Soufanieh began the Marian Era for the East. But still, Soufanieh is for all the world. People come from Egypt, India, Iran, etc. Fatima is now the great one in the West and Myrna senses that Fatima is important. This indicates the unity of all in Mary. We call Mary our Mother of ‘At-one-ment’ through Mary at Fatima. She is working to bring all Christians and Muslims together in unity.

“It is clear from the first message given December 18, 1982. [See total message above.] It is a clear message to love everyone, even those who do bad to you. ‘I am asking for love. . . . I shall visit homes more often, because those who go to Church, sometimes, do not go there to pray. I am not asking you to build me a church, but a shrine. . . .’

“The Soufanieh message is important for all and especially in the Middle East where there is much conflict.”

Fr. Zahlaoui’s insights and comparison with Fatima were very meaningful to me as I have studied Fatima in depth and have written countless articles and books, and lectured on Fatima for years, having formed the *Fatima Family Apostolate*. That the message of Our Lady of Fatima in the West is also for the entire world is symbolized by the golden ball that hangs near Our Lady’s waist and under her Immaculate Heart. Fatima is a call to love as Mary loved. It is a call to imitate the virtues of Mary, the first and perfect Christian, she who is Mother and Model of the Church.

Years ago theologians met at Fatima to discuss the essence of the Fatima message and came to the conclusion it was a call to devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and all that it means—love. I personally know, starting ten years ago when I first talked to Myrna by phone, her great love for Our Lady of Fatima. Fatima came up again in my discussions with her in September, 2001, which will be related later.

Fr. Zahlaoui said, “However, without exaggerating, it seems to me and to many witnesses, that the most important sign is Myrna herself. Whether she prays, relates her experience or whether she is silent or busy taking care of her children or husband, Myrna is always consistent with herself: simple, humble with a total gratuitousness and availability. Such a sign does not lie and testimonies on this matter are numerous. Some people were pleased and had the courage to write about this. . . .”

Permanent Welcoming in the Strictest Gratuity

The Virgin’s House [of the Nazzours] remains always open, throughout the day, to anyone, and with a permanent gratuity which continues to defy all slanders and calumnies. The welcome remains simple, frank and discreet at the same time. . . . Among the countless visitors, one should mention the Nuncio, Msgr. Pier Giacomo de Nicolo,

Msrgr. Georges Coueter, Greek-Catholic bishop of Sidon, Lebanon, and Msrgr. Georges Riachi, Greek-Catholic bishop of Australia.

In Chicago, a New Soufanieh—Since July 14, 1994, an enlarged picture of Our Lady of Soufanieh exudes oil without interruption, in the house of Mr. Daoud Hanna, a Syrian-Orthodox family originally from Hasake in Syria. The house has become a shrine for thousands of pilgrims from the United States and Canada, and this in the strictest gratuity.

Nicolas and Myrna, together with their children have thus far presented a good example of a Christian family. Their simplicity and the welcoming warmth of their home is edifying indeed and doubtlessly unmatched any place in the world. For what other family has people from throughout the world walk into their house, without knocking, day after day.

The Apostolate given by heaven, especially to Myrna, offers, it would seem, almost a super-human challenge to her duties as a wife, mother and sister. Fr. Joseph Malouli, a priest of the Holy Roman Catholic Church, and who was so close to the Nazzour's from the beginning of the phenomenon until his death in 2000, said Myrna and Nicolas "rely a lot on our prayers so she can remain faithful to the grace."

Studying the events of Soufanieh, especially as they relate to family life, do so much to remind us that God the Creator, who made us autonomous and free, is our Father and concerned in love with every detail of our lives. He knows and loves each one of us. God created us from love and destines us for eternal love and union with him, beginning already here on earth. He has an intimate relationship with each of us, more than each has with himself.

Our own condition should remind us of the transcendence of Almighty God. He is infinite; we are finite. Still, in Soufanieh, we see a sign of his imminence and closeness. There is an indissoluble bond between the Creator and the creature man. God desires to live in each one of us, in a special way, as in a temple, when we are in the state of sanctifying grace.

While Mary is a creature like ourselves made in the image and likeness of God, as each one of us is, yet Mary, Mother of the Lord, is the most perfect and beautiful Icon of God. By grace she is greater than all angels and saints collectively. God gave the Virgin a special mission for His Son, the greatest mission ever given to a human person. God placed the Virgin Mary in our midst to familiarize us with God. Thus Mary became a privileged manifestation of the mercy of God to mankind.

St. Catherine Labouré said that the Virgin of the Incarnation leaning over the crib, the Virgin of Cana and the Virgin of the apparitions is one and the same. The Virgin Mother continues to intercede for us before Christ saying: "They have no wine." They have exhausted the wellsprings of joy for which they were made. She continues to repeat to

us what she said to the servants of Cana when she pointed to Christ: "Do whatever He tells you" (John 2:5).

The family home of the Nazzours has been turned, in a way, into a sanctuary for the world, inviting families to love and unity. All individuals of various religious persuasions who come there are thus encouraged to pray and work for unity in faith and love as Christ established His Church to be one. The open courtyard where the first oil-exuding Icon was set up has been roofed over and it is now the central room of the house and seems almost like a church. Pilgrims come in and calmly pray before the miraculous image. When Myrna and Nicolas decided to put up the notice in red, near the Icon, "Sorry, we do not accept gifts or money," it did not occur to them that this gesture would contribute to their credibility.

In addition to writing this book to help spread the messages of Soufanieh, I have tried through the Fatima Family Apostolate, which exists for the sanctification of families, to introduce a replica of the Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh into as many homes as possible.

It is my hope and prayer that many thousands of homes, displaying this Icon of Soufanieh, and accompanying it with the basic message of Soufanieh, will thus be reminded of the love and unity that should exist in the home. Whenever family members look upon this Icon, they will be reminded of their family vocation to love and work for unity.

Having the Soufanieh Icon as a shrine in one's home, with Mary as Mother who presents to us her Son, Jesus Christ giving His blessing, can serve as a daily reminder to all in the home to live in love, to live in grace, to live in unity with each other. Each time one looks at the Icon in the home he or she will be reminded of becoming worthy of the goal to which they are called (cf. Eph. 1:15-23).

"I plead with you, then, as a prisoner for the Lord, to live a life worthy of the calling you have received, with perfect humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another lovingly. Make very effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force. There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all" (Eph. 4:1-6).

For those in the United States the replica of the Icon in two sizes can be obtained by writing: Fatima Family Apostolate, Box 158, Alexandria, South Dakota 57311. Phone: 1-800-213-5541.

While at Soufanieh, as mentioned in a previous chapter, I asked Myrna if Our Lady or our Lord had ever mentioned the Holy Eucharist in any of the messages she had received. Her immediate reply was: "Not yet." It was a personal joy to me that when the miracle of the oil occurred at the end of the Mass I offered at the site of the Soufanieh apparitions, that the Holy Eucharist was still present at the altar, for she had asked

me to consecrate a couple extra hosts that would be taken to the sick.

On the anniversary of Soufanieh, which was a little more than two months after I departed Damascus, Jesus Christ gave Myrna the following message on November 26, 2001:

"How beautiful is the family, which lives unity, love and faith. Its path is Mine and My Mother is its support.

"My children, I offer Myself to you. The acts of adoration, meditation, thanksgiving and spiritual guidance rejoice Me, but are only fulfilled through your unity at the altar.

"I offer you My Body and My Blood as a proof of My fidelity and love. Receive from Me this Sacrament with trust and faith, because this Sacrament comforts you, provides you with strength and wisdom and increases you in grace.

"Difficult days lie ahead. Turmoil within the Church.

"He who does not enjoy true peace is prone to division.


"Do not surrender to failure.

"Do not worry about the judgment of others on you.

"Do not defend yourselves and seek only what I have prepared for you.

"I am the One Who takes care of you because you are the work of My hands.

"Prove to Me your love, because through love I walk at your side. And through the Sacraments, I unite Myself to you.

"And do not forget that I am the reason for your existence on earth and I am the reason for your happiness in heaven." 



The author meets various church officials: (left) Orthodox Archbishop Dionysius Behnam Jajjawi; (center) Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I, Patriarch of Antioch, head of Syriac Orthodox Church; (bottom) Greek Melkite Catholic Patriarch Gregory III of Damascus.





(Left) The author meets with Papal Nuncio, Bishop Diego Causero; (Bottom) The author uses the chalice (used by Pope John Paul II at Damascus) as he offers Mass daily at the Virgin's House.



Chapter 8

Interviews with Hierarchy in Damascus



HAVING BEEN INVITED by Nicolas and Myrna to be a guest at their house, I sent word ahead that while I was there I would like to meet with both Orthodox and Catholic bishops. My purpose was to discover if the attitude of Church leadership was positive as regards the reported supernatural events of Soufanieh. If the Church, either the family of the Orthodox or Catholics, were negative toward Soufanieh there would be neither the need nor desire to write this book.

On my first full day at Soufanieh I was accompanied by a 25-year-old young man from Germany, Tobias Beutgen. We were able to walk to the area of the Chapel of Ananias near Soufanieh. It helped me realize how close Soufanieh was to the place of the baptism of St. Paul the Apostle who wrote so much of the New Testament. He changed the world with his famous three missionary journeys in the known world at that time, 2000 years ago.

That same day, Myrna also took me to the upper terrace of their home. There she showed me the eucalyptus tree by a river, easily visible across the street, where the Virgin Mary came to her on the terrace. The Blessed Virgin touched Myrna's hands with the crucifix of the Virgin's rosary. Then oil immediately came abundantly from Myrna's hands, overflowing onto the concrete floor (during her last apparition). It was later realized that the oil on the concrete floor formed the suffering face of Jesus Christ.

The Blessed Virgin Mother appeared first as a big ball of rainbow color light on the branch of the tree. The ball opened and the Virgin Mary appeared in a great halo of light and walked on a stream of light toward Myrna who was on the terrace, leaving behind her a great ray of light. Myrna was on her knees before seeing the Virgin Mary because it

was very cold and Myrna was very scared in the beginning. The Virgin Mary walked toward her, passing through or penetrating right through the iron fence of the terrace in order to come to Myrna.

On September 13, 2001, beginning about 10:30 a.m., I had a long interview with Orthodox Archbishop, Dionysius Behnam Jajjawi of Hasakh, Syria, who had been to see Pope John Paul II several times. The archbishop came to the Soufanieh house so that I could interview him right at the center of the Soufanieh community.

He explained to me how he had followed the events of Soufanieh from the beginning. It was obvious he had meditated on the messages thoroughly for he retained details, it seemed, almost perfectly. It was obvious that his faith in Soufanieh was very strong and that he sensed



heaven's renewed call for unity in our time.

Highlights of that interview follow:

"It was November 27, 1982, when the oil first came. It was December 15, 1982, that the Virgin Mary appeared. Myrna says the Lady of Soufanieh is Our Lady of Kazan by its similarity."

I asked: "How do you know the reports of Soufanieh are true?"

He replied: "From the oil I've seen come from the small Icon and from the wounds in Myrna or the stigmata I have witnessed. We believe Jesus Christ has suffered and he has passed the *via dolorosa* and Jesus completed his mission by his affliction on the Cross and His Resurrection." The sorrowful way for Jesus in his Mystical Body today, is obvi-

ously the division among Christians.

I found it interesting to have this very open and friendly Orthodox archbishop refer to the Stigmata as one of the reasons he believes in Soufanieh. I once heard another Orthodox archbishop in the United States say that stigmatists have not been known in the Orthodox tradition. "We are in awe, we are in wonder when we hear of such but it has not been known that there have been stigmatists among Orthodox." The American archbishop attributed this to the spirituality of the Orthodox which emphasizes the risen Jesus Christ rather than the suffering Christ.

We consider the family that heaven has chosen for the Soufanieh events with great interest. Obviously heaven's design was that in this way the importance of Christian unity could be more effectively communicated. Myrna is Catholic of the Greek Melkite rite. Nicolas, her husband, is Orthodox. Because of the respect and importance of the father as head of the family, the Orthodox Church looks upon the Nazzours as an Orthodox family. In the message for Church unity, it is important that the Feast of Easter, which celebrates the risen Jesus Christ, should be celebrated by all Christians at the same time. It is important that Orthodox and Catholics both come to an agreement to celebrate Easter at the same time—and then it is believed the rest will follow (i.e., Catholics and Orthodox Christians). It is the most important Christian Feast and in early Christianity was the only Feast celebrated with each Sunday of the week seen as a little Easter.

In the Nazzour family we see then both Christ Crucified and Christ Risen. Heaven is truly working for unity between East and West. It is being done in the context of marriage and the family.

"Why are the events of Soufanieh happening?" I asked the archbishop.

Response: "Mainly to prove to people by these holy happenings what they are to do and to live. On March 24, 1983, the Virgin Mary said: 'I tell you, pray, and pray again . . . Pray for the inhabitants of earth and heaven.'"

It was during this fifth apparition on Thursday, March 24, 1983, 9:30 p.m., that the Virgin said also: "I myself do not deserve to tell you: 'Your sins are forgiven.' But my God has said it. Establish a church. I did not say 'build a church.' The Church that Jesus adopted is One Church, because Jesus is One. The Church is the kingdom of heaven on earth. He who has divided it has sinned. And he who has rejoiced from its division has also sinned. Jesus built it. It was small. And when it grew, it became divided. He who divided it has no love in him. Gather! I tell you: 'Pray, pray, and pray again!' How beautiful are my children when they kneel down, imploring. Do not fear, I am with you. Do not be divided as the great ones are. You, yourselves, will teach the generations the WORD of unity, love and faith. Pray for the inhabitants of earth and heaven."

In pointing to this particular message, it is obvious that Archbishop Jajawi was taken up with heaven's call for unity in the Church, that Christ's Church be One Church. Jesus built One Church. Men are not to build other churches. The Church Jesus founded was to be established throughout the world. Different kinds of churches with conflicting doctrines were not to be built by men.

The Mother of God is calling people to the Church of her Son for the forgiveness of sin. Mary is not a priest. She is not able to say, "Your sins are forgiven." But Jesus, her divine Son incarnate, has said it. He has given that power to ordained priests. This power to forgive sins exists among both the Orthodox and Catholic family.

The Syriac Orthodox Archbishop continued to answer my question of "why this is happening" by saying:

"On Ascension Day, May 28, 1987, Jesus said: 'Love each person and pray with faith.'

"On Monday, February 21, 1983, Mary said, 'I want you to keep my word in your mind always. My Lord will save you. Jesus will enlighten you, the Holy Spirit is my life, for that I am not afraid.'"

The archbishop's memory and sharpness, plus his excellent rendition in English, was remarkable. He was quoting from the fourth apparition of February 21, 1983, 9:30—[thus from the *third* message as Myrna had run away in panic the first time the Virgin Mary appeared and so she received no message then]—when Mary said, "My children, let it be said between us, I have come back here. Do not insult the haughty who are devoid of humility. The humble person craves other people's remarks to correct his shortcomings, while the corrupt and haughty neglects, rebels, becomes hostile. Forgiveness is the best thing. He who pretends to be pure and loving before people, is impure before God. I would like to request something from you, a word that you will engrave in your memory, that you shall always repeat: **GOD SAVES ME, JESUS ENLIGHTENS ME, THE HOLY SPIRIT IS MY LIFE, THIS IS WHY I FEAR NOTHING...**

The Orthodox archbishop was intent on pointing out, in response to my question why Soufanieh was happening—that *LOVE IS MOST IMPORTANT*. He quoted from the first message of Saturday, December 18, 1982, 11:37 p.m.: "Love one another. I am not asking for money to give to churches, nor for money to distribute to the poor. I am asking for love. Those who distribute their money to the poor and to churches, but have no love, those are nothing. I shall visit homes more often, because those who go to church, sometimes, do not go there to pray. I am not asking you to build me a church, but a shrine. Give. Do not turn away anyone who asks for help."

The archbishop was emphatic that "love is most important." It appears Mary is asking that Christian homes become shrines of love, families of love and unity. When there are millions of such Christian

families, the unity of the Church will come. Mary has been coming into homes through the Icon of Soufanieh and in hundreds of cases throughout the world the Soufanieh icon has exuded oil.

The Archbishop then quoted for me the message of November 26, 1989, "My children, Jesus told Peter, You are the rock, and on it, I shall build my church. As for me, I tell you now: You are the heart in which Jesus will build his UNICITY. I want you to devote your prayers to peace, from now until the commemoration of the Resurrection."

This Syriac archbishop knew he was being interviewed by a Roman Catholic priest. I found it most interesting then that he made the point to quote this text relative to Peter, the first pope. From his first words to me he had made clear that he had already met with Pope John Paul II more than once. It appeared the Archbishop was impressed that the desire, even demand for unity of all Christians, would eventually come from the baptized people of faith. Leaders of the various Christian communities, it seems, too often are reluctant to unite as Christ would have it.

Next, he quoted for me the message from Jesus Christ, given on Saturday, April 18, 1987 (Holy Saturday), "I have given you a sign to glorify me. Continue along this path and I am with you. For if you do not. . . ."

I asked him what the word "Soufanieh" meant. He mentioned that some historians say that men who believed in the monastic life once lived in the area and wore wool of sheep and the word has that connotation, "gathering of the sheep." When I told Myrna, she replied that she had heard it too.

The Archbishop then told me that in the future the Greek Melkite Catholics will be celebrating the Feast of Easter at the same time as the Orthodox. He concluded his detailed answer to my question of why all this is happening at Soufanieh with: *"All these appearances have happened to make people understand that we must come to unity."*

I then indicated to the Archbishop that I thought the people would gladly unite in one Church if the bishops would. He responded by outlining for me the seven different Patriarchs as follows: 1. Melkite Catholic. 2. Syrian Catholic. 3. Chaldean. 4. Latin Patriarch. 5. Coptic Catholic. 6. Maronite. 7. Armenian. He added: "They must unite. Then the Orthodox could unite. If they would unite, the Orthodox could unite. Pope John Paul II has said to them, "If you decide to unite, I will sign."

