

# Light of the East

Society of St. John Chrysostom – Youngstown/Warren Chapter

WINTER 2018  
Volume 17, No. 3



## Next Meeting

Friday, December 28, 2018

5–9 pm

St. Maron Maronite Church

Christmas Party and Elections. You are invited to bring a favorite casserole, appetizer, or dessert along with, if you like, your favorite holiday spirits.

## Featured Article

### CHRISTMAS MORNING HOMILY

Behold a new and wondrous mystery. My ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and He that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side, the Sun of justice. And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed; He had the power; He descended; He redeemed; all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He Who is, is Born; and He Who is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man...

*Continued on page 3*

## GOD CAME! AND STILL COMES!

By Chris Berardi



I really enjoy Christmas movies – all different kinds of them. From the deeply religious to the sappy secular ones. I just love them all! One that I particularly enjoy is called Christmas Child and in the closing scene the local pastor makes a nice observation that “God came and God spoke...the God who spoke still speaks and the God who came still comes.”

This is part of the beauty of our faith, that the God of the universe cares for each of us so much, that he not only entered time and space to redeem us once a long time ago, but continues to come to each of us individually and as a community. He comes to us in the Liturgy, when we partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. He speaks to us when we read Sacred Scripture and listen in prayer.

Pope Benedict XVI reminded Catholics of this in 2006 when he said: “Awaken! Remember that God comes! Not yesterday, not tomorrow, but today, now! The one true God, ‘the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’, is not a God who is there in Heaven, unconcerned with us and our history, but he is the-God-who-comes.”

Let us use this time of preparation before Christmas to truly prepare ourselves for his coming. Let us listen in prayer to hear what God wishes to say to us and let us have the courage to answer God's calling even when, and especially when, it is difficult and takes us out of our comfort zones. Let us not ignore God's voice because we don't like what we hear. Rather, let us die to our own ego and selfish will, convert our hearts, and willingly and joyfully unite our will with God's...that is the best Christmas gift that we can give to God.

Marana'tha! Come, Lord Jesus.

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Current dues are \$25 for an individual or \$30 for a family membership. For membership inquiries, contact Rich Mattiussi at (330) 573-8653 or via email at [mattiussi52001@yahoo.com](mailto:mattiussi52001@yahoo.com).

## Treasurer's Report

Balance as of December 1, 2018  
\$1,482.61

## Newsletter Committee

Editor	Rich Mattiussi
Assistant Editor	Dom Mattiussi
Assistant Editor	Chris Berardi

## Who are we?

The Society of St. John Chrysostom aims to make known the history, worship, discipline, and theology of Eastern Christendom. The Society also works and prays that all Christians, particularly the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, will attain the fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires and encourages support for the Eastern Christian Churches:

- Byzantine and Oriental Catholic Churches
- Orthodox Church
- Oriental Orthodox Church
- Church of the East

The Society was founded in the United Kingdom and Europe in 1926. In 1998, the Society was also founded in the United States. Following some exploratory and preparatory meetings in 1998 and early 1999, the local Youngstown/Warren Chapter was founded and the first meeting took place on May 4, 1999.

## Who was Saint John Chrysostom?

Saint John Chrysostom was born in Antioch around the year 349, and after an extensive education embraced a life of asceticism. He was the Archbishop of Constantinople from approximately 397 to 407, during a period of great reform and renewal among the clergy and faithful of the Byzantine Roman Empire. Twice he was forced into exile by enemies and the imperial court, and died at Comana in Pontus, Asia Minor (present-day Turkey).

## Who are the Eastern Churches?

Jesus Christ commanded his apostles to preach the "good news" to the whole world. St. Peter traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch and then to Rome. St. Andrew founded the Church in Byzantium which later became Constantinople. St. James went to Egypt and St. Thomas to India. Of the five initial Patriarchates, known as the Pentarchy, the four in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire are the origins of what are today called the Eastern Churches.

## For more information

Youngstown/Warren Chapter Website  
[www.byzcath.org/stjohnchrysostom/](http://www.byzcath.org/stjohnchrysostom/)

Pittsburgh Chapter Website  
[puluka.com/home/category/ssjc/](http://puluka.com/home/category/ssjc/)

National Society Website  
[www.ssjc.org](http://www.ssjc.org)

# HOMILY ON CHRISTMAS MORNING

By St. John Chrysostom

Behold a new and wondrous mystery. My ears resound to the Shepherd's song, piping no soft melody, but chanting full forth a heavenly hymn. The Angels sing. The Archangels blend their voice in harmony. The Cherubim hymn their joyful praise. The Seraphim exalt His glory. All join to praise this holy feast, beholding the Godhead here on earth, and man in heaven. He Who is above, now for our redemption dwells here below; and He that was lowly is by divine mercy raised.