"Easter is the way," added the Archbishop. "The first step must be uniting for the feast of Easter. From Easter the jump will take place to all the rest on doctrine. People want unity for Easter. One Church includes more than the clergy.

"I believe one day the people will have a spiritual revolution to demand the clergy, the hierarchy to unite. Jesus did not come to teach

arithmetic but to serve and unite all people in himself as one body.”

At this striking statement I asked the Archbishop: “How many other Orthodox bishops agree with what you have just said?” He responded with disappointment: “None.” He added that a Latin bishop, Luigi Accogli, who was former nuncio to Damascus (1987-1994), but is now at the Vatican, gave a picture of the Soufanieh Icon to Pope John Paul II. Bishop Accogli had dedicated, on October 15, 1999, the *Center of Our Lady of Soufanieh* in Rome for the unity of Christians and for interreligious dialogue.

The young people of Damascus, whether Catholic or Orthodox, are surely ready for unity of the Orthodox and the Catholics. On Monday, May 7, 2001, when Pope John Paul II was in Damascus, there was a youth gathering with the Pope. Wherever the Pope goes he gives special attention to the youth and asks that he be able to meet with them. When he met with them, both the Orthodox and the Catholic Patriarchs were present as well as many priests from both the Orthodox and the Catholic Church.

At this papal youth gathering there were different choirs that sang hymns, and all the youth (around 5000 people) were singing with the choirs and holding the Vatican flags. Then the Pope talked to the youth about unity. Besides the Pope’s talk there were five speeches from the youth. One of them, at the end of her speech, asked the Pope and the Patriarchs for unity. All the youth shouted: “We want unity. We want unity.”

Then it came Melkite Catholic Patriarch Gregory III Laham’s turn to take the microphone. He asked the youth, “Do you want unity?” All the youth shouted very happily that they did. So Patriarch Laham declared that Easter 2002 would be celebrated in union with the Orthodox. Then the Orthodox Patriarch Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I made a speech welcoming this step and everyone was excited and happy about it.

Unfortunately, due to some problems acquired from other rites, for 2002 Easter could not be celebrated by Orthodox and Catholics at the same time. Thus in 2002, Catholics celebrated Easter on March 31 and the Orthodox on May 5. Still, the Catholic Patriarch promised that this would be cleared up and in 2003 Easter will be one Feast celebrated at the same time despite anything.

We see in this, how difficult it is even for the Pope and Patriarchs when they desire unity when not all the leaders of the rites, even those with a valid priesthood, find it difficult to come to unity on something such as the date for Easter. Selecting the date in no way involves the unchangeable faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, God and Savior, who suffered, died, rose from the dead—for the salvation of all. The importance is our faith in all this and that we observe the remembrance in our hearts and celebrate it sacramentally in the divine liturgy. Remember, Pope John



Paul II has said to the different rites, "If you decide to unite, I will sign."
His Holiness, Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I

Patriarch Zakka I is officially described in this manner: "Prince Patriarch of Antioch and all the East. Supreme Head of the Universal Syrian Orthodox Church." His Church has about 5 million members. He was already mentioned in chapter 2 of this book.

Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, who accompanied me to interview the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch on September 17, 2001, assured me that this man was indeed a holy man. It was an impression I found easy to accept once I met him. Dressed in all his formal red robes, he met me in his audience hall but still his simplicity and humility seemed obvious to me. It was an honor to sit in a chair near this Patriarch as he answered me from the presiding chair, which he usually occupied in conducting more prestigious meetings, even of the bishops under his jurisdiction.

"Why do you think Soufanieh is happening?" I inquired of the Patriarch.

Response: "We believe in miracles. Miracles are more important today because many Christian people have lost their faith. They are Christian only in name. God has given us the account of miracles in the Gospel. Mary gives us signs to strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ and His Mother."

"What made you believe that the reported happenings of Soufanieh to be true?"

Response: "First, the lady Myrna. God has chosen her who is faithful, honest and virtuous and she continues to manifest virtuous ways.

"Myrna is suffering for the message which she received from St. Mary and our Lord Jesus Christ. Once I saw the oil in her hands when she came to visit Almighty God here (in the Holy Eucharist—Blessed

Sacrament).

"A Moslem woman of Kuwait had asked if it is possible to send oil from Soufanieh.

"Once a man from Kuwait came here for this and he asked if Myrna could come here to this Patriarchal place. While they were talking the Icon gave oil. (It was a reproduction or copy of the icon of Soufanieh.) Then I saw oil in Myrna's hands.

"I saw the oil myself in Myrna's hands and from the Icon which they brought here.

"I know Myrna is a very good person. I believe it is of God. Perhaps it happened in my Patriarchate to let me know it is true, so that I would believe. From that oil some was taken to the Muslim lady in Kuwait and she was healed."

I next asked the Patriarch, "What are the purposes of the messages of Soufanieh?"

"When Christians become one it will be easier for Muslims to see (accept) Christianity.

"When Pope John Paul II came here to Damascus, May 2001, both the Orthodox and Catholics welcomed him as one. People admired that unity, even the Muslims admired that the Orthodox and Catholics as one welcomed the Pope. *Our disunity is only a matter of administration.*

"The Pope came to my church in May 2001 and I met him also at the Vatican many times. In 1984 we signed at the Vatican a common statement. In it we allowed Catholics and Syriac Orthodox to receive Holy Communion in each other's churches. The Pope agreed. I agreed. Some of our family were not happy. I did that as the head of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

"My synod had studied every word of the statement before I went to the Vatican and they agreed. Every member of the synod agreed. That was 17 years ago."

"Are all pleased now?" I asked.

Response: "I don't know if all are now pleased. We have done it and I see that it was by the Holy Spirit."

The Syriac Orthodox Patriarch continued: "Five or six years ago for the See of Alexandria, we met in Cairo in Egypt. We had a meeting and we decided that from now on there shall be three of us, if any more statements to be signed with other churches, not only one. I said that whatever I signed before holds. They then accepted what I have done with the Roman Catholic Church. It seems that Our Lord is bringing Christians together in her Son Jesus Christ."

Since I was in Syria to write a book on the Virgin of Soufanieh and the miraculous happenings associated with the Icon of Soufanieh, I inquired of the Patriarch: "Did you get this spirit from Soufanieh to act in this way?"

Response: "I had the spirit for unity like this before but Soufanieh

reaffirms this spirit for me.”

I asked the Patriarch: “When I write the book on Soufanieh what especially would you like me to say?”

Response: *“It is the work of the Holy Spirit who leads us always to the truth. The Holy Spirit leads us to the truth. Christians must live the truth. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Life, the Truth.”*

It was clear to me here that His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I was calling upon all Christians to have an open heart to the Holy Spirit to lead us into unity, to one Church that Jesus built. I got the personal impression, as I did from Archbishop Jajjawi of the Syrian Orthodox Archdiocese of Hasakh, Syria, that the Patriarch also was ready to move on Christian unity with the Pope and prayed and longed intensely for the moment for others of Eastern Rite churches to come together in unity. When the Christians of the world, especially the Orthodox and Catholics unite as one, the hope for the conversion of Muslims to Jesus Christ as Lord, God and Savior will be more likely.

After this interview, Myrna later told me that the Orthodox Patriarch is a native of Iraq. “When people come from Iraq the Patriarch tells them to go to Soufanieh.”

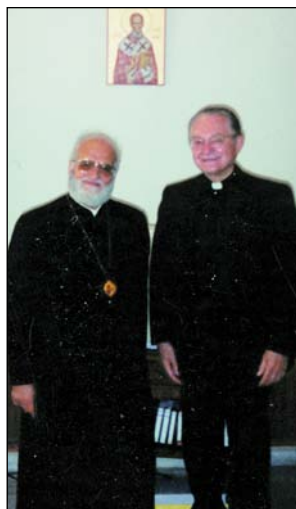
On the same day as the interview with His Holiness Moran Mor Ignatius Zakka I, Syriac Patriarch, Nicolas told me that it had been *publicly* announced that very day that “henceforth [in future years] the Catholics and Orthodox will celebrate Easter on the same day.”

Interview with Patriarch Gregory III Laham—Patriarch of all Melkite Catholics in the world.

He is Patriarch of this Arab-rite Church of 1.4 million faithful.

On September 19, 2001, at Damascus, I was able to interview the Melkite Catholic Patriarch Gregory III. He too was most receptive when my purpose of interview was to obtain information on Soufanieh. He was very gracious, and immediately teased me about being a “fox.” Then he expressed his deep sorrow about the tragedy of terrorism with the planes, the destruction and deaths in the United States of America and said, “We must pray that the right decisions will be made.”

I gave Patriarch Gregory III my background as a parish priest, author of books, work with Eternal Word Television



Network. . . .

I asked the Patriarch if he knew about Our Lady of Soufanieh. "Yes, but I would not be able to give you details. You must interview some people like Fr. Elias Zahlaoui." I answered that I had already done so to which the Patriarch replied, "Good."

In my personal view I felt that the Melkite Catholic Patriarch was being careful because with Nicolas being Orthodox, the family is looked upon by the Orthodox as being Orthodox even though Myrna has retained membership in the Catholic Church and her children like to go with her to the divine liturgy.

I asked the Patriarch for his impression of Soufanieh.

Response: "I am not for it or against it."

"Is your position then neutral?" I asked.

Response: "Not neutral. It is always good when there is faith and prayer." I felt it was like saying, since this is an Orthodox family, center of the reported happenings, it is not for me as Melkite Catholic to make a pronouncement.

"Is it true that yesterday, September 17, it was publicly announced that henceforth Easter for Melkite Catholics and all Orthodox will be celebrated at the same time?"

The Melkite Patriarch answered me: "I signed the statement for this on September 3, 2001 [although just announced]. We will celebrate Easter at the same time as the Orthodox."

I inquired: "Do you think this will be the beginning of other Catholic rites and Orthodox rites celebrating Easter at the same time?"

Response: "I hope so."

When Pope John Paul II was visiting Damascus on May 5, 2001, he proposed that Christians in the East and West celebrate Easter on the same date, as a visible sign of the quest for full unity. The joint agreement by the Syriac Orthodox and Greek-Melkite Catholics in Syria was the *beginning* of the fulfillment of the mission given Myrna Nazzour by Our Lady of Soufanieh and Jesus for Christian Unity. But, of course, her mission extends beyond Syria.

"Do you believe then that progress is being made for Christian Unity?" I asked.

Response: "Yes. I see you are a fox."

I smiled and said: "If Christians become united, will this not make it easier for Muslims to recognize Christianity?"

The Patriarch replied: "Yes. Jesus prayed as follows: 'I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, *that the world may believe that you sent me.* . . .'"

I was rather persistent with the gracious Melkite Patriarch, who was just as gracious with me. It is important to remember that the Catholic hierarchy exercises great care when the heavenly messages are originating

from an Orthodox home. The very home in which the apparitions have taken place, where Myrna receives the messages, undergoes the sufferings of the stigmata when Orthodox and Catholics celebrate Easter at the same time, and takes place in a home owned by the Nazzours (not just Nicolas) who are Orthodox, and the head of Myrna's family is Nicolas who is Orthodox.

This Patriarch the following month went to Rome for the World Synod of Bishops and on October 23, 2001, during a break in the sessions, addressed the press. Regarding relations with the Muslim world, the Patriarch said, "Islam is not compact; it differs from one place to another." Regarding Syria, he added: "Relations between Muslims and Christians have improved since the attacks on the United States [September 11]. Dialogue is accelerating in response to terrorism."

The October, 2001, Synod of Bishops, which included almost 250 bishops from more than 110 countries, was focused on the bishops' role in the Church and the Church becoming the Church of the poor. Pope John Paul II attended all the sessions of the month-long meeting. He praised the "climate of communion" and said "the Church's strength is her communion, her weakness is division and internal strife."

Pope John Paul II then urged the bishops to courageously promote Church teaching and work for Church unity. At the synod's closing Mass, October 27 in St. Peter's Basilica, the Pope said: "A credible answer can be given to the challenges that come from today's social and cultural context only if the deep and convinced unity of the shepherds among themselves and with the successor of Peter, as well as of the bishops with their priests, is clearly perceptible."

Heaven has a divine plan and good reason why, after 2000 years, at a time when interest in Christian unity is so high among both Catholics since the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) and the Orthodox today, an Orthodox family was chosen whose mother is Eastern Rite Catholic in union with Rome.

"Do you know about Our Lady of Soufanieh concerning Christianity Unity?" I asked the Patriarch.

"Yes" was his simple answer.

"Did the Pope coming here May, 2001 assist Christian Unity?" I asked.

The Patriarch replied: "Yes, both the Orthodox and Catholics invited him. At least 70 bishops of the Orient were present to join the Pope. Never before have there been so many bishops of the Orient with the Pope at one time."

This Greek-Melkite leader was born in Damascus and his See is in that city.

When I returned from the interview with the Melkite Catholic Patriarch, John Emmanuel, the 13-year-old son of Nicolas and Myrna, had just returned from his first day of school. I saw that he was

affectionately embraced by his father and received by his mother.

Immediately upon return, John Emmanuel showed his parents a book from which he is learning English. I said to the boy through his parents, "Good that you learn English. Then I'll be able to talk to you." (Nicolas speaks English fluently. Myrna does well, but with greater hesitancy.)

In September 2001, I visited Bishop Diego Causero, the papal nuncio to Damascus, a role he has had since 1999. At this same time, Bishop Luigi Accogli (nuncio, 1987-1994) was making arrangements for an ecumenical meeting, October 12, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and to which he had invited Myrna to attend. (On October 15, 1999, in Rome, Bishop Accogli had dedicated the Center of Our Lady of Soufanieh for the unity of Christians and for interreligious dialogue.) The October 12 planned meeting was cancelled, at least for a time, in response to the terrorists' attack in the United States of a month earlier.

Before going to the papal nuncio's residence, Fr. Elias Zahlaoui said to me, "I know from the reaction of the Secretary of the [former] papal nuncio of Damascus that Rome is happy regarding Soufanieh. The former nuncio came here to pray; he was saying Mass here in this Soufanieh house. The Pope listens but does not talk as Nicolas is Orthodox. I gave His Holiness a book (in French) on Soufanieh, titled, *The Apparitions in Damascus*, by Christian Ravaz. Rome does not interfere but the Pope expressed happiness of what is happening at Soufanieh."

On December 18, 1999, Fr. Zahlaoui met the nuncio and gave him two books in French with information on Soufanieh. Then Fr. Zahlaoui traveled for three weeks to Europe but had not received any expressed reaction from the nuncio.

While the present papal nuncio, Bishop Diego Causero, is very cautious, he did graciously receive the author and Tobias Beutgen, a 25-year-old German traveling companion. The nuncio is aware of Soufanieh but obviously thinks it prudent not to make any direct comments. It seems he is being sensitive to the Orthodox and Catholic families of the area in which he lives. There is a special sensitivity to the Orthodox authorities who have risked some involvement as reported elsewhere in this book.

Again, especially for us in the Western world, we must understand this caution in light of the Eastern mentality and their position that they consider the Nazzours to be an Orthodox family, based on the father's religion. The Catholic Church would not want to give the impression that they were superseding that position. This is especially important when very good ecumenical relations exist in Damascus between the Greek Orthodox and the Catholics.

Before going to the papal nuncio's residence I asked Fr. Zahlaoui this question: "Do you know whether any reaction has been given by Pope John Paul II to Soufanieh?"


Response: "Rome does not say anything about Soufanieh because Nicolas is Greek Orthodox. Myrna is Catholic. Rome listens but does not talk as Nicolas is Orthodox."

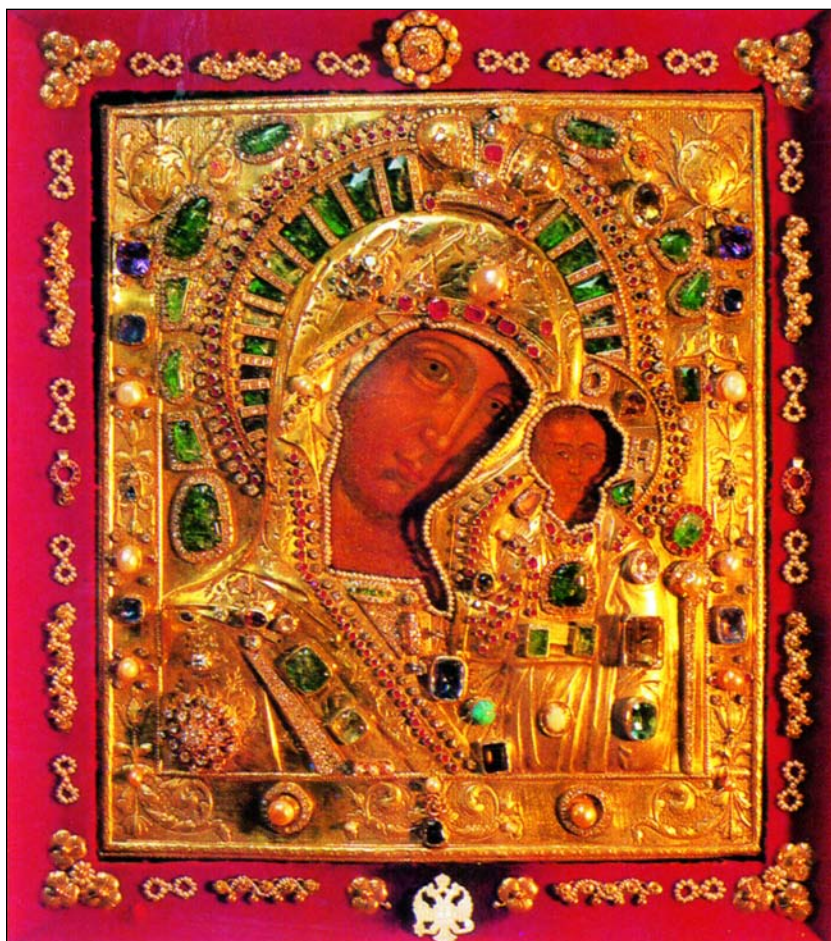
Bishop Causero informed me that he was aware of Soufanieh. He expressed nothing against Soufanieh. He was able to say that he understood people going to Soufanieh were praying and if those who go there pray, that was favorable.

That the House of Soufanieh is a place of prayer is a fact. This is shown in the atmosphere of peace, joy and serenity that pervade the house. This is true in spite of the necessary imposition of those who come there in constant visitation. It is because of the Virgin's request that the doors be open each day,

There are two prayer services each day; the prayer of the Rosary and common prayer which includes the prayers taught by Jesus and Mary. Sometimes there are three or four services. The week I was a guest at Soufanieh there was also a daily Mass at 6 p.m.; always many participated. It was a great joy to be handed a large framed picture of the Icon, once I had concluded the Mass. With it I would bless all present. Then each one would come forth to venerate and kiss the image of the Virgin with Child.

Since November 27, 1982, prayer has not ceased for even one day. Moslems participate spontaneously in the general prayers since they hold the Virgin Mary in high esteem. People who visit Soufanieh for the first time are impressed by the fervor of the believers. Spiritual conversions are numerous and are looked upon as more important than physical cures. Myrna herself says that what is important is not oil but that people turn in prayer to the Holy Spirit.

Lives have been totally transformed. Meanwhile, Myrna keeps her simplicity and integrity; despite many opportunities that could lead her to become proud, she remains the same. Her goal is than all be for the glory of God and the Virgin. For this goal her husband Nicolas and their children Miriam (born October 15, 1986) and John Emmanuel (born July 26, 1988) agree and cooperate. 



Our Lady of Kazan Icon

Chapter 9

Our Lady of Kazan, Fatima and Soufanieh



OUR LADY OF KAZAN, Fatima and Soufanieh, all come together as they are one and the same Virgin Mother. Since the Icon of Soufanieh is considered a replica version of Our Lady of Kazan, this chapter gives a summary of the known history of the Kazan Icon. We must say, however, that scholars debate different explanations for its history which is not easy to track. In brief, since the 17th century, the Virgin Mary through the Icon of Kazan has been venerated as the Savior or Protectress of Russia. After the decisive victory of Peter the Great over the Swedish army, during which the Icon was brandished as the flag of victory, a cathedral was built in honor of Our Lady of Kazan in Moscow.

The cathedral in honor of Our Lady of Kazan was built on what later became the Kremlin, known in Moscow as Red Square during the Communist reign. The Icon was venerated in the Kazan Cathedral in Moscow until 1721 when it was transferred to St. Petersburg, the new capital then of Russia.

The cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan in Moscow was without the Icon for the past two centuries. Under Communism the cathedral was destroyed in 1936. It was thought for years that the Communists had destroyed the famous Icon of Kazan. The history of what happened since the reign of Communism and its fall is interesting, and we give a summary here.

There are reports from missionaries that after decades of Communist repression the Catholic presence had been largely eliminated and the Orthodox Church greatly crippled. The conversion of Russia, promised by Our Lady of Fatima, will doubtlessly be through the Russian Orthodox Church. Part of the Fatima message is also for Christian unity, so hopefully Our Lady will bring about a union of Orthodox and

Catholics in Russia.

Pope John Paul II, known in many quarters as especially devoted to Our Lady of Fatima, worked intensely for a reunion of Orthodox and Catholics from the beginning of his administration. Not as well known is the Pope's devotion to Our Lady of Kazan.

Many millions of positive thinking Christians are continuing to pray for Russia and make sacrifices. The Fatima Family Apostolate financed the building of the first Shrine to Our Lady of Fatima in all of Russia (dedicated October 11, 1998, with the Pope's blessing). They also continue to make the First Saturdays.

We explore here the amazing sign of the coming rebirth of faith in Russia that has a history hundreds of years old. And this great sign is in the possession of Pope John Paul II at the Vatican at least at the time of the writing of this book. The sign I mean here is the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan, one of Russia's most venerated religious images.

George Weigel, senior fellow of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., was chosen to write the more than 900-page *Witness to Hope*—the amazing life of Pope John Paul II—while spending much time with the Pope. While at Castel Gondolfo he saw the Kazan Icon resting on the altar of the Pope's chapel. He saw it again at the Vatican. He wrote: "My wife and friends were stunned by the priceless diamond and ruby-encrusted frame which partially covers the Icon itself."

It is interesting that the Icon of Soufanieh which has gained so much attention in Damascus, and then throughout the world, considered to be a replica or at least one version of the famous Kazan Icon, is an extremely inexpensive reproduction. The original Soufanieh image, which was at the beginning of the Soufanieh phenomena, is in a plastic frame, 2.4 × 3.2 inches. Nicolas, while traveling, bought ten small reproductions of Our Lady of Kazan from the Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Church in Sofia, Bulgaria. It was one of these, on rather thin paper, which began to exude oil on November 27, 1982, and is still in the shrine in the Soufanieh home today.

Would not this tell us that the value of an icon is not, from God's view, in diamonds and rubies which may decorate an icon? Christian unity and peace will come, not from wealth and power of men, but from humility and love in men and the power of the Holy Spirit to which Christians become open in love.

We are reminded of how St. Faustina, apostle of divine mercy, cried the first time she saw the painting of Jesus with the red and white rays. It was so far from how beautiful Jesus had appeared to her. Jesus had requested a painting of what she saw to be spread throughout the world with the signature, "Jesus, I trust in you." Jesus informed her that the power or effectiveness of the image of divine mercy would not be in the paints or colors. The power would come from the Holy Spirit working in human hearts and the response in the hearts of those who gazed

upon it.

With St. Faustina and the divine mercy image, however unworthy the image from the reality, the power of God would still be present for those who responded in faith and love. So with Soufanieh. "God chose those whom the world considers absurd to shame the wise; he singled out the weak of this world to shame the strong. He chose the world's low born and despised, those who count for nothing, to reduce to nothing those who were something, so that mankind can do no boasting before God. God it is who has given you life in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1:27-30).

Weigel has written: "The Pope (who once told me, 'Russia is a big part of the story') burns to take one of Russia's holiest images back home, and in doing so, to illustrate Rome's fraternal love for the largest church of the Christian East. And no one who believes that Providence acts in history will deny that the incredible journey of the Kazanskaya [Icon] is, in a word, providential.

"Or, as John Paul himself said at Fatima, a year after he was shot in his front yard, St. Peter's Square, 'In the designs of Providence there are no mere coincidences.'"

The Fatima message, the famous Icon of Our Lady of Kazan, the Pope and Christian unity—all are wondrously intertwined. For years, especially during the 1970s, the Kazan Icon was kept in the Russian chapel of Domus Pacis in Fatima. Readers should appreciate what the Icon is about, its history, its destined future, for it will surely continue to have a role in Russia's religious history and the future relationships of the Russian Orthodox Church with Roman Catholicism. Patriarch Alexis II of Moscow is reported to be anxious for the return of the miraculous Icon to Russia. There are reports that when returned a new church will be built especially for the Icon in the city of Kazan itself, in the monastery of the Theotokos.

George Weigel, whom I respect, has written, "Some will be a little skeptical of the attempt to link the drama of the *Kazanskaya* to various theories of the Fatima apparitions—the *saga is remarkable enough in its own right without further embellishment*." True enough, but perhaps Weigel does not know the Fatima connection in recent decades and how the Icon got to the Pope. I doubt too he knows the Soufanieh connection. Perhaps he does not know that Sr. Lucia has said that the Collegial Consecration of Russia accomplished March 25, 1984, requested by Our Lady of Fatima and the quest for Christian unity are joined, or that it was largely Fatima devotees that redeemed the Icon of Kazan and kept it in the Russian Chapel at Fatima for years and who finally gave it to the Pope to some day deliver to Russia.

Our Lady of Fatima said "all bishops" were to make the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. When the Pope for March 25, 1984, invited the Orthodox bishops of the East to join the Roman Catholic bishops of the West in the collegial consecration, and

reportedly many Orthodox did—God accepted it. Pope John Paul II has a small replica of Our Lady of Kazan in his limousine as he travels in Rome, so important does he deem all this.

When revolution was taking place in Portugal (1974-1975), the Icon was brought to the United States for a time and placed in safe-keeping. The U.S. government had reportedly given up on Portugal, thinking it would fall under Communist control and thus all western Europe would go Communist. It appeared the atheistic Communism was about to gain total control of the government in Portugal. Even on the outside walls near the entrance of the Carmelite Monastery in Coimbra, the residence of Sr. Lucia, the sole survivor of the Fatima apparitions of 1917, I saw in 1974 where Communists had painted the words: "Religion is the opium of the people." The attempted revolution in Portugal in 1974 was daily news on the big news networks.

I happened to be on the same plane that was bringing the Kazan Icon from Portugal to the United States, although I did not know it at the time. Later, when back in the United States, a priest who had been entrusted with its transfer out of the country informed me that he had brought it with him, by request, on that flight.

A chief authority at the International Shrine in Fatima told me later it was unfortunate that some in the Fatima Apostolate in America made the decision to take the Icon out of Fatima. It was done at the very time revolution was threatening and Portugal was endangered by the Communists. If there was ever a time when the miraculous Icon of Kazan, so associated with Russia and liberty, should have remained in Fatima, Portugal, it was at the very time it was removed without any authorization from the Diocese of Leiria-Fatima. A brief history of the Icon should inform us why. We must trust in Jesus and in Mary, not ourselves.

Our Lady of Kazan is Our Lady Protectress

The Icon of Our Lady of Kazan is widely known as the "Liberatrix and Protectress" of Holy Russia. It has been used as the standard of the Russian army accompanying them in their struggles against invaders, the Tartars, the Poles, the Swedes, and the French.

Our Lady of Kazan has been venerated in Russia for centuries and even greeted by Russian troops as the Liberatrix of Russia. The Russian Orthodox Church proclaimed two liturgical feast days in her honor, July 8 and October 22. In many Russian prayers the Mother of God is called the "invincible general." *The Icon of Our Lady of Kazan is one of the most venerated Icons in Russia and is inseparable from its long Christian history.* The image is linked to the rich sources of Russia's religious life. Events involving the Kazan Icon during the 20th century are only now becom-

ing widely known.

Our Lady of Kazan—Patroness of Russian Families

Our Lady of Kazan is the patroness of households in Russian families. Copies of the Icon are frequently given to young ladies before their weddings. She is so much a part of Russian culture that even unbelievers often have had an Icon of Kazan in their home. The Icon has a special spiritual significance and role in the history of Russia. Our Lady of Kazan shows the way for the future of Russia.

The Fatima Family Apostolate has been promoting the Icon of Soufanieh for two reasons: 1) as a reminder to pray for Christian Unity for the total Church; 2) for families to have it in their homes to promote love and unity in the family.

According to Marguerite Peeters, writing from Brussels for the magazine, *Inside the Vatican*: “Throughout Russia, churches, monasteries and cathedrals are dedicated to the Kazanskaya,” as it is called. “The Moscow Patriarchate has declared 16 copies of the Icon to be miraculous or venerable. *Popular devotion* proclaims more than 30 copies to be miraculous. The copies from different periods are often covered with gold, silver and precious stones, testifying to the deep veneration Russians have for this Icon.”

Kazan is a city on the Volga River located some 500 miles east of Moscow. The Tartars invaded Russia in the middle of the 13th century and oppressed Russians for 300 years. The Tartars considered the city of Kazan the capital of their principality. Then Czar Ivan IV the Terrible in 1552 organized a crusade against the Tartars who were oppressing the Orthodox. The Russians took over the city of Kazan. The Tartars began to be instructed in the Orthodox faith. The city could freely exercise its faith again. In gratitude Ivan the Terrible had a large basilica built in honor of the Mother of God in Kazan. It was dedicated to the mystery of the Annunciation. He had a cathedral built in Moscow in honor of the Protection of the Mother of God—now known as the famous St. Basil’s Basilica on Red Square.

The Moscow synod of bishops in 1555 elected the first bishop of Kazan and had a Cathedral built there. The majority of Kazan’s population, however, was still Moslem. When the second bishop of Kazan died the Moslems revolted against the Christian faith. It was during this struggle that half of the city was destroyed by fire in 1579. Moslems claimed it was a punishment from God against Christians. The future of Christianity in the city was in peril.

History of the Kazan Icon

A soldier whose home had been destroyed in the Kazan fire of 1579

was planning to build a new house when his eight-year-old daughter, Matrona, saw a vision in which the Blessed Mother on two occasions told her to tell everyone that the Icon of Our Lady would be found in the ground under the ruins of the burned house. The child was ignored both times. In the third apparition Matrona saw the Icon itself “and from within a great light glowed.” This time Matrona heard a voice which told her, “If you do not announce my words to all then I will appear in another place and a great calamity shall befall you.”

After the rejection of the message by the governor of the city of Kazan and by the Archbishop Jeremiah, the mother, to satisfy the child, and along with some neighbors, went to the place and started searching. It was not until Matrona started digging herself that, in a very short time, she uncovered the Holy Icon wrapped in old cloth and perfectly preserved. “Though it was an old Icon, its paint glistened like new. It seemed to be illuminated from within.”

The Icon was then taken in solemn procession from the place of excavation to the Church of St. Nicholas, the nearest church. On the way two men, Joseph and Nikita, who had been blind for years, had their sight restored so that “the Holy Icon appeared to have wonder-working powers.”

It is thought that the Icon was hidden during the Tartar domination, when the Orthodox were obliged to hide their faith, but the origin of the Icon still remains mysterious.

The event of the finding of the Icon took place on July 8, 1579. A liturgical feast day was thus established on that date in commemoration of the apparition of the Icon.

The pastor of the church was the priest Hermogen who was later to become the Patriarch of Moscow and, still later, to exhort the people of Russia during the “Time of Troubles” to drive out the invaders so that Russia might be saved. Those exhortations of Hermogen inspired the raising of an army in 1611 whose leadership, organization, and training were entrusted to the prince, Pojarski.

The time of freedom was not yet at hand, for the Russian military commanders quarreled among themselves. The violence of the Cossacks and other militiamen knew no bounds. In the winter of 1611, the Icon was being returned to Kazan. While it was enroute to Kazan, it stopped at Yaroslavl where militiamen from Nizhni Novgoro, recruited by Minim and led by Pojarski were located. Hearing about the Icon and the many miracles which were wrought in connection with it, the militia-men took the Icon with them, constantly paying it homage with prayers for help. Many miracles were manifested.

Army troops marching from Kazan toward Moscow brought along the sacred Icon. The forces of Prince Pojarski encountered impossible obstacles near Moscow. The city must be taken. It was heavily reinforced and guarded by fresh troops arriving near Moscow. The disorderly Cossacks, instead of aiding the arriving troops, repelled them. There

were few supplies or ammunition for the loyal forces. Under these circumstances, the morale of the troops ebbed low. Furthermore, autumn came bringing with it unfavorable weather. Deciding, however, to make a last effort to capture the city, depending no longer on their own strength, but only on the protection of the Mother of God, on October 22, 1612, the troops gathered to pray in front of the Icon, and then were successful in seizing the walls of the Kremlin, liberating Moscow. The Lord heard the prayers for the Church and the Fatherland.

Subsequently Our Lady of Kazan was hailed by Russian troops as the liberator of Russia. It is why the Orthodox church later proclaimed October 22 a liturgical feastday.

Among the many devotional accounts of this victory among the Russians is that within the city was a saintly hierarch, Arseny, who came to Russia from Greece. He was taken prisoner and lived under severe conditions of hunger and grief. Being a hierarch and a saintly man he was close to God and was chosen to receive heavenly favors. During the darkness of the night his cell was filled with light and he saw before him St. Sergius of Radonezh.

"Arseny," said the saint, "Our prayers have been heard. Through the intercession of the Mother of God, the divine judgment on our fatherland has been changed to mercy. By morning Moscow will be in the hands of the liberators and *Russia saved*."

The word spread and the Orthodox militia were strengthened with new courage. The enemy, in spite of their number, could no longer hold their positions and the Kremlin was taken by the Russians.

The Icon of Our Lady of Kazan was placed by Prince Pojarski in the Church of the Presentation of the Holy Virgin in Moscow until the time when the Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan was built in Moscow (1630), where the Icon was then enshrined.

Cathedral of Kazan in St. Petersburg

Much subsequent history follows involving the Icon of Kazan and the people of Russia being spared from invasions. The Icon was transferred to various churches or copies made of it for various places.

The czar finally ordered the construction of a Cathedral of Kazan in St. Petersburg on Nevsky Prospekt. (This cathedral is one-half block from the Roman Catholic St. Catherine of Alexandria Church, which contains the special wing for a Shrine to Our Lady of Fatima, built by the Fatima Family Apostolate.) The St. Petersburg Cathedral of Kazan was intended to be a Russian imitation of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and the chief church for all Russia. This cathedral was consecrated on September 15, 1811, when the Icon was solemnly brought to the Cathedral of Kazan in St. Petersburg on that day.



Cathedral of Our Lady of Kazan in St. Petersburg, Russia.

The history of Russia has been frequently linked to their faith and love for Our Lady of Kazan. She was invoked during the invasion by the Poles at the beginning of the 17th century and also by the Swedes. Patriarch Germogen supported a patriotic movement and urged the Russians to put themselves under the protection of the Mother of God with her title Our Lady of Kazan.

Prince Pojarski had the Cathedral of Kazan built on what is now Red Square in Moscow. An Icon of Kazan was brought to the cathedral in 1636. The Bolshevik Revolution that put Communism into Russia (and the Soviet Union) for decades destroyed this cathedral. Mikhail Gorbachev allowed a small church to be rebuilt on this spot—the first permission granted under the Soviet regime for the building of a church. Metropolitan Alexi blessed the cornerstone for this new Basilica of Our Lady of Kazan on Red Square on November 6, 1990.