Bethlehem this day resembles heaven; hearing from the stars the singing of angelic voices; and in place of the sun, enfolds within itself on every side, the Sun of justice. And ask not how: for where God wills, the order of nature yields. For He willed; He had the power; He descended; He redeemed; all things yielded in obedience to God. This day He Who is, is Born; and He Who is, becomes what He was not. For when He was God, He became man; yet not departing from the Godhead that is His. Nor yet by any loss of divinity became He man, nor through increase became He God from man; but being the Word He became flesh, His nature, because of impassability, remaining unchanged.

And so the kings have come, and they have seen the heavenly King that has come upon the earth, not bringing with Him Angels, nor Archangels, nor Thrones, nor Dominations, nor Powers, nor Principalities, but, treading a new and solitary path, He has come forth from a spotless womb.

Since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a



Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech.

For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend.

Nature here rested, while the Will of God labored. O ineffable grace! The Only Begotten, Who is before all ages, Who cannot be touched or be perceived, Who is simple, without body, has now put on my body, that is visible and liable to corruption. For what reason? That coming amongst us he may teach us, and teaching, lead us by the hand to the things that men cannot see. For since men believe that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears, they doubt of that which they do not see, and so He has deigned to show Himself in bodily presence, that He may remove all doubt.

Christ, finding the holy body and soul of the Virgin, builds for Himself a living temple, and as He had willed, formed there a man from the Virgin; and, putting Him on, this day came forth; unashamed of the lowliness of our nature.

For it was to Him no lowering to put on what He Himself had made. Let that handiwork be forever



glorified, which became the cloak of its own Creator. For as in the first creation of flesh, man could not be made before the clay had come into His hand, so neither could this corruptible body be glorified, until it had first become the garment of its Maker.

What shall I say! And how shall I describe this Birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of days has become an infant. He Who sits upon the sublime and heavenly Throne, now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, Who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He Who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an infant's bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.

For this He assumed my body, that I may become capable of His Word; taking my flesh, He gives me His spirit; and so He bestowing and I receiving, He prepares for me the treasure of Life. He takes my flesh, to sanctify me; He gives me His Spirit, that He may save me.

Come, then, let us observe the Feast. Truly wondrous is the whole chronicle of the Nativity. For

this day the ancient slavery is ended, the devil confounded, the demons take to flight, the power of death is broken, paradise is unlocked, the curse is taken away, sin is removed from us, error driven out, truth has been brought back, the speech of kindness diffused, and spreads on every side, a heavenly way of life has been in planted on the earth, angels communicate with men without fear, and men now hold speech with angels.

Why is this? Because God is now on earth, and man in heaven; on every side all things commingle. He became Flesh. He did not become God. He was God. Wherefore He became flesh, so that He Whom heaven did not contain, a manger would this day receive. He was placed in a manger, so that He, by whom all things are nourished, may receive an infant's food from His Virgin Mother. So, the Father of all ages, as an infant at the breast, nestles in the virginal arms, that the Magi may more easily see Him. Since this day the Magi too have come, and made a beginning of withstanding tyranny; and the heavens give glory, as the Lord is revealed by a star.

To Him, then, Who out of confusion has wrought a clear path, to Christ, to the Father, and to the Holy Ghost, we offer all praise, now and for ever. Amen.

# November 13<sup>th</sup> Meeting

Photography by Lori Demiduk, OFS



Icon of Christ in the entry area of the monastery.



Attendees discuss blessed spices from the relics of St. John the Beloved and anointing oils with one of the nuns.



Chapel at St. Mary and St. John the Beloved Coptic Orthodox Monastery in Warren Ohio. Setting for the service in honor of Mary the Mother of God.



A reflective Father Mina Essak, prepares to be the guest speaker on the topic "The Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt".



Fr. Ken Bachovsky introduces Fr. Essak.



Fr. Mina Essak gifts all with handcrafted leather cross pendants from Egypt.

# 2018 Christmas Social



On Friday, December 28, at 5:00pm, we will gather at the Saint Maron Parish Antioch Hall to elect new officers and trustees and to fellowship in celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. St. Maron / Antioch Hall is located at 1555 South Meridian Road, Youngstown, Ohio 44511. This will be a pot luck event and you are encouraged to bring a favorite casserole, appetizer, or dessert along with, if you like, your favorite holiday spirits. As with last year's event, a full bar service will be provided by Chorbishop Mike Kail, our host and St. Maron's pastor.