When the Napoleon forces invaded Russia in June, 1812, the Icon of Kazan again was invoked as the Protectress of Russia. General Kutuzov kept the Icon hidden under his cloak and on December 25, 1812 Russia was liberated from the French. The czar offered Our Lady of Kazan in St. Petersburg the trophies of the defeated French.

The Kazan Icon then remained in the Cathedral of St. Petersburg until the night of June 29, 1904, when all the treasures of the cathedral were stolen, including the Icon. This was considered a national tragedy. A copy put in its place also disappeared during the 1920s.

This same Cathedral of Kazan in St. Petersburg, when taken over by the Communists in the early 20th century, became a museum for atheism and headquarters to spread atheism throughout the entire

nation of Russia, which covers 12 time zones.

Location of Kazan Icon Obscure after 1904

After its disappearance in 1904 the story of the Icon of Kazan is difficult to follow. But it is exactly after this date that the West and the Fatima message enter into the picture. Different accounts are given on how the Icon disappeared out of Russia and got to other countries. We give here what appears to be a reliable account.

The Holy Icon of Our Lady of Kazan (now at the Vatican) is thought to be the most ancient. Whether or not Prince Pojarski brought the original Holy Icon of Kazan that was discovered by Matrona, or whether he brought one of the two other Miraculous Icons of Kazan cannot be stated for certain. (Note: one remained in Kazan and was reportedly destroyed in 1904; one was enshrined in the Kazan Cathedral which was patterned after the Vatican and built in St. Petersburg; and the third was in Moscow).

Following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 the Holy Icon of Kazan was confiscated from the Kazan Cathedral, and, along with other religious art treasures, was sold into private hands. This was partly to raise money for the Revolution and partly to remove the more important symbols of religion in an effort to completely destroy religion and faith among the peoples of Russia.

Purchased and taken to Poland, the Holy Icon remained there in obscurity until 1935 when it was purchased by Mr. Norman Weisz, who had examined it at the Moscow sale in 1919 but did not have sufficient funds to buy it at that time. The Icon appeared at an auction in Poland after the First World War. It is not known who put it up for sale or bought it. About 1950 the Icon was detected on the wall of an English castle. A Russian countess recognized it from the way the diamonds and rubies were placed on the *riza* (silver or gold plaque partially covering venerated icons in Russia).

How the Kazan Icon traveled to Fatima

The owner of Farleigh Castle in England was a Protestant. He had an adopted daughter who was Catholic. When her foster father died, she agreed to sell the Icon to the Orthodox Archbishop of San Francisco. The Russian Church in the United States carried on a nationwide campaign to raise one-million dollars for this purpose. They failed to raise the money. The Icon was about to be sold to a museum because thousands of dollars had been spent in its protection, with armed guards accompanying it on the journeys through America in the effort to raise a million dollars to redeem it.

The Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima, which was founded to carry

out the conditions of Our Lady of Fatima for the conversion of Russia, heard about the danger of the miraculous Icon of Kazan becoming a museum piece. It was then that the leaders of the World Apostolate of Fatima signed a contract to redeem the Icon. Reports indicate that it was purchased in 1970 for three million dollars and presented to Pope John Paul II in 1993.

In 1964-65, arrangements were made for an exhibit of the Russian Orthodox and Greek Catholic Church of America at the New York World's Fair. Along with Michelangelo's *Pietà* which had been brought from St. Peter's Basilica for the Holy See pavilion at the World's Fair—these two were the most venerated religious works on display.

Byzantine Chapel built in Fatima

A Byzantine-style chapel was built in Fatima not far from the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima in the Cova da Iria. On July 21, 1970, the Holy Icon was brought in procession to the Chapel of the Dormition in Fatima by Bishop John Venancio of the diocese of Leiria-Fatima and Bishop Andrea Katkoff, Apostolic Visitor of Russian Catholics. Bishop Katkoff celebrated a solemn pontifical liturgy in the chapel. Then for several years the Icon was kept in a bank vault in Portugal. Without security it was feared communists would attempt to steal the Icon if kept in Fatima's Russian chapel.

Finally Pavel Bliznetsov, a former Soviet air force officer who had escaped Russia, went to Rome, and was ordained a Catholic priest, was asked by Cardinal Tisserant to become the first chaplain of the Byzantine rite in the Russian Chapel at Fatima where the Icon could be housed in security. Archpriest John Mowatt, who offered Mass in the Byzantine rite, became the second chaplain. For years the Kazan Icon was thus venerated in Fatima within the Russian chapel of Domus Pacis of the World Apostolate of Fatima. During many youth pilgrimages I conducted over the years (1970s into 1990s) the Icon was venerated by the youth as we stayed at Domus Pacis in all the early years of the youth pilgrimages. By now these youth are mature adults raising Catholic families of their own. Also perhaps 200 or more went on to the seminary on the way to the priesthood. Many are now ordained. Many young ladies became religious, a considerable number became professed as contemplative Carmelites to my knowledge.

Each year Fr. Mowatt would offer the Sacrifice of the Mass for our "Youth for Fatima" pilgrims in the Russian Chapel of Domus Pacis. My intention was to expose our Catholic youth to the beautiful Byzantine Eastern Catholic rite in union with Rome and which is identical to the Russian Orthodox rite. I had founded a "Youth for Fatima" apostolate which conducted 13-day youth pilgrimages to Fatima twice each sum-

mer for about 20 years; one for young men, another for young ladies. This apostolate grew into what is now known as the *Fatima Family Apostolate*. This total family apostolate resulted from an encouragement of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in early 1985. It received subsequent endorsement of the Pontifical Council for the Family in 1989 when its Prefect, Cardinal Edouard Gagnon, came to its national FFA Congress.

How the Kazan Icon Passed to Pope John Paul II

It was Jose Correa, a Fatima devotee and later director of information for the Catholic charity *Aid to the Church in Need* in Koenigstein, Germany, who proposed giving the Icon to John Paul II so the Pope himself could give it back to Russia.

I became acquainted with Jose Correa at Fatima while conducting youth pilgrimages. People could not help notice a priest with, at times, 70 youth. One time there were 150 teenagers and young adults in Fatima—for close to two weeks at a time. They would go out of their way to discover what was behind these prayerful young pilgrims so well disciplined. I remember repeatedly hearing from adult pilgrims from Ireland, “We could never get a group from Ireland to do what you are doing with American Catholic youth.”

I learned that Jose, who approached me at Fatima, is like a family member to the Santos family of Sr. Lucia in Portugal. He has thus been able to visit her over the years when in Portugal. He was reportedly adopted as a child by Santos family members who had moved to Brazil. He was able to provide the radio transmitter for Boris Yeltsin in an upper room of the Kremlin when the coup against Gorbachev was underway in 1991. Russian people were asked by radio to come to the Kremlin in protest. They did. They came with icons, various images of Mary, while, readers will remember, Yeltsin stood atop a jeep explaining to people that the attempt was to re-establish hard Communism while Gorbachev was held prisoner. At that time Jose was the managing director of the Catholic Radio and Television Network headquartered in Brussels, Belgium. He had radio equipment stored in a warehouse in Moscow, awaiting installation as restrictions against religion were easing up. (See October-December 1992 *Messenger* for more details.)

He had a Russian language program, *Blagovest* (“Good News,” a calling to prayer). They used to transmit through *Radio Veritas* in the Philippines for the Asian areas of the country. Starting July 5, 1992, his Catholic Radio Television Network was able to broadcast every Sunday at 2:30 p.m. over *Ostankino’s Radio One* (formerly Radio Moscow) with a network of over 350 local radio stations throughout Russia.

The board of the World Apostolate of Fatima decided unanimous-

ly to accept the proposal to give the Icon to the Holy Father so that he would give it back to the Russian people. The bishop of Leiria-Fatima concurred. When the Holy Father came to Fatima for the first time, May 13, 1982, to thank Our Lady for sparing his life in the May 13, 1981, assassination attempt, he venerated the Icon of Kazan.

When Pope John Paul II came to Fatima on May 13, 1991, for the second time, tenth anniversary of the attempt on his life, the Icon was by then already in his apartment at the Vatican. Previously, representatives of the Church with Vatican connections, showed up at Domus Pacis with authorized papers and quietly the Icon was taken to Rome.

Authenticity of the Kazan Icon with Pope John Paul II

Tass, Russian national news agency, reported in 2001 that during the past two years Russian experts from the city of Kazan had been studying evidence on the authenticity of the Icon now in the apartment of Pope John Paul II. The result is that the findings of Western experts are being confirmed by Russian experts that the Icon is the original one.

Is this the original Icon found by Matrona in 1579 or an early 16th or 17th century copy that was given special veneration over other copies? What experts agree to is that this Icon is the one that was stolen from the Cathedral of Kazan in St. Petersburg in 1904. It is thus considered to be the most venerated *Kazanskaya* Icon.

Conclusions of Expert Historians

The conclusion of art historians of both the West and Russia is as follows. The original, which dates from the time before the Tartar invasion, was lost in a fire, and three copies were made at the end of the 16th century. One of the copies went to the library of the Patriarchate of Moscow and is now in the patriarchal Cathedral of the Holy Theophany in Moscow. Another was in the imperial public library. A third one was in the library of the Rumiantsev museum.

According to Russian experts, one of these two would have remained in Moscow until 1710 when it was transferred to St. Petersburg, and was stolen in 1904. According to this account, the Holy Father's Icon would be a late 16th century copy of the original.

But the World Apostolate of Fatima rejects this account. It claims experts dated the Icon to be from the 13th century. *In this case, the Icon at the Vatican would be the original miraculous Icon of Kazan.* American and English experts at the time it was purchased had authenticated the Icon dating it to the 13th century. They said it was painted on wood in the traditional Greek-Byzantine style. Constantinople was its probable place of

origin. X-ray examination confirmed the perfect preservation of the colors. The gold-plated silver *riza* of the Icon was dated as the 17th century. This Fatima Apostolate says it is encrusted with more than 1,000 diamonds, emeralds, rubies, sapphires and pearls given primarily by Ivan the Terrible and Catherine the Great. It was the privilege of the author of this book at one time to hold the Kazan Icon close to his heart with proper permission. It is indeed encrusted with precious jewels.

The Vatican had requested a second in-depth study of the Icon before it was brought to Rome from Fatima. Three experts came to Fatima. They concluded the authenticity of the Icon. Their findings were then confidentially given to the Holy Father.

Some time in the 1980s, Luigi Scalfaro, heading the Fatima Apostolate in Italy, discussed the matter with the Holy Father. The two agreed to transfer the Icon from Fatima to Rome. Several times Pope John Paul II has shown the Icon to Orthodox bishops and Russian dignitaries who visited him. The Pope is burning with the desire to take one of Russia's holiest images back home.

In June 2000, President Vladimir Putin visited Pope John Paul II. Jose Correa was then given almost four minutes on Russia's national evening television news (RTR) to explain what had happened to the Icon of Kazan since 1904. He said that the original was now in the Pope's apartment at the Vatican. He suggested that when Orthodox officials would invite the Holy Father to come to Russia, he would bring the Icon back to the Russian people. Listeners were moved to tears.

There is growing interest in Russia over the message of Fatima. "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and it will be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world." For Russian Orthodox, conversion means abandoning atheism, sins of the past and a return to Jesus Christ and their own Orthodox roots. The final and complete conversion has yet to come. Thus the Fatima message appeals to millions of Russians and while Orthodox Patriarchs give no official position on Fatima they have not objected to the message.

When the *primary* and official International Pilgrim Virgin was taken for about a year by Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz from Fatima to travel throughout Russia a few years ago, Orthodox, including bishops, also came out to venerate it. The Archbishop returned this International Statue of Our Lady of Fatima to the sanctuary in Fatima, Portugal, on July 12, 1997.

On the occasion of returning the statue from Russia to Fatima, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz said, "... The Fatima prophecy concerning the conversion of Russia is being fulfilled. However, conversion is a long process. It is not so much an external event as an inner state of being. Conversion comes about where there is interior freedom based on truth. ... The pilgrimage that has now come to an end was a very

great grace for our Church and for our society. As represented in the Fatima statue, Mary visited a land which on the one hand had only recently been regarded as a stronghold of atheism and on the other was a land of martyrs.

"I do not think there have been any other pilgrimages like it in the world. The statue arrived in St. Petersburg (at St. Catherine of Alexandria Church where the Fatima Chapel is presently being constructed) on the 79th anniversary of the October Revolution (a few minutes' walk from the storming of the Winter Palace by the Bolsheviks and one-half block from the Orthodox Cathedral of Kazan). Everywhere the statue was received with enthusiasm and with tears of joy because it was the representation of her who had foretold the conversion of Russia. . . ."

The Fatima Family Apostolate (FFA) thus considers it to have been one of its greatest honors, when Archbishop Kondrusiewicz, living in Moscow, and then Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Rite Catholic Church for all European Russia, requested the FFA to finance the building of Russia's first Fatima Shrine.

Pope John Paul II, Our Lady's Pope, has worked hard to bring a restoration of unity of the Orthodox with the Roman Catholic Church. He would find it a perfect crowning to his long pontificate if he could be invited by the Orthodox to Russia, where the world's largest Orthodox community lives. There he would present them with the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan. What great significance and Marian affection this could be toward Christian unity.

As our Lord and our Lady slowly accomplish their goal of triumph and Christian unity we remember the words spoken at Fatima in 1917. "If my requests are not heard, error will spread from an atheist Russia throughout the entire world, fermenting further wars, the good will be persecuted, and the Holy Father will suffer much. However, if my requests are heard, Russia will be converted and an era of peace will be granted to the world. In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and it will be converted, and a period of peace will be granted to the world."

Soufanieh is to the East what Fatima is to the West. The Virgin Mother Mary is the Mother of the Church. Jesus desires his Church to be one, for such he established the Church. His Mother Mary desires unity of all in her Son, Jesus Christ. Mary is working for unity through her images of Kazan and Soufanieh.

The need for prayers for unity between Orthodox and Catholics is especially seen from time to time in news reports of relations between the Vatican and the Moscow patriarchate. They seem to go up and down. Developments could well be far beyond what we give here by the time this book appears. The need for prayer and fasting is important for unity.

A Russian Orthodox leader in February, 2002 asked the Interpol police agency to seize the beloved Icon from the papal apartments.

Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk at that time charged that the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan was “stolen” from the Russian Orthodox Church. He asked the international police force to recover it “by whatever means are necessary.”

The Icon, dating from the 13th century, has been prized by the Orthodox faithful for generations. When Russia was swept by the Communist Revolution, the Icon was eventually acquired by Orthodox in America, who later sold it to Catholics as explained earlier. In 1991, after several transfers, the Icon came into the possession of Pope John Paul II.

In November, 2001, Pope John Paul indicated that he was prepared to return the Icon to the Russian Orthodox Church. But that prospect, like all other relations between the Vatican and Moscow, was placed “on hold” when the Russian Orthodox hierarchy pulled back from ecumenical talks after the Vatican announced February 11, 2002, that it was transforming into dioceses the four Catholic apostolic administrations set up in the 1990s to minister to Catholics in Russia.

The Moscow Orthodox Patriarchate held that since Russia was an Orthodox country Rome should not be establishing dioceses there. Protesting the Vatican’s establishment of the four dioceses in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Church asked the Vatican’s top ecumenist to cancel his planned February, 2002 visit to Moscow.

Rome held that Catholicism has had a long presence in Russia and these dioceses were necessary to serve the Catholic people in that vast land. A Vatican official said the Orthodox statements simply underscore how important continuing contacts are. Although he cancelled his trip as requested, Cardinal Kasper sent a letter to Russian Orthodox officials “confirming his willingness to go at any time to clarify the situation.”

Archbishop Kondrusiewicz, who heads the Mother of God Archdiocese of Moscow, said: “Catholic dioceses were established in Russia in the 14th century. Before 1917, before the Bolshevik Revolution, there were two bishops’ Sees, one in St. Petersburg and one in Saratov; the metropolitan See was in the capital of the Russian Empire (at that time, St. Petersburg).”

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, the Vatican secretary of state, said: “It is not right that our Russian Orthodox brothers say they were surprised. For some time we have been discussing with them this reorganization planned by the Pope to offer better religious assistance to Catholics in that immense country.” The same Cardinal also dismissed concerns that the Vatican action would delay the trip Pope John Paul II has hoped to make to Russia. “This plan has not been pushed off; it was not even near,” the Cardinal said.

Metropolitan Kirill, in his complaint to Interpol, said that the Russian Orthodox patriarchate would have preferred to settle the question of the Icon’s ownership quietly, relying on fraternal cooperation between the two churches. But he complained, “The Vatican did not

have that attitude in mind when they erected four dioceses in Russia.”

It is most unfortunate that such disagreements arise. The love and unity of spirit fostered by Soufanieh will hopefully become a guiding light to all authorities as well as all the faithful. The real interest and effort should be for a united Christendom according to the will of Jesus Christ.

We know what heaven can accomplish quickly, even when human resources deem it impossible. This was witnessed in the fall of Communism in 1989 after the accomplishment of Our Lady’s request for the Collegial Consecration of the World and of Russia. Heaven can act quickly for Christian Unity between Orthodox and Catholics as well when Christians unite in sincere prayer.

One does not find the call for CHRISTIAN UNITY so direct and explicit in the messages of Fatima as one does in the messages of Soufanieh. But it is in the Fatima messages. Sr. Lucia has said that the Collegial Consecration has always included the call for Christian Unity. It is implicit. The message of the Christian solidarity of the Mystical Body of Christ (the Church) is in the message of Fatima as a whole.

Already on July 3, 1917, Our Lady said: “I shall come to ask for the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart, and the Communion of reparation on the First Saturdays. If my wishes are fulfilled, Russia will be converted and there will be peace. . . .”

On June 13, 1929, Mary kept the promise to come again. This is when Sr. Lucia had the vision representing the Blessed Trinity and she concluded the report this way:

“I understood that it was the Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity which was shown to me, and I received lights about this Mystery which I am not permitted to reveal.

“Our Lady then said to me:

“The moment has come when God asks the Holy Father (the Pope), in union with all the bishops of the world, to make the Consecration of Russia to my Heart, promising to save it by this means.”

Note: “the Holy Father (the Pope) and all the bishops of the world.” Now Orthodox are true bishops. The Catholic Church recognizes that the apostolic chain of ordination is valid for both the Orthodox and Catholic bishops. The first two times (1942 and 1952) that Pope Pius XII attempted the requested Consecration, he acted without any other bishops. In 1982, Pope John Paul II conducted a consecration right at Fatima on May 13 but there was a deficiency because not all the bishops had been informed in time.


Only after March 25, 1984, did Sr. Lucia say that the Lord had accepted the Collegial Consecration—and for the Act to be offered on March 25, 1984, in a letter that the Pope had sent previously in December 1983, inviting both Catholic and Orthodox bishops to join him. Many Orthodox bishops did so. Our Lady had said it was to be

made by “all the bishops of the world.” Then things began to change regarding religious freedom in Russia and the Soviet Union.

The call for Christian unity is explicit in the Soufanieh messages. Approved Marian messages are ongoing. Years ago, Sr. Lucia said that Christian unity was always part of the Collegial Consecration. She has



Muslim ladies light a candle before the miraculous Icon. Muslim tradition considers Mary most blessed and prominent of women.

said that, until her death, she will pray for CHRISTIAN UNITY. 



Our Lady of Soufanieh Icon

Chapter 10

Messages Given to Myrna Nazzour from Jesus Christ and the Holy Virgin Mary



THE ONGOING MESSAGES which Myrna has received began on Wednesday, December 15, 1982. The beginning of the apparitions and messages was in this way. At first the Icon was kept in the young couple's bedroom and since the events of November 19, 1982, the room has been called, "the Room of the Virgin." About ten people were praying before the Icon. About 11 p.m. Myrna became seemingly restless which her friend Ghada, sitting close to her, noticed. Ghada held her hands for a while but suddenly Myrna pulled them away and stood up.

Suddenly Myrna went hurriedly up the stairs to the terrace of the house. She had felt someone pulling her, as if someone had taken hold of her shoulder to pull her to another location.

Once on the terrace, Myrna placed her forehead facing to the ground, then she raised her head saying:

"A beautiful Lady was standing in front of me. I understood later that it was the Virgin Mary and I ran away scared."

Myrna went to her sister-in-law's apartment next door which is at the same level as the terrace. She woke up Helen, shouting, "The Virgin, the Virgin."

Myrna later told Fr. Zahlaoui of this vision and he advised her that she must not be afraid. "People are not afraid of their mother," he told her. He advised her to strengthen herself so as to be receptive to the graces and to have the strength to receive the messages the Virgin might desire to give to her.

While this was the Holy Virgin's first apparition, yet because of Myrna's state of mind and running away, no message was received then

and the first message would await the second apparition.

The Second Apparition (the First Message)

Saturday, December 18, 1982, at 11:37 p.m.

*My children,
Remember God, because God is with us.
You know all things and yet you know nothing.
Your knowledge is an incomplete knowledge.
But the day will come when you will know all things the way God
knows Me.
Do good to those who do evil.
And do not harm anyone.
I have given you oil more than you have asked for,
but I shall give you something much more powerful than oil.
Repent and have faith, and remember Me in your joy.
Announce My Son the Emmanuel.
He who announces Him is saved, and he who does not announce Him,
his faith is vain.
Love one another.
I am not asking for money to give to churches, nor for money to distrib-
ute to the poor.
I am asking for love.
Those who distribute their money to the poor and to churches,
but have no love, those are nothing.
I shall visit homes more often, because those who go to church, sometimes,
do not go there to pray.
I am not asking you to build Me a church, but a shrine.
Give.
Do not turn away anyone who asks for help.*

Myrna was most cooperative with me since she knew I was writing this book. From the beginning she made it clear that her prayers were so that the book would not be for her own glory. As said in chapter 4, the first full day there Myrna took me to the upper terrace where she had been, as it were, pulled to go. She showed me the eucalyptus tree across the street by the river from which the Blessed Virgin had come to her [see p. 79].

Myrna explained that the Virgin Mary was so beautiful that no one could paint an accurate portrait of her. Myrna first saw the ball of light in the tree; the ball then opened and the Virgin walked on a stream of light to Myrna on the terrace, passing right through the iron railing. Myrna touched the Virgin Mother Mary. About 20 years later when I interviewed her, her responses were without hesitation and represented an experience ever fresh in her mind. She explained that touching the Virgin was like touching a person with a physical body.

The portrait of Myrna on her knees with hands outstretched to the Virgin while our heavenly Mother touched Myrna's hands with the crucifix of the rosary is quite accurate as to the appearance of Our Lady [see p. 124]. The abundant oil at that moment overflowed from Myrna's hands unto the concrete floor, forming the suffering face of Jesus Christ. "I have given you oil more than you have asked for, but I shall give you something much more powerful than oil."

Myrna has said that we ought not to seek simply the oil but the Holy Spirit. Surely the Holy Spirit is most powerful. She has also said that those who look for such miracles should rather rest in faith and love of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. The action of the two-fold consecration by the priest at the Sacrifice of the Mass, perpetuating the Sacrifice of the Cross and bringing us the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, is surely "something much more powerful than oil."

But does Mary give us the Holy Eucharist? One of her titles is "Our Lady of the Holy Eucharist." She gave us Jesus by cooperating with God's will and the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the God-Man incarnate whom we offer to the Father and receive in Holy Communion became our one essential Mediator through the cooperation of Mary. Mary always leads to Jesus. She is the Spouse of the Holy Spirit and no grace is given without the intercession of Mary Mediatrix.

"Remember God." How important it is to remember God in our secular times, when faith has weakened even among Christians. People have often made gods out of modern technology, science, material things. "No man can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other or be attentive to one and despise the other. You cannot give yourself to God and money (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). Consumerism often has replaced God and religion, in fact it has become the "religion" for many.

How much hatred and revenge there is, even among many who call themselves Christian. The Virgin says: "Do good to those who do evil. And do not harm anyone. . . . Love one another."

"Repent and have faith, and remember me in your joy."

How often in the Marian era, which begins with St. Catherine Labouré and the Miraculous Medal (1830) [see p. 132], has the Virgin Mary appeared sad in the authenticated apparitions. Why are Jesus and Mary sometimes depicted as sad? They are sad because of the sins of mankind, and our lack of faith. We are to have faith and to pray, not only when in trouble, but always, even in good times, in times of joy.

"Announce my Son the Emmanuel." Many have given up the spirit of evangelization, to bring others to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God with us. Many who call themselves "Christian" are that in name only. One billion Muslims of the world do not believe that the Virgin's Son, Jesus Christ, is Emmanuel, God with us—God become man to save us. There are now roughly as many Muslims as there are Catholics

in the world.

If Christians were united, if Christians formed the one Church Jesus came to place on earth as the Kingdom of God among us, Muslims could more easily recognize the divinity, as well as the humanity, of Jesus Christ. If Orthodox and Catholics united, and the one true Eucharistic Jesus both of these families receive and celebrate could be concelebrated as one Church, what effect for conversion this would have on Muslims; what effect too it would have on the thousands of divided Protestant bodies. All could more fully understand that unity is the will of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said in John 17: "I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." Lack of unity among Christians keeps the world from recognizing that God the Father, the one true God, sent Jesus Christ into the world to save it, and that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God the Father and they breathe forth the Holy Spirit upon the world. Jesus needs to be recognized as the universal Savior for he came for the entire human race. Jesus died on the Cross for all, not for some.

Muslims worship the one true God. Muslims worship a God of majesty, but God became incarnate in the flesh as Emmanuel. Islam, unfortunately, is not a religion of redemption, of the cross, and the resurrection. They are not able to give God the infinite and perfect worship through the Sacrifice of the Mass which perpetuates the Sacrifice of the Cross. Muslims have a great respect for Our Lady, and they pray five times a day. May their prayers to the Virgin and ours too bring all to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, God, Savior.

"I am not asking for money to give to churches. . . ." Christians have often got sidetracked on money. Too often some have thought themselves rich in God if they gave money to the Church without a selfless and humble motive. It is the poor in spirit who see God, who come into the reign of God. "How blest are the poor in spirit: the reign of God is theirs" (Matt. 5:3). It is genuine love for all that the Virgin asks for, even love of one's enemies, to those who would do harm to us.

"I shall visit homes more often, because those who go to church, sometimes, do not go there to pray. . . ." The Virgin Mother wants our homes, families, to be domestic churches, little churches, miniature mystical bodies of Christ. She wants love and unity in the family, in the home. Through the image of Our Lady of Soufanieh, the Virgin is visiting many homes. In many cases throughout the world replicas of the Icon of Soufanieh have shed oil, a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, of Whom Mary is Spouse. The miracle has led such families, and their friends, to come to deeper prayer or return to prayer, to faith, to love.

"I am not asking you to build me a church, but a shrine." This again seems to reflect on the home as a shrine of love, unity. Later Our Lady asked that a stone from the arch of the Soufanieh home of Myrna and Nicolas be removed from the front of their house and there be placed an

Icon of the Holy Virgin with a message of thanks and recognition to Jesus. A pane of glass was placed over it and a small lamp illuminates the Icon day and night. I noticed passers-by stop to pray there, even kneel for a short while on the sidewalk and pray. Nicolas said to me, "I think it is the first time in any Muslim country an image of Mary and Jesus has been so exposed publicly for veneration."

Is this too telling Christians in Muslim lands not to be afraid to evangelize; not to give up working to bring Muslims to faith in Jesus, the Emmanuel?

"Give. Do not turn away anyone who asks for help." The greatest gift we can give is God who is a gift. As Christians, true children of God, we must give. First we must give our very selves. Myrna and Nicolas came to this realization from the beginning and opened their door to the world and have kept it open since. It requires a constant giving, giving of themselves. They show exceptional patience and a great smile to all who come. They fade into the background and leave people to pray before the Icon or study the messages on the wall of their home. 🌊

The Third Apparition (the Second Message)

Saturday, January 8, 1983, at 11:37 p.m.

The Virgin was crying.

She told Myrna: "It's all right."

Myrna was also crying, while shouting, "The Virgin is crying!"

At last, the Virgin withdrew, but before disappearing, she smiled softly.

The above very short message must be understood in the context of the situation at Soufanieh at the time. The Virgin said to Myrna: "It's all right." According to Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, "Maa'leche" is the word spoken by Mary in Arabic dialect and is an expression heard in Damascus every day and frequently. It has the meaning: "It's OK. I'll get through it." Myrna was crying and the Virgin Mary said to her "Maa'leche." While Myrna was crying she was shouting, "The Virgin is crying!" The holy Virgin smiled gently before disappearing.

It was the evening before the Icon was to be moved from the Soufanieh home to the church as described in chapter 4. Antiochian Patriarch Ignatius Hazim IV had given the order and, although Myrna and Nicolas were saddened that it would depart their home, it was accepted by them. They were to "give."

Nicolas had been hoping for a rotation of transfers of the Icon to

different churches. Fr. Zahlaoui then convinced Nicolas to cooperate with the desire of the Patriarch. He spoke to him in this manner: "Nicolas, the Church brings us closer to Jesus and Mary. The Church, for you, now is the Orthodox Church. In the person of the Patriarch [the Church speaks to you]. Therefore, if the Patriarch tells you something, it is as if the Lord himself is telling you.

"Besides what the Church says, we know nothing. The Church is responsible for the deposit of the faith, the Gospel, the Sacraments, and even Jesus; the Church takes care of us. We cannot make our own reality in the name of Jesus. Therefore, you should do what the Patriarch asks, as if this request came directly from the Lord. And, as long as the Patriarch wants the Icon to remain in this church, you should say, 'Let it be.'"

Fr. Zahlaoui said that the Icon being taken solemnly to the Church and displayed was a form of recognition of the phenomenon that was taking place. The Nazzours had had little rest for 45 days and nights after the phenomenon began and Fr. Zahlaoui felt the transfer would give them an opportunity to adjust, get some rest, etc. There was also hope that the Icon in the Orthodox Church would lead to ecumenical prayers for Christian unity. Nicolas agreed.

Fr. Zahlaoui did not hear about the Holy Virgin crying the night before the Icon was moved until a few days later. When Myrna and Nicolas told him about it the priest thought to himself that the Lord and the Virgin know things we do not know. So we must wait and trust. Things became clearer later when the Icon was returned in secrecy to the home of Nicolas and Myrna.


It seems to this author that heaven's plan included emphasis of the home as a domestic church, a miniature mystical body of Christ, a place of prayer and grace. This would become a call for millions of families, millions of homes, which make up the Church, to become what they are. That is what Pope John Paul II said in *Familiaris Consortio*: "Families, become what you are."

That heaven wanted the Icon in the home, not in an official church, to emphasize the family as a little church, seems justified when we consider the following: During all the time that the Icon was at the Church of the Holy Cross, not once did oil exude from it. At the same time while Myrna and Nicolas had placed in their room another similar icon to the one at the Holy Cross Church, the one in their home exuded oil several times. The oil built up on the surface of the paper reproduction without a glass cover

On February 21, 1983, the Icon at the church was returned to the Soufanieh home. People were upset by the manner of its return (in a cheap, black plastic bag, by two Greek-Orthodox priests). Nicolas especially was shocked, as was the Christian community when they learned of it. He let the priests know that he considered it disgraceful to bring

the Icon back like that. Fr. Joseph Malouli, a Lazarist priest, remained outside when he arrived and heard the loud voices coming from inside. After the two Orthodox priests left, Fr. Malouli prayed a decade of the Rosary with Myrna before the Image. It was thus Fr. Malouli who worked to appease everyone and to pray. He inwardly prayed: "Virgin Mary, enlighten us so that we don't make a mistake that can jeopardize your program."

It was only after a few minutes of meditation that Myrna, without saying anything, got up and hastily left the room and went to the terrace where the apparitions had taken place on two previous occasions.

All the household also hastened to the terrace when they realized where Myrna had gone. They found her on the terrace, her face brightly lit. She was kneeling with her hands joined. She pronounced words which seemed dictated to her by someone. She later confirmed that the message below in dialectal Arabic was given to her by the Virgin Mary. 

The Fourth Apparition (the Third Message)

Monday, February 21, 1983, at 9:30 p.m.

My children,

Let it be said between us, I have come back here.

Do not insult the haughty who are devoid of humility.

The humble person craves other people's remarks to correct his shortcomings,

while the corrupt and haughty neglects, rebels, becomes hostile.

Forgiveness is the best thing.

He who pretends to be pure and loving before people, is impure before God.

I would like to request something from you, a word that you will engrave in your memory, that you shall always repeat:

God saves me, Jesus enlightens me, the Holy Spirit is my life, this is why I fear nothing.

Is it not so, My son Joseph?


Forbear and forgive.

Forbear much less than the Father has forborne.

The priest advisors, Frs. Malouli and Zahlaoui, and those directly involved kept secret the first part of the above message for a couple of years. The Virgin had said, "Let it be said between us." There seemed to be a bitter reproach in the first part of the message. At the same time there was a loving invitation from the Mother of God to be forgiving rather than accusing.

Fr. Joseph Malouli was addressed personally in this message and it was thought to be a major turning point in the Soufanieh phenomenon. This priest was a good theologian and gifted with a good memory and scientific mind. Fr. Malouli had lived in Damascus since 1940 and was known as a man of integrity and honesty. He was already advanced in age and above suspicion. He was not a priest who was easily convinced about reported supernatural phenomena. On the contrary, he had strongly opposed numerous reports of “supernatural events” that from time to time were reported in Damascus.

When people would hear that Fr. Malouli was interested and favorable to Soufanieh, the response would be: “If Fr. Malouli is for it, that is enough. Then I do not doubt it.”

The Blessed Mother is telling us in this message to forgive. Regardless how much we forbear, it cannot be compared to what God forbears from us. It came to be realized that the Virgin was asking everyone to pray more so as to please the Father. 

The Fifth Apparition (the Fourth Message)

Thursday, March 24, 1983, at 9:30 p.m.

*My children,
My mission has ended.
That night, the Angel told Me:
“Blessed are thou amongst women.”
And I was only able to tell Him that “I am the Servant of the Lord.”
I am happy.
I Myself do not deserve to tell you: “Your sins are forgiven.”
But My God has said it.
Establish a church. I did not say: “Build a church.”
The Church that Jesus adopted is One Church, because Jesus is One.
The Church is the kingdom of Heaven on earth.
He who has divided it has sinned.
And he who has rejoiced from its division has also sinned.
Jesus built it.
It was small.
And when it grew, it became divided.
He who divided it has no love in him.
Gather!
I tell you: “Pray, pray, and pray again!”
How beautiful are My children when they kneel down, imploring.
Do not fear, I am with you.
Do not be divided as the great ones are.
You, yourselves, will teach the generations THE WORD of unity, love*

and faith.

Pray for the inhabitants of earth and Heaven.

The major mission of the Virgin became very clear in the above message. Soufanieh is a call to UNITY for Christians. This had already become the intuition of the Lord's will in the Soufanieh phenomenon. People would ask: "What is the Holy Virgin trying to do? Is she desiring to unify us?" Since Myrna was a Greek Catholic and Nicolas a Greek Orthodox it seemed a logical conclusion that the Holy Virgin was coming on a mission to unite.

The idea had become very popular among people in trying to understand what the Virgin was about. Until the above message, the Virgin had not stated explicitly her mission to Soufanieh. To unify her children was then already a popular idea of the reason for the Blessed Virgin's manifestations, including the use of the image of Soufanieh with the Christ Child as well as the apparitions and expressed messages.

On the evening of March 18, Nicolas had called Fr. Zahlaoui and said, "Father, please come!" He arrived and found large quantities of oil exuding from the Icon. All the people present were praying. Fr. Zahlaoui reported it to his bishop the next day. The oil continued to flow all that next day.