## AGENDA FOR THE SSJC ANNUAL MEETING

- 5:00 - 5:30pm: Welcome / Buffet set up / Social period
- 5:30 - 6:00pm: Report of Nominations Committee / Elections
- 6:00 - 6:15pm: Old Business/New Business/Treasurer's Report/Announcements
- 6:15 - 9:00pm: Blessing of the Food and the Assembled: Eat, Drink, and be Merry!

ALL seven elected (7) positions of our Executive are up for reelection. These positions include PRESIDENT, VICE PRESIDENT, SECRETARY, TREASURER and three (3) TRUSTEES. If you are a full, dues paying member, you are eligible and encouraged to run if you would like to serve. Please call, email, or text Ray Nakley if you would like to put your name in nomination for one of these positions. **Ray Nakley: 330-506-1999(M); 330-746-1797(H); ray112@ameritech.net; 2220 Selma Avenue, Youngstown, OH 44504.** Deadline for nominations is December 24, 2018.

And with the New Year, of course, **dues are due**. Individual: **\$25.00**; Family: **\$30.00**. Please remit your dues to **SSJC (Y-W) Chapter** and send to **Dr. Richard Mattiussi, Treasurer: 4656 Driftwood Lane, Youngstown, OH 44515; 330-573-8653(M); 330-792-5697(H); mattiussi52001@yahoo.com.**

As you can see, we have abbreviated the normal business meeting to only deal with issues absolutely necessary to address, primarily our mandated elections. We look forward to enjoying this time together as we extend the warmth and majesty of this Holy Season among ourselves and our guests and everyone who loves, lives, and cherishes the reason for the season – Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.



# 2018 Year In Review

## **Tuesday, January 30**

SSJC (Y-W) meeting at the Franciscan Shrine of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted in Youngstown. The topic was “The Franciscans and the East” and speakers were Fr. Vit Fiala, OFM and Lori Demiduk, OFS. They both gave great talks! Fr. Vit led us in Evening Prayer and served us some very delicious homemade soup on a very cold evening. Maybe he will share the recipe?! Franciscan hospitality is always a gift from God. Thank you!

## **Sunday, March 11**

Both Rich Mattiussi and Ray Nakley represented our local chapter by being invited by the Majetich family to attend Great Lenten Vespers at their church. We enjoyed a delicious Lenten Dinner and heard a presentation by Fr. Aleksa Pavichevich on “Great Lent and Fasting” at Holy Trinity Serbian Orthodox Church in Youngstown. We made contact with the pastor, Fr. Bosko Stojanovic, who was most gracious to host our SSJC (Y-W) Chapter for Meeting on May 8! Thank you for your hospitality!

## **Sunday, March 25**

Great Lenten Vespers and Dinner at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in Youngstown. Several of our members attended a very beautiful prayer service, an excellent reflection by Presbytera Melanie on the Annunciation, generous hospitality, and great fellowship. Thank you, Fr. DiStefano, Presbytera, Socrates Kolitsos, and parishioners of St. Nicholas!

## **Monday, April 30**

SSJC (Pittsburgh) Spring 2018 Event at 7:00 pm at St. Anthony Chapel located at 1704 Harpster St., Pittsburgh, PA. St. Anthony’s chapel on Pittsburgh’s north side is home to thousands of relics of the saints and has been designated a Historical Landmark by the Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation. This is the perfect venue to discuss the common heritage of the saints and their relics in both the eastern and western church with presentations from both the perspectives with discussion and questions encouraged. Western

devotion to the saints and their relics spread in the Roman Catholic community. The extensive collection at this Pittsburgh landmark provides both the example and the spiritual and prayer focus of these practices. The eastern churches also devoted to the examples of the saints have used relics in liturgical practice like the Antimension in Byzantine Liturgy and seen them as sources of miracles throughout the ages. The Society of St. John Chrysostom promotes understanding of Eastern Christian Churches and promotes Christian unity of east and west while providing material support to Eastern Christian churches. SSJC (Pittsburgh) events have three main sections lasting two hours: • Opening Prayer Service: Vespers • Main Topic Presentation and Discussion • SSJC Business and Discussion on Next Steps, Operations, and Future Events Feel free to email suggestions to Steve Puluka ([steve@puluka.com](mailto:steve@puluka.com)) or volunteer to help with the spring 2018 event or with planning the next event. More information on St. Anthony’s Chapel Relic Collection can be found online at: [saintanthonychapel.org/relics-2](http://saintanthonychapel.org/relics-2) More information about the SSJC Pittsburgh Chapter can be found online at: [puluka.com/home/society-of-saint-john-chrysostom-pittsburgh](http://puluka.com/home/society-of-saint-john-chrysostom-pittsburgh)

## **Tuesday, May 8**

SSJC (Y-W) meeting at Holy Trinity Serbian Orthodox Church in Youngstown. The host pastor is Fr. Bosko Stojanovic who gave a brief tour of the church along with Fr. Sava from the neighboring Serbian Church in Austintown. A brief Business meeting followed with some refreshments and Fr Bosko spoke on the topic of “St. Sava and the Serbian Orthodox Church”. Q &A session followed.