Myrna asked the priest, "Father, is there a feast today?" (During the first couple of years, oil exuded regularly during certain religious feasts: the Feasts of Jesus and Mary; feasts of some saints, like St. Luke, St. Joseph, etc. At first Fr. Zahlaoui thought the evening of March 18 was *not* a special feast. He forgot that March 19, which they were now entering at its vigil was the Feast of St. Joseph. For the Byzantine Church, it was also the Feast of the Holy Virgin of the Acathist, which is a very beautiful celebration.)

Myrna got a calendar and pointed out that it was the Feast of St. Joseph and the Feast of the Holy Virgin of the Acathist. Then Fr. Zahlaoui also recalled, "It's Fr. Malouli's birthday!"

Fr. Zahlaoui then wished Fr. Malouli "Happy Birthday" and left.

When the evening of March 24 arrived, Fr. Zahlaoui was at the church to watch a play. During the intermission, while he was speaking to the producer, a friend informed him, "Father, the Nazzours want to see you."

Arriving at their home, he discovered the people were on the rooftop terrace. He joined the kneeling people. Then he heard Myrna saying words that were clearly not coming from her but that she was repeating what she heard another say.

Always the Virgin begins with "My Children." We are truly the children of God by adoption through baptism and of the holy Mother Mary in the order of grace. Although the message was great, the people so closely involved began to worry that perhaps the phenomenon was going to end. "My mission has ended." They then were sad although happy about the message of unity. It was later proven true that Mary had

accomplished a mission but she would accomplish other missions.

Why does Mary say, "That night, the Angel told me." Were not the words "Blessed are thou among women" spoken by her cousin Elizabeth? Fr. Malouli worried that since the message had the *Angel* saying the words people could say it is not the Holy Virgin who is speaking. In some Arabic translations of the Gospels, the sentence comes from the angel. In other translations it comes from the mouth of Elizabeth. Fr. Zahlaoui found the translation used in their Mass celebrations agreeing with the message.

In reading the messages, people of the West would do well not to jump to quick conclusions and think the Virgin could never have said all the words about the Church reported here. We do well to keep in mind that heaven sees the hundreds of millions of Orthodox with a valid priesthood and a thousand years of separation from the See of Rome. We do well to keep in mind the mentalities of the East. We are all children of God and should be one. The Father sees a valid Eucharist being offered in Eastern Orthodox churches which also perpetuates the Sacrifice of the Cross, gives infinite worship, and brings the Real Presence of Jesus Christ, true God and true man.

Heaven wants to unite what Pope John Paul II has called the two lungs of the Church so that they breathe as one Body. Union will not come by throwing accusations at each other and saying, "We are right, you are wrong. You are responsible. You conform entirely to our side." Heaven is not asking for compromise of truth, but for humble and sincere hearts which love and unite.

We see in this message that heaven wants the Church not to wield power but truly become a servant. Politics and worldly power are not for the one Church of Jesus Christ. A church that wants power on earth and uses politics to attain its goals is not the way of God or his one Church, the Body of Jesus Christ.

"The Church is the kingdom of heaven on earth." Jesus built one Church, men are not to build churches or another church. Jesus took to Himself one Church. He wills that it remain One Church. He prayed for such unity at the Last Supper when he instituted the Sacrament of Unity, the Holy Eucharist, to give us himself and his Sacrifice.

Has there not been a sense of power and pride that has contributed to the divisions today? Also, to maintaining these divisions? "He who has divided it has sinned. And he who has rejoiced from its division has also sinned. Jesus built it. It was small. And when it grew, it became divided." How much pride and sense of the desire for power is keeping Christians apart?

The forgiveness of sin. Mary in humility cannot say, "Your sins are forgiven." But God in Jesus Christ has given this power to his priests. The Father wants sinners to repent, to confess, to have their sins forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. How many have ever repented or


confessed sins of division? Do we work and pray for unity, the end to divisions, in the Church, in families?

The kingdom of heaven exists already on earth in the Church. The baptized are in communion through the sacramental indelible sign or character of baptism, of Confirmation, through a common sharing in the life of God (sanctifying grace) with the souls in Purgatory and those in heaven. We should pray for the souls in Purgatory to be admitted soon to heavenly glory.

How amazed we would be if we could see the good holy angels which surround us each day. They praise God with us, especially before the Holy Eucharist and during its celebration. There is the Real Presence of Jesus in the tabernacle. His Cross is perpetuated at the Sacrifice of the Mass. Surely there is at least a moral presence of Mary when we are in the sacramental presence of Jesus Christ. Saints are present in our daily lives, more than we think, especially when we call upon them. They love for us to call upon them. We are of the same family.

You, yourselves (not just Myrna) will teach the generations THE WORD of unity, love and faith. Pray for the inhabitants of earth and heaven. It is not only the example of Myrna but the example of all sincere Christians open to love and unity who will teach.

Myrna has traveled to many countries to teach people about the need for unity, love and faith. From Soufanieh there is going out to the world, through replicas of the Icon, the call for unity and love among Christians and unity and love in their homes.

For this unity: "Gather! Pray, pray, and pray again." We should pray not only privately but gather with others and pray for these intentions. 

The Ecstasies

(First period: from Friday, October 28, 1983
to Tuesday, November, 26, 1985)

Ecstasies are mystical phenomena in which there are both interior and exterior elements. The invisible elements involve the mind being focused on a religious subject. The bodily aspect means that the senses are suspended. External influences or sensations have no influence on the soul. The person in ecstasy is oblivious of what is happening in one's physical surroundings.

In the case of Myrna the ecstasy is usually preceded by the exuding of oil from Myrna's hands, face, and neck. Oil comes also from her eyes and burns them when she is about to see Christ and go into ecstasy. This

stage is then followed by the ecstasy itself.

During the ecstasy Myrna does not see, hear or feel. Her body is stiff. She sees the Virgin or Jesus Christ, in the form of a Person made up of light—but she cannot distinguish our Lord's face. This is not the case with the Blessed Virgin whose face she can see.

The interior light that Myrna sees prevents her from seeing anything of the exterior world. Once from November 26–29, 1984, she remained in this state for 72 consecutive hours. Most of the ecstasies vary in time from five to 75 minutes. Most have been recorded on video tape.

The messages from these ecstasies present a summary of important Christian truths: Blessed Trinity; Creation; Incarnation; Divine Paternity; Mediation of the Virgin Mary; deserving the kingdom of heaven; repentance due to the Lord; necessity for constant prayer and fasting; sanctity of marriage; pressing appeal for the unity of the Church; the role of the laity in the work of unity.

Message from the Holy Virgin, Friday, October 28, 1983:

*Do not fear, all this is happening to glorify the name of God.
Do not fear, in you I shall educate My generation.*

Message from the Holy Virgin, Friday, November 4, 1983:

*Go down and tell them that you are My daughter before
being theirs. . . .
My heart has been consumed over My only Son.
It will not be consumed over all My children.*

[See chapter 3 and also p. 231 of this book to interpret the above message which does not translate well into English. It is not saying that Mary is unconcerned about us.]

Message from the Holy Virgin, Friday, November 25, 1983:

*This is all I want.
I have not come to separate.
Your married life will remain as it is . . .
Would you like to come to Me? . . . Come . . .
Your willingness (to come to Me) is enough.*

Message from Jesus Christ, Thursday, May 31, 1984 (Ascension Day):

On Holy Thursday of the Ascension in 1984 about 3:30 p.m. Fr. Malouli is conversing with some women while Myrna is in a calm state. Suddenly Myrna says to the priest:

I wish to see Jesus.

Why not, but it is necessary to pay the price.

What does that mean: to pay the price?

Perhaps it will be necessary for you to suffer, or something else, I don't know. I only know that it will be necessary to pay the price.

About 4 p.m., Myrna went into her room and lay on the bed. Oil appeared on her face, neck, and hands. Oil exuded from her eyes which caused terrible pains. A couple of people held her hands, thinking that she may have hurt herself; there was so much pain that was intolerable, causing Myrna to scream.

By 4:11, Myrna entered into ecstasy. She had a vision which she described in this fashion:

"I saw a mountain, a light, and at the summit I saw Jesus raising his right arm, while the other one remained alongside his body. . . ."

At 4:30, Myrna opened her eyes, moaned from the pain caused by the oil oozing from her eyes. Then at 4:45, she smiled and said:

"I saw him."

She entered into ecstasy again at 4:48 until 4:58. At 5:00, she dictated the following message verbatim from our Divine Lord:

My daughter,

I am the Beginning and the End.

I am Truth, Freedom and Peace.

My Peace, I give you.

*Your peace shall not depend on what people say, be it good or bad,
and think little of yourself.*

He who does not seek people's approval, and does not fear their disapproval, enjoys true peace.

And this is achieved through Me.

Live your life, contented and independent.

*The pains you have incurred for Me shall not break you. Rather,
rejoice. I am capable of rewarding you.*

Your hardships will not be prolonged, and your pains will not last.

Pray with adoration, because Eternal life is worth these sufferings.

Pray for God's will to be done in you, and say:

Beloved Jesus,

*Grant that I rest in You above all things,
above all creatures,*

*above all Your angels,
above all praise,
above all rejoicing and exultation,
above all glory and honor,
above all heavenly hosts,*

*For You alone are the Most High,
You alone are the Almighty and Good above all things.
May You come to me and relieve me,
and release me from my chains,
and grant me freedom,
because without You my joy is not complete,
without You my table is empty.
Only then will I come to say: Here I am, because you have
invited Me.*

The above prayer, taught by Jesus, is recited daily by thousands throughout the world. It has been produced on Holy Cards with the Image of Our Lady of Soufanieh. It is recited daily at prayer time at Soufanieh.

Message from the Holy Virgin, Friday, September 7, 1984:

The Virgin Mary entrusts Myrna with a secret: "This is between you and me until your death."

Myrna remembers from the message only the following words: "Live your life, but let not life prevent you from continuing to pray."

Message from the Holy Virgin, Wednesday, May 1, 1985:

*My children, assemble.
My heart is wounded.
Do not allow my heart to break because of your divisions.
My daughter, I shall give you a gift for your hardships.*

Message from the Holy Virgin (Hassake', Syria), Sunday, August 4, 1985:

*The Church is the kingdom of Heaven on earth.
He who has divided it has sinned.
And he who has rejoiced from its division has also sinned.
I am happy: do not fear, I am with you.*

In you I shall educate my generation.

Message from the Holy Virgin, Wednesday, August 14, 1985:

Happy anniversary.

It is always a feast for me whenever I see you all gathered together.

Your prayer is my feast.

Your faith is my feast.

The union of your hearts is my feast.

Message from Jesus Christ, Saturday, September 7, 1985:

It was the vigil of the Nativity of Mary, 7:18 p.m. Myrna entered her room to lie down. At 7:22, oil came from her eyes causing sharp pains. At 7:33, she entered into ecstasy. She saw a powerful light, and from the heart of this light she heard a voice saying:

I am the Creator.

I created her, so that she could create Me.

Rejoice from the joy of Heaven,

because the Daughter of the Father

and the Mother of God

and the Spouse of the Spirit is born.

Exult from the exultation of the earth, because your salvation is fulfilled.

Message from Jesus Christ, Tuesday, November 26, 1985 (Eve of the third anniversary of the phenomenon):

A massive crowd of people had come to the house of Soufanieh for this anniversary. People were devout; they were praying, also singing well-known hymns and spontaneous prayers were said. About 5 p.m. Myrna's hands, neck and face were covered with oil and for the first time, her feet were also covered with oil. Then her eyes oozed oil. She entered into ecstasy.

A physician, Dr. Abillam, performed several tests on Myrna's body during the ecstasy, with one of them causing harsh disapproval of people in attendance. He put a knife under her right index fingernail. Myrna did not react at all. She felt severe pain, however, when she came out of the ecstasy.

Myrna had requested that only priests be allowed to remain in her room during ecstasy. Myrna had a vision of Christ and He said to her:

My daughter,

Do you wish to be crucified or glorified?

Answer: Glorified.

Christ smiles and says:

Do you prefer to be glorified by the creature or the Creator?

Answer: by the Creator.

Christ: This is realized through Crucifixion.

*Because each time you look at the creatures,
the eyes of the Creator move away from you.*

*My daughter, I want you to apply yourself to praying and to humble
yourself.*

*He who humbles himself, God increases him in strength and in
greatness.*

*I was crucified out of love for you, and I want you to carry and bear
your cross for Me,*

*willingly, with love and patience, and (I want you) to await My
arrival.*

*He who participates in My suffering, I shall make him participate in
My glory. There is no salvation for the soul except through the
Cross.*

Do not fear, My daughter,

*I shall give you from My wounds enough to repay the debts of the
sinners.*

This is the source from which every soul may drink.

*And if My absence lasts, and the light disappears from you, do not
fear, this will be for My glorification.*

*Go to the land where corruption has prevailed, and remain in God's
peace.*

**(Second period: from Wednesday, November 26, 1986,
to Friday, August 14, 1987)**

**Message from Jesus Christ, Wednesday, November 26, 1986 (Eve of
the fourth anniversary of the phenomenon):**

My daughter,

How beautiful is this place.

I shall build My kingdom and My peace in it.

I give My heart to (all of) you so that I may obtain your heart(s).

Your sins are forgiven, because you look towards Me.

And he who looks towards Me, I shall paint My image in him.

*Woe to him who represents My image but has ransomed My blood.
 Pray for the sinners.
 Because for each word of prayer, I shall spill a drop of My blood on one
 of the sinners.
 My daughter, let not earthly matters trouble you, because through My
 wounds you will gain eternity.
 I want to renew My Passion, and I want you to accomplish your mis-
 sion.
 You will not be able to enter Heaven unless you have accomplished
 your mission on earth.
 Go in peace, and tell My children to come to Me any time, and not only
 when I renew the feast of My Mother.
 Because I am with them at all times.*

Message from Jesus Christ, Saturday, April 18, 1987 (Holy Saturday):

*I have given you a sign to glorify Me.
 Continue along this path and I am with you.
 For if you do not. . . .*

Message from Jesus Christ, Thursday, May 28, 1987 (Ascension Day):

Love one another and pray with faith.

Message from Jesus Christ (Maad, Lebanon), Wednesday, July 22, 1987:

*Do not fear, My daughter, in you I shall educate My generation.
 Pray, pray, and pray again!
 And if you pray, say: "O Father, through the merits of Your beloved
 Son's wounds, save us."*

Message from Jesus Christ, Friday, August 14, 1987:

*My daughter,
 She is My Mother from whom I was born.
 He who honors her, honors Me.
 He who denies her, denies Me.
 And he who asks something from her, obtains because she is My*

Mother.

(A Turning Point: from Monday, September 7, 1987,
to Thursday, November 26, 1987)

Message from Jesus Christ, Monday, September 7, 1987:

**Mary, is it not you that I have chosen,
the quiet girl with a heart full of love and sympathy?
I have noticed that you cannot endure anything for Me.
I shall give you a chance to choose.
Know that if you lose Me, you will lose the prayers of all those
around you, and know that bearing the Cross is unavoidable.*
* Myrna's real name is Mary.

Message from Jesus Christ, Thursday, November 26, 1987 (Eve of the
fifth anniversary of the phenomenon):

*My daughter,
I am pleased that you have chosen Me, not only in words.
I want you to join My Heart to your gentle heart so that our hearts
will unite. By doing so, you will save suffering souls.
Do not hate anyone, so that your heart not be blinded by your love of
Me.
Love everyone as you have loved Me, especially those who have hated
you and have spoken evil of you,
because in so doing you will obtain glory.
Continue in your life as wife, mother and sister.
Do not worry about the difficulties and the pains that will afflict
you.
I want you to be stronger than they—because I am with you—
otherwise you will lose My heart.
Go and preach to the whole world and tell them without fear to
work for unity.
Man is not condemned for the fruit of his hands, but for the fruit of
his heart.*

*My peace in your heart will be a blessing for you and for all those
who have cooperated with you. ~*

**(Third period: from Sunday, November 26, 1986
to Friday, August 14, 1987)**

**Message from Jesus Christ (Los Angeles, U.S.A.), Sunday, August 14,
1988:**

*My children,
My peace I gave you, but what have you given Me?
You are My Church and your heart belongs to Me, unless this heart
has a god other than Me.
I told you: The Church is the kingdom of Heaven on earth.
He who has divided it has sinned.
And he who has rejoiced from its division has also sinned.
It is easier for Me (to accept) that an infidel believe in My name
than that those who pretend to have faith and love swear by
My name.
It is in God alone that you must place your pride.
Pray for the sinners who forgive in My name, and for those who
deny My Mother.
My children, I have given you all of My time, give Me a part of
your time.*

**Message from Jesus Christ (Damascus, Syria), Wednesday, September
7, 1988:**

*My daughter,
I told you to overcome all your difficulties and know that you have
endured only a few.
Tell My children that it is from them that I demand unity, and I do
not want it from those who act as if they were working for
unity.
Go and preach.
And wherever you go, I am with you.*

**Message from Jesus Christ (Maad, Lebanon), Monday, October 10,
1988:**

*My daughter Mary,
Why are you afraid even though I am with you?*

*You must speak loudly to tell the word of truth about He who created
you, so that My strength may be manifested in you.
And I will give you from My wounds so that you will forget the
hardships that people inflict upon you.
Do not choose your path, because I have laid it out before you. 🌀*

(Fourth period: from Saturday, November 26, 1988,
to Monday, November 26, 1990)

**Message from Jesus Christ, Saturday, November 26, 1988 (Eve of the
sixth anniversary of the phenomenon):**

*My children,
Is everything you do out of love for Me?
Do not say: What shall I do, because this is My work.
You must fast and pray, because through prayer you face My truth
and you confront all enemies.
Pray for those who have forgotten the promise they made Me because
they will say:
Why did I not feel your presence, O Lord, even though You were with
me?
All I want is for you all to gather in Me as I am in each of you.
As for you, My daughter, I will leave you.
Do not fear if you do not hear My voice for a long time, but instead,
be strong and let your tongue be a sword that speaks in My
name.
And be sure that I am with you and with you all.*

**Message from the Holy Virgin (Los Angeles, U.S.A.), Friday, August
18, 1989:**

*Do not fear, my daughter.
All this is happening to glorify the name of God.
Rejoice, rather, because God has allowed you to come to me so that I
can tell you:
Do not worry about what people say about you, but remain always
in peace, because the creatures turn towards me through you.
Tell everyone to pray more because they need prayer to please the
Father.*

May the blessings of God be upon you and upon all those who have cooperated with you out of love for Him.

Message from the Holy Virgin, Sunday, November 26, 1989 (Eve of the seventh anniversary of the phenomenon):

My children,

Jesus told Peter, You are the rock, and on it, I shall build My church. As for me, I tell you now: You are the heart in which Jesus will build his UNICITY.

I want you to devote your prayers to peace, from now until the commemoration of the Resurrection.

[Perhaps we can see in the above message that as the spirit of love of unity grows from Soufanieh throughout the world, Christians themselves will come to realize that the will of God is for their unity. They will request, as they grow in love for one another in Jesus Christ, perhaps even demand, unity. Does it not appear that a revolution for unity in the Church, among all Christians, has started in peace and harmony in and around the Virgin's House of Soufanieh?]

Message from Jesus Christ, Saturday, April 14, 1990 (Holy Saturday):

My children,

You, yourselves, will teach the generations THE WORD of unity, love and faith.

I am with you.

But you, My daughter, will not hear My voice until the Feast (of Easter) has been unified.

[Notice: Jesus keeps his word and does not speak to Myrna in message until 11 years later, not until Holy Saturday, April 14, 2001. In 2001 the Orthodox and Catholics and other Christians celebrated Easter at the same time, for the Julian and Gregorian calendars coincided for Easter that year.]

Message from the Holy Virgin (Braaschaatt, Belgium), Wednesday, August 15, 1990:

My children,

Pray for peace, and especially in the East, because you are all brothers in Christ.

Message from the Holy Virgin, Monday, November 26, 1990 (Eve of the eighth anniversary of the phenomenon):

Do not fear, my daughter, if I tell you that you are seeing me for the last time until the feast (of Easter) is unified.

Therefore, tell my children:

Do they want or not to see and remember the wounds of my Son in you?

If it does not pain them to see that you are suffering doubly, I myself, am a Mother, and it pains me to see my Son suffering repeatedly.

Remain in peace, remain in peace, my daughter.

Come, so that He may give you peace, so that you may spread it among the people.

As for the oil, it will continue to manifest itself on your hands to glorify my Son Jesus, whenever He wishes and wherever you go.

We are with you and with everyone who wishes the Feast (of Easter) to be One.

[Now we have the Blessed Mother saying also that there will be this eleven year interval. Myrna does continue her mission throughout the world and oil does exude from her during these years. The oil from the Icon will exude only in Holy Week 2001. Our Lord and our Blessed Mother in this way are most emphatic on the importance of Christian Unity. Our Lord is suffering constantly because of the divisions among Christians. It pains the Blessed Virgin Mother to see her Son suffering over these divisions.]

Message given to Myrna by Jesus Christ at Soufanieh on Holy Saturday, April 14, 2001, at 2:50 p.m.:

My children:

I have given you a sign for My glorification. Stay on your path, and I am with you. Otherwise, I will close the gates of heaven in your faces [in your faces, rendered "to you" in English]. But here is Mother suffering . . . praying . . . saying to me: O Lord, You are love in its totality!


And I say: Do not despair, O Gate of Heaven, because I love them and I want them to respond to this love with giving.

My children:

Strive to see yourselves as you truly are, and to see the extent of your

*faithfulness in achieving the unity of heart among yourselves.
 Adorn yourself with patience and wisdom. Don't be afraid if you fail.
 Stay firm in hope. Trust Me. I will not abandon those who do My
 will. As for you, My daughter, be careful, and be armed with
 My grace. Be patient, wise, and humble.
 Offer up these pains with joy.
 I have said to you, Your pains will not last long.
 Look to Me. You shall find peace and rest. It is I who strengthen you,
 I who desert [throw] you,
 and I who pick you up to lead you to the joy of heaven.
 Persevere in prayer, and let your fasting be accompanied by medita-
 tion and solitude, and you will hear My voice in your heart.
 Trust Me. I will not abandon you, your family, or anyone who par-
 ticipated with you in My name and for My sake.*

**Message given to Myrna by Jesus Christ at Soufanieh on November
 26, 2001:**

*How beautiful is the family whose emblem is unity, love and faith.
 Its path is My path and My Mother is its support.
 My children, I am bestowing Myself upon you.
 The act of adoration, meditation, thanksgiving and spiritual guid-
 ance rejoice Me. But the whole is incomplete without your
 unity at the altar.
 I am giving you My Body and My Blood as a proof of My fidelity
 and love. Receive from Me this sacrament with trust and
 faith, because this sacrament comforts you, provides you with
 strength and wisdom and increases you in grace.
 Difficult days are coming. Turmoil within the Church.
 He who does not enjoy true peace, will be in danger due to division.
 Do not surrender to failure, do not worry about the judgment
 of others on you, do not defend yourselves and seek only what I
 have prepared for you.
 I am the One who takes care of you because you are the work of My
 hands.
 Prove your love to Me, because through love I walk at your side and
 through the sacraments I unite Myself to you. And do not forget
 that I am the reason of your existence on earth and I am the
 reason of your happiness in Heaven. *



(Top) Fr. Elias Zahlaoui with the author at the Virgin's House before the miraculous Icon. (Bottom) Fr. Zahlaoui holding up an enlarged Icon of Soufanieh for veneration at one of many prayer gatherings. Myrna is beside him.

Chapter 11

Soufanieh Is for Now and the Future



THROUGHOUT THE WORLD many communities have evolved from the Community of Soufanieh. In spite of all the turmoil in the Middle East, God and His Mother are speaking and acting in the Middle East, especially through Soufanieh. God wants to build His Kingdom and His Peace in the very part of the world where He began to establish His Kingdom on earth.

Our Lord is looking to the future. He speaks of what he will do with and for those who cooperate. Jesus made the promise to Myrna: "My peace in your heart will be a blessing, for you and for all those who have cooperated with you." For now, we are asked to pray and fast for unity. We must please our Lord Himself. He is saying through the Holy Virgin, "Tell everyone to pray more because they need prayer to please the Father."

The most important thing now is to preach Jesus Christ through our lives. What a poor image many Christians have given of true Christianity to the world. When many millions of Christians begin living a true Christian life, they are preparing for the evangelization of the world.

God chose a very young woman, Myrna, only 18 at the time, to begin in the Middle East a renewal of this long work. It would seem that God's intention was to use her for a long time. The messages are ongoing, perhaps for decades to come. The Holy Virgin has asked that we pray for unity and for peace. No one who truly loves can avoid praying for unity and peace.

The first time the Holy Virgin specifically and explicitly asked for peace was on November 26, 1989. This was after having said, "My children, Jesus told Peter, You are the rock, and on it, I shall build my Church. As for me, I tell you now, you are the heart in which Jesus will build his unicity." Then the Virgin added: "I want you to devote your prayers to peace, from now until the commemoration of the Resurrection." A short while after this request, Lebanon degenerated into a fratricidal war among Maronites as never seen before.



Fr. Elias Zahlaoui

Fr. Elias Zahlaoui speaks of the second time that the Holy Virgin requested prayers for peace:

“That was in Belgium, in Braaschaatt, at the Church of the Sacred Heart, during Myrna’s ecstasy on August 15, 1990. The Holy Virgin said this sole sentence: ‘My children, pray for peace, and especially in the East, because you are all brothers in Christ. All brothers in Christ.’ As if to say to Belgians and Westerners: ‘You are brothers of your Arab

brothers.’ Myrna was there; she is an Arab. Nicolas was there; he is an Arab. Fr. Boulos Fadel is an Arab; he was there. ‘You are all brothers in Christ.’ Are all men brothers in Christ? Indeed so! St. Paul said it also. Even before our baptism, we are brothers, because we were redeemed by the Blood of the Lord. To me, a Muslim is a brother in Christ, even though he is a Muslim, because he is also called, in some way, to be redeemed by the Blood of the Lord and to enter into the brotherhood that Jesus has brought upon us.”

Fr. Elias continues: “Thus, whether I understand it or not, whether I like it or not, the Holy Virgin tells us: ‘You are all brothers in Christ.’ Therefore, stop killing each other. Stop fighting each other. Stop committing injustices. How can peace be accomplished if I pray but then act contrary to peace? Consequently, along with prayer, I must act such that peace be established. If I am in conflict with somebody and I pray for peace, I must start by reconciling with this person. And if I have committed an injustice against someone, I must correct this injustice, to be in peace with this person, and then with myself, and therefore with the Lord.

“For if the Holy Virgin is inviting the whole world to pray for peace, and especially in the East, it is because there is something wrong. And we know that something is wrong. We know that the world is unfair. We know that the logic of the power in the world is a logic of violence, and not a logic of love. The logic of violence is not a logic of God. But what comes first nowadays is the logic of violence, of power. The strongest has consumed the weakest.

“And the worst thing is that this is done in the name of the law, which is supposed to regulate the relationships between men, in order to have relationships of equality, justice and love. The worst thing is that now, the great powerful countries brandish international law, and in the name of the international authorities who are supposed to protect the weakest people, they brandish international law to crush the poor people. Why? In the name of what? And who will tell these people and these powerful countries to stop acting against God? If the Church is incapable of doing that, who is going to say it?

“It is sad that the Western world, which advocates so much violence, and which also advocates injustice in the name of the law, is considered, in the eyes of our Muslim brothers, to be a Christian world. There are so many things to review. I understand why Jesus or the Holy Virgin says to Myrna: ‘Tell everyone to pray more because they need prayer to please the Father.’ If we do not pray, how shall we change?

“And if we pray and mold a god to our own image, which will have nothing to do with Jesus, then we allow ourselves all eccentricities and injustices in the name of justice. Whether we like it or not, the Holy Virgin reminds us: ‘My children, you are all brothers in Christ!’” [Above quotations are from *Remember God* by Fr. Elias Zahlaoui, 1991.]

God always knows what is best for His people and to accomplish the ends for His glory and the salvation of mankind. We have seen in this book that from 1990, both Jesus and the Blessed Virgin Mother had a ten-year period in giving messages through Myrna.

It was on Holy Saturday, 1990, that Jesus spoke to Myrna two sentences: “My children, you will teach the generations the WORD of unity, love and faith. I am with you. But you, my daughter, will not hear my voice until the Feast has been unified.” Myrna would not see Jesus in an ecstasy. The first reaction for the Soufanieh people was to think that if Jesus disappeared, yet the Virgin would continue to appear.

But the Holy Virgin gave a different message to Myrna on two occasions in 1990. On August 15, 1990, Myrna was in Belgium from August 9 to September 2. On the evening of August 15, after the divine liturgy, Myrna was praying with Fr. Van der Voort near the altar when she had an ecstasy. She saw Jesus, but Jesus did not say anything, yet Jesus blessed the crowd. Then Myrna saw Mary who said: “My children, pray for peace, and especially in the East, because you are all brothers in Christ.” On November 26, 1990, the eighth anniversary of Soufanieh, the Virgin informed Myrna that she too would not appear until the Feast of Easter was unified.

Heaven kept its word. From that date until Holy Week 2001 there were no stigmata, no ecstasies, no exuding of oil from the original miraculous Icon of Soufanieh. The oozing of oil from Myrna’s hands, however, occurred many, many times during the 11 years and throughout the world. The fact that this happened in many countries indicates Soufanieh

is for the world. During these 11 years, the Lord continued to give the sign of His presence among the people by oil exuding from Myrna. During these years oil flowed from some images as well, but not the original one at Soufanieh.

The phenomenon of Soufanieh is a call to prayer. As Fr. Elias Zahlaoui points out: "In Arabic, the word 'prayer' comes from a root meaning 'to link' or 'to bond.' 'Assilat,' relating, 'assalat,' prayer. 'Assalat,' in Arabic, is prayer, which is 'relating to God.' It is the relationship between man and God. And if this relationship does not exist, everything crumbles and nothing holds. God is on one side, and man is on the other. Therefore, if the Lord enjoys giving us so many signs, this is really to help us re-create this link of prayer which was, or may be, gradually loosening. God desires to re-create this link of prayer, to take us back gently to himself.

"Therefore, the essence of Soufanieh has always been prayer. People responded with a spontaneous and massive outpouring of prayer, since the first minute, and right until now."

Fr. Zahlaoui points out that during the periods when nothing was happening, like between November 1985 and November 1986, yet, one thing continued and that was prayer.

Especially in Aleppo, Syria, since January 24, 1988, there have been manifestations of the Soufanieh phenomenon. An image of Our Lady of Soufanieh has exuded oil in the house of an Armenian family where the husband is Orthodox and the wife is Catholic. Her name is also Mary. In other homes of Aleppo the same has happened.

Fr. Zahlaoui says there is a wave of spiritual renewal which is difficult to talk about or understand if one has not experienced it. There has been a real increase in prayer in Aleppo. Churches have had to open for some hours of worship every day. Many families are living a great spiritual renewal. This is true especially about Syria, but the priest has witnessed similar results in France.

Prayer is the most important phenomenon of what is coming out of Soufanieh. While the present papal nuncio is most cautious, it was encouraging to hear him say that he understands it is drawing people to prayer and that is good. The return of man to God, through prayer, in thanksgiving, reparation, love, while awaiting to meet the Lord in eternity, is always precious and praiseworthy. There have been occasions when, after the oil had exuded from the Icon, people prayed and sang spiritual songs for hours without realizing the time.

Fr. Adel Khoury, a Lebanese priest, dean of the faculty of theology of Münster in Germany, has put it this way: "At Soufanieh, we feel as if we are with God. The Holy Virgin is there. And when I hear people praying, I can feel that these people are talking to the Holy Virgin who is with them. They are not talking to someone who is far from them. She is there, it's as simple as that."

Fr. Elias adds: "At Soufanieh, the Holy Virgin gave us an extraordinary lesson of service. She is all beauty. She is the Queen of the Heavens and the world. And in spite of that, she knows that she is the servant of the Lord. She came to Soufanieh to prepare the way for the Lord, somewhat as she prepared it in Palestine. And when the Lord arrived, she disappeared. And that is how it happened at Soufanieh. We realized that only a few years later."

As the author of this book, and director of the *Fatima Family Apostolate*, I have often said that from the beginning of my annual pilgrimages to Fatima in 1974 I experienced the presence of Mary, the Mother of God, in the Cova da Iria. After a week at Soufanieh I said, "At Soufanieh I experienced the presence of both Mary and Jesus." Of course, at Fatima, I knew in faith the Real Presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, at Mass, etc. But Soufanieh was like experiencing a presence of Jesus and Mary together at the same time.

While I was doing research for this book, I was frustrated with the message given by the Virgin, during the second ecstasy (Friday, November 4, 1983; see p. 214). Mary had spoken in Arabic dialect, a strong message full of both power and tenderness. On that day, after Mary had said to Myrna: "Go down and tell them that you are my daughter before being theirs." . . . The Virgin added immediately: "My heart has been consumed over my only Son. It will not be consumed over all my children."

As already indicated in this book, I sought help from the people at Soufanieh in understanding this message. Then I learned from the writings of Fr. Elias Zahlaoui the following:

"As such, the translation in its literal sense is not what is meant. It gives the impression that in this sentence, the Holy Virgin is saying: 'I wash my hands of my children.' But, in Arabic dialect used by Mary here, this means clearly, 'If I was unable to save my Son from death [on the Cross] and my heart has been consumed over his sufferings, now, I am going to do my utmost to save you.' It is exactly the contrary of what a literal translation can mean. "My heart has been consumed over my only Son." The poor Virgin was at the foot of the cross, absolutely incapable of doing anything [to prevent Jesus' sufferings and death]. But once crowned Queen of the Heavens and the Earth, and once in Heaven after her Assumption, she became the all-powerful. Isn't she the 'All powerful supplicant,' as referred to by one of the saints? And she wants to do her utmost to save her children. Therefore, she is not going to let her children get lost by their own fault or because of others. She is going to do her utmost. This is where we truly touch the divine motherhood. And the motherhood of Mary towards all her children.

"Thereafter, on August 14, 1987, Jesus gave us a message that confirms this full power of Mary over the heart of God. This sentence says a lot about the place of the Holy Virgin in the heart of the Trinity: 'My daughter, She is my Mother from whom I was born. He who honors her

honors me. He who denies her denies me. And he who asks something from her obtains because she is my Mother. . . .”

Muslims do recognize Mary as very great and special. The hearts of both Muslims and Christians in the East are open to the Holy Virgin. They don't say “Virgin Mary” but simply “Virgin.” For most people it is the Holy Virgin who is at Soufanieh so they could accept this. When Jesus appeared afterward, after the Holy Virgin, and gave special messages through Myrna, the way was prepared for Jesus and the people accepted him. Tens of thousands of copies of booklets on the messages were distributed to people and were gladly accepted.

Pope John Paul II during his long reign as pope repeatedly spoke against the consumerist mentality. It has affected not only the West but the East as well. In the East too science has been held in such high esteem as if it held the answers to all man's future. Youth in the East have been deeply affected also by Western philosophy and atheism and science.

It would be so easy for youth of both the East and the West to think that religions have been the cause of divisions, even wars. There is the temptation to exclude God and accept only the human values as known through science and philosophy. Power and money become the great temptation, the “god” of the modern man.

Fr. Zahlaoui offers accounts of conversions through Soufanieh. He even tells about Fr. Boulos Fadel, who is now one of Myrna's spiritual directors. He tells how, as a young priest from Damascus, he would come to pray at Soufanieh, even though there were priests who were hostile and stubborn and closed to Soufanieh, even in Damascus. Father saw one young priest (Fr. Fadel) come regularly to pray at Soufanieh. That was three-and-a-half years after Soufanieh began.