## **Monday, June 4**

SSJC (Pittsburgh) meeting at SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Pittsburgh. A number of members from the SSJC (Y-W) Chapter attended this meeting. A Prayer service in the Chapel was led by our very own Fr. Dan Rohan, SSJC (Y-W) Chapter President. Fr. David Fisher (Maronite) spoke on the topics of “Comparing and Contrasting Purgatory of the

Latin/Roman Tradition with the Eastern Tradition of Final Theosis” and “Pneumatology (Theology of the Holy Spirit) in the Liturgical Theology and Practice of Catholicism and Orthodoxy”. Q & A followed with an in-depth discussion! Thank you to SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary Staff and Steve Puluka for hosting this meeting.

### **Tuesday, June 5**

SSJC (Y-W) meeting at St. Maron Maronite Catholic Church in Youngstown. A Prayer Service in the Maronite Tradition was led by Chorbishop Spinosa in the church. Fr. David Fisher (Maronite) spoke on the topics of “The History of the Filioque Problem” and “How Western Scholasticism Changed the Theological and Philosophical Approach Inherited from the Fathers of the Church.” Host Pastor: Chorbishop Kail. Excellent Mediterranean Food was provided to all participants. The meeting lasted way past 10pm and people stuck around! Thank you, Fr. Fisher for spending so much time with us and Chorbishop Kail for all your hospitality!

### **Summer Executive Committee Meetings**

**Friday, June 29 [Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul]**  
at St. Maron’s Maronite Catholic Church,  
2:30-4:30 pm.

**Friday, July 27** at St. Mark’s Antiochian  
Orthodox Church, 2:30-4:30 pm

**Friday, August 24** at St. Mark’s Antiochian  
Orthodox Church, 3:30-5:00 pm

*After each meeting, the Executive Committee and Members were invited to go to the weekly Friday Fish Dinner served at Holy Trinity Serbian Orthodox Church on the west side of Youngstown for a social and discussion. Great food and conversations!*

### **Sunday, September 30**

A Moderated Panel discussion under the direction of Dr. Richard Mattiussi took place at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in downtown Youngstown. Students from Cardinal Mooney, YSU and other schools and churches took part in a delightful

discussion on the following theme: “Young People and the Church Today: To be or not to be involved? Why? Why not? A lively discussion continued to around 9:20 pm! Thank you, Fr. Joe DiStrafno, (host pastor) for your prayers and wholehearted support, Presbyteria Melanie, Socrates Kolitsos, and parishoners for the delicious food and hospitality!

### **Tuesday, November 13 [Feast of St. John Chrysostom, Eastern Calendar]**

Fr. Ken Bachofsky was kind enough to contact Mother Marina at St. Mary and St. John the Beloved Coptic Orthodox Monastery for Nuns in Warren, Ohio for a general SSJC (Y-W) Meeting. We were kindly greeted by Mother Marina and the other nuns as we entered the monastery for a brief prayer service in the chapel led by Fr. Mina Essak. Then we assembled in the community room for a Power Point Presentation on “The Holy Family and the Flight into Egypt” by Fr. Essak. After the presentation a Q & A period followed. We had a very brief Business Meeting, comments from some of our members, and then refreshments. Thank you, Mother Marina and the other nuns, for hosting us!

### **Saturday, December 8**

SSJC Pittsburgh meeting at SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Pittsburgh. 10 AM – 12 N. Fr. Radu Bordeianu, Ph.D. will speak on “Spiritual Fatherhood and Parish Ministries.”

### **Friday, December 28**

SSJC (Y-W) Chapter Elections, Brief Business Meeting and CHRISTMAS SOCIAL!

### **Anniversaries of Ordination to the Priesthood**

- Fr. Patrick Manning 40 years
- Fr. Daniel Rohan 40 years
- Fr. Ken Bachofsky 40 years

**May God grant them many more years of fruitful ministry!**





# MEMORY ETERNAL

<b>Br. Peter Scalise, S.S.P</b>	Oct 8, 2018
<b>Dr. Costas Sarantopoulos</b>	Aug 15, 2018
<b>Fr. Ken Rick</b>	Mar 21, 2018
<b>Ted Perantinides</b>	Feb 8, 2018
<b>Vito Rosario Carchedi</b>	May 6, 2016
<b>Dr. Dean J. Lambert</b>	Oct 15, 2015
<b>Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko</b>	Mar