One day Fr. Elias asked Fr. Boulos, “What brought you to Soufanieh?” He answered, “Father, I simply thought about the fact that people have been praying here for three-and-a-half years, so I told myself that these people are surely not stupid. They must have seen a sign. So I wanted to pray with them.” Fr. Elias encouraged him to continue coming.

Today, as already described in this book, Fr. Fadel, who has by now witnessed a lot of things, is most active with Soufanieh. He even travels with Myrna. Fr. Elias knew at the time that Fr. Malouli was getting very old and he himself was weakening with age too. So Fr. Elias finally said to him: “Prepare yourself, Boulos, to take over from us. You will certainly have a great mission at Soufanieh.”

When the summer of 1990 came and Fr. Franz Van der Voort had asked Myrna and Nicolas to come to Belgium, Fr. Malouli wanted to stay in Damascus. He was already scheduled with other work. Fr. Boulos was the only priest available and so he traveled with Myrna and Nicolas. That is how he started leaving Damascus to assist Myrna and the mission of Soufanieh.

There are some priests in Damascus too who refuse to listen to anything in favor of Soufanieh. Fr. Elias tells about three different priests, two are Greek Catholic and one is a Jesuit. He challenged them: "At least come and see! See what is going on. You do not have the right to refuse *a priori*. Then you will be able to tell people whether this is all an act, or trickery. You don't have the right. One day, the Lord will ask you for an explanation. What will you answer him when you will be facing him and he says (these are the words I used): 'I knocked on the doors of Damascus and you had the mission of spreading the Good News. What did you do?' Are you going to answer him, 'My superiors were barricaded in their ivory towers? I waited for them to tell me what I had to do. But if our superiors continue to barricade themselves in their ivory towers, who will bring them the right information to help them understand what is going on, who, if not you? If not me?' Unfortunately, until now, some clergymen still stubbornly refuse the phenomenon."

Such is how Fr. Elias Zahlaoui sees the situation, he who at the very first had to be convinced himself. But he soon went. He saw. And since that he has given testimony. Fr. Zahlaoui has had a very great influence on the author of this volume who also went and saw for himself.

One can hardly imagine any new excuses for people not accepting Soufanieh. It reminds one of the Gospel accounts of the scribes and pharisees who did not want to believe in Jesus Christ. They sought natural reasons, or even diabolic reasons, even after Jesus performed miracles like giving sight to the man born blind, and raising Lazarus from the dead.

There have been those who have attributed the phenomenon of Soufanieh to the devil. How can that be when the many years of oil, stigmata, etc., have brought widespread prayer from thousands. Is the devil drawing people to prayer? To Jesus and his Mother? And the great devotion one sees at Soufanieh and in its extension throughout the world?

Some speak of a physiological or psychological, or physical explanation to all this phenomena. But they offer no proof to that, just excuses. Some have even said that Myrna must take some special pills to make her body exude olive oil. Well, would the images take pills for that purpose too? And this not only in Syria, but in Lebanon, in France, in America, Canada, etc.

The general reaction of people has been to respond in prayer. That is what is great. Fr. Malouli used to say that among the people there has been sort of an evangelical experience. At first they are shocked when they witness the oil. Then there is a reaction of prayer in humility. Slowly the phenomenon enters the heart. Union with God in prayer. That is the purpose. And such an accomplishment among more and more will lead to holy family life and Christian unity.

Each evening I was in Soufanieh I saw the people come for deep prayer, including the Rosary and the prayers of Soufanieh. They

participated very devotedly in the Sacrifice of the Mass which I offered each day before the original Icon of Soufanieh. They were very devout in receiving the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. "The finger of God is here."

Christians do not have the right to remain divided. They have the obligation to pray and work for unity. In the East they see that the unification of Easter will contribute much toward the unification of Orthodox and Catholics. From the unity of the Feast the rest will follow.

For Good Friday, March 29, 2002, youth in Damascus visited all the bishops of all the rites to inform them about the brochure calling for unity of the Feast of Easter. They asked for the bishops' blessing in their intention to distribute the brochures. Patriarch Laham of the Melkite Catholics was very kind and encouraged the youth. He promised that in the year 2003 Easter for his people would be celebrated at the same time as the Orthodox. The youth went to various cities and villages with the same request, sometimes getting enthusiastic receptions, other times mixed reactions.

A divided Church cannot testify effectively to the world. At Soufanieh the Lord has promised to rebuild the Church himself. For this the Lord wants us to pray and serve with humility. Through us united in prayer and love Jesus Christ will rebuild His One Church. The Church is the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth and it will be His Kingdom and His peace. Jesus will realize his unicity. Man on his own power and initiative cannot do it. It will come from Jesus Christ and the intercession of the Holy Virgin and our opening our hearts to prayer and love of God and one another.

God has not forgotten that Christianity remained the religion of the majority in Syria until the 14th or 15th century. Under the pressure of the Turkish regime, a large number of Christian Syrians gradually drifted into Islam. By 1990, Syrian Christians represented about 12-15 percent of the population of 13 million. These Christians were divided into Catholic and Orthodox with a majority being Orthodox, plus some Protestant communities, even many sects, including Jehovah Witnesses.

God has not forgotten that Syria is one of the cradles of Christianity. Antioch was once one of the most flourishing cities of apostolic Christianity. God is speaking today through Soufanieh. It is not only for Christians of Syria to listen, but for all of us to listen and to respond.

From the end of the third century, Christians from the East and the West have had a power-to-power relationship. There were two poles competing with each other, Rome and Constantinople. Constantinople in the East tried to take full control of the Eastern empire. It placed unbearable taxes and ecclesiastical domination on large populations, who to reject its yoke, created separate Churches and gave the guise of theological differences for the excuse. It has taken centuries to discover that

the theological conflicts were really political and ethnic conflicts.

The difficult relationships between the Christians of the East and those of the West were already difficult long before the arrival of Islam. It was their lack of unity that aided the rise of Islam. Mohammed died in 632. By 636 Muslim armies were in Syria and throughout the Middle East. The dissensions between the Christians aided the spread of Islam rapidly throughout the Middle East and it even spread to the Western countries.

The development of the Turkish empire, headquartered in Constantinople in 1453, was a long time threat to the West, and it confirmed the separation of the Eastern and Western Churches. That separation accelerated with the centuries. Eastern Christians, totally separated from the Western Christians, turned in on themselves. With their past history, deeply influenced by suspicion and hostilities, they have not been prepared to unite together. Each Church community tries to preserve itself to survive rather than seeing all Christians as one family of God in Christ, brothers and sisters all.

The history and division among Christians in the East is not understood by the average Catholic in the United States, or the West, for that matter. When Latin missionaries arrived in Syria, Lebanon and the entire Middle East, they created a Christian circle that appeared to constitute a core of unity with Rome, a bridge between Rome and Eastern Orthodoxy. This finally led to the creation of different Eastern Churches related to Rome, which achieved the full division of the Eastern Orthodox Church already divided within itself.

The divisions within each of the Greek, Syrian and Armenian Orthodox communities led to the creation of Greek, Syrian and Armenian Catholic communities. Most of the Orthodox of the Middle East hide a fear of everything Catholic. Suspicions underlie relationships.

Relationships between the East and the West have been dominated by a dialectic of force, power, all of which has had nothing to do with Christianity. Countries considering themselves in terms of power remove themselves from the consciousness of the only real power which is God. Consider then what image Christians of the West convey to the East which has a Muslim majority.

The phenomenon of Soufanieh is happening in the midst of the Arab world surrounded by an environment of a Muslim majority. The powerful countries of the West often look with disdain upon the Arab world. Soufanieh is saying to Christian minorities in the East, do not leave. The Lord is giving you a sign. "Stay to bring the full Gospel, to bring the fullness of faith—who is Jesus Christ—to the East, to Muslims, to all peoples. Bring this truth of Jesus who is the Truth, by your lives."

Fr. Elias Zahlaoui tells the story of a man who was tempted to leave Syria for the United States where most of his family was already. Then he learned of Soufanieh. He thought and prayed and concluded: "I have

no right to leave Damascus at a time when the Lord came to stay here for good." That man, said Fr. Zahlaoui, really understood the events of Soufanieh, that the Lord is telling us: "My children, I am here. Stay with me. I am with you. It is not a time to leave. Two thousand years ago, I told my children: 'Go and preach,' now, to you also, I say 'Preach!' And if, as far as we can judge, the Lord has maintained the presence of a Christian minority in the Arab world against all odds, this is certainly for a mission. He entrusted us with this mission two thousand years ago. Unfortunately, we have let him down. Now, I am sure that the Lord is saying to us: 'My children, begin your mission.'"

The struggle in the East is dealing also with the invasion of social, intellectual, political and scientific conditions and ideas and ways based on Western life. This means the young people, who are the future of the Church, under this influence, could find themselves completely out of touch with the Christian religion.

The West, by and large, does not realize sufficiently what we have tried to describe here; or it just ignores it. People do not bother to measure the extent of the exodus of the Christians, especially from Palestine under the Israeli oppression. Palestinians emigrate, Christians even more than the Muslims. Christians have unfortunately counted too much on human elements than on the Lord. They love their country but they leave. Their endurance and patience seemingly is broken.

With this all too brief summary, readers hopefully will understand why through Soufanieh, the Lord is saying: "My children, I am here. Stay with me."

Hopefully, in this final chapter then, we can come to appreciate that the phenomenon of Soufanieh is not to entertain. The Lord is addressing especially the Church of the Middle East, through the Church of Damascus. The Lord wants Christians to look to the future. Jesus' messages speak about the future.


The verbs that Jesus uses are in the future tense. The Churches of the Middle East, unfortunately, are stuck in their past. They seem to fear that to drop the past means to lose the present and the future. But the Lord is in this and they must put their trust in him. God is not bound down by time. All is present to God. In eternity only *now* is the reality. Still God works with man in man's time upon earth. We must put on, as St. Paul said, "the mind of Jesus Christ." St. Paul said, "Let this mind be in you which is also in Jesus Christ." And St. Paul went forth to evangelize the nations. As the Lord called St. Paul for this in the area of Damascus, he is calling again today.

The Church while being from the past is not presently for the past. Jesus has not remained in the past. Jesus is God-Man come for all generations. The death of Jesus on the Cross was followed by the Resurrection and Pentecost. Soufanieh is asking Christians to look to the future Resurrection and the action of the Holy Spirit NOW. The Holy

Spirit is the Soul of the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ. Openness to the Spirit leads to unity.

The Church, both of the East and the West, must not turn in on itself. We have seen the Western Church, after the Second Vatican Council, do so, but not because of the Council. The Council which introduced authentic renewal became the occasion for some to work for non-authentic “renewal” which only divided.

We have seen clergy and others of the West get caught up in all kinds of useless and distracting debates: Should priests be celibate? Should ordination of women be permitted by the Church? We’ve seen many people dissent from the teachings of the Church on artificial birth control which the Church has always condemned and which Muslims by and large don’t practice as they believe in having children. We’ve seen the crisis of faith affecting family life, and the sacredness of indissoluble marriage.

Clergy who permitted themselves to become caught up in such thinking as the dissenters promote have too often lacked spiritual lives. As this book goes to print, in the United States, a relatively small percentage of priests, perhaps three or four percent, yet a very significant number have caused grave scandal to the Church which has also had to deal with civil law actions. If all the clergy and the faithful by and large were truly living a Christ-like life, which the Second Vatican Council called for, a great Catholic moment could have been realized to bring many more Christians into one family, one Church of Jesus Christ. 

God can do great and marvelous things, even things affecting the universal Church with a small beginning, and with little things. Jesus lived physically in the Middle East and he started in a small way. Those who study and pray with Soufanieh in mind discover that the Divine Will is expressing Itself there to build something strong and lasting. The Lord is concerned about His Kingdom and His Peace. The Lord came to the world in the Incarnation, “the Word was made flesh” and the Word is still flesh in us as He is glorified in the flesh in heaven. The Lord counts on human beings, one with Jesus in his Incarnation. God has started to rebuild his one Church again through Soufanieh, not that the Church in essence was ever destroyed, but many of its members became and are divided. God counts on the community of Soufanieh and the many Soufanieh communities evolving throughout the world.

Fr. Zahlaoui says: “Indeed, I have to keep what the Lord has given me through history. I have to respect Tradition. But to do what the Jews did with the Law and the Sabbath, to make them equal to God, and to go even beyond that, by saying, as some Pharisees, that God teaches the Law, is to put God under the Law. And this is absolutely a disastrous inconsistency for the Church. Nobody does it consciously. But we live

this in a personal or collective state of unawareness. And that will turn against the Church and against the people in the midst of which the Lord has placed us. The Church cannot remain turned in on itself or closed off from others. It must open. It must open at all costs; otherwise it will die.”

Remember the words of Jesus to Myrna: “My peace in your heart will be a blessing for you and for all those who have cooperated with you.” That is a promise for the future. Now we are to pray and love one another from the heart. “My peace in your heart will be a blessing for you and for all those who have cooperated with you.” This should serve as a light to face all difficulties. Through the Virgin Jesus is saying: “Tell everyone to pray more because they need prayer to please the Father.”

After having said to Myrna on November 26, 1987: “Go and preach to the whole world and tell them without fear to work for unity,” Jesus also said: “Man is not condemned for the fruit of his hands, but for the fruit of his heart.” This is to guide us against judging others by material or worldly standards. What we are is what matters, not what we have. With difficulty will a rich man enter heaven.


There has been an atmosphere of peace, joy, and prayer at Soufanieh since November 27, 1982. People who have come to Soufanieh from around the world have been touched by the fervor and prayers of the believers there. There have been many spiritual conversions which are more important than the physical cures that sometimes take place.

It is indeed edifying that our Lord Jesus Christ and His all powerful and holy Mother, who are calling for love and unity, frequently have people whether Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, etc., praying at Soufanieh.

What is asked of all of us now, whether of the East or West, is PRAYER, PRAYER, PRAYER from sincere and humble hearts. Fast and prayer. Do penance for Christian unity. This includes charity toward those around us, those who offend us. If the study of Soufanieh does not lead us to prayer, love and unity, beginning within our own families, and with those around us, then we have read of Soufanieh only for entertainment. Then the message of Soufanieh has not been permitted to touch and move our hearts.

The greatest miracle of all, we yet await, is the reunion of Christians.

O Lady of Soufanieh, pray for us to have hearts of love for one another that we may worship God and offer Our Father the Eucharistic Sacrifice as one family.

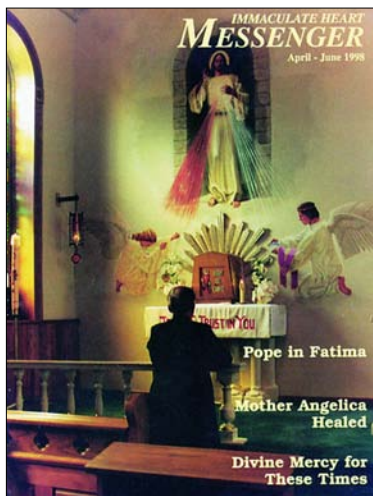
May the example of our lives reflect the love of God and for one another as daily we pray for unity. Amen. 



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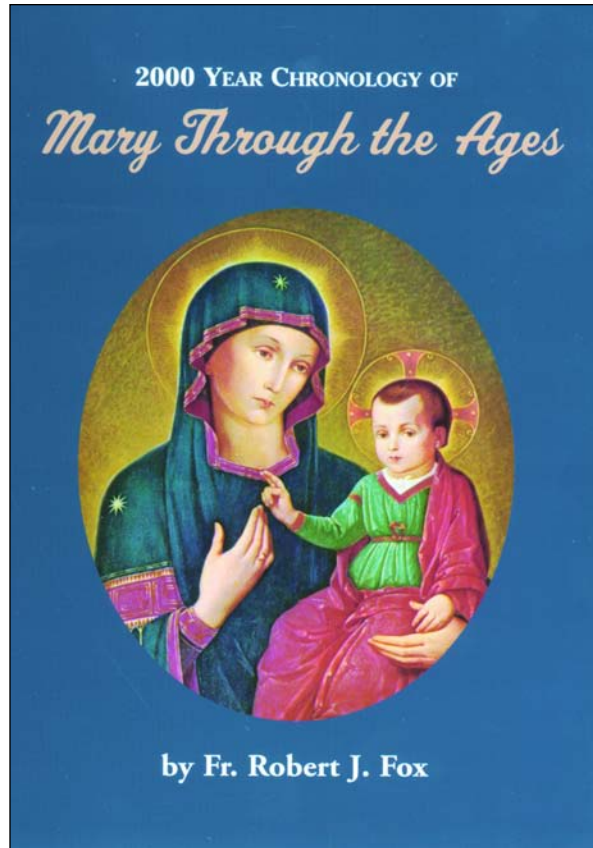
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There is a great need for both understanding and appreciation between the East and the West, between Orthodox and Catholic Christians.

A testimonial to this book from the East

“Your testimony about Soufanieh bears great significance. It appears at a crucial time in history. Mary, the Virgin, is the Mother from the East, whom God chose, excluding all other women, in order to open locked doors in both the East and the West so as to form one human family...

“One of the most amiable aspects of this [book] is your discourse about the Mother Icon of Our Lady of Soufanieh, that is, the Icon of Our Lady of Kazan upon which the Soufanieh Icon is based. What you have written has great dimensions, at the Church level, the ecumenical level and the level of faith in general.”

“I do beseech Our Lord Jesus, with the mediation of Our Virgin Mother, to make this testimony of your book a new voice to awaken those who got drowned in the delusion of this world. This book reflects the sensitivity needed now.”

(Above excerpts from this Book’s Introduction by Fr. Elias Zahlaoui - Our Lady of Damascus Church, Syria. He has been associated with the happenings of Soufanieh from the beginning.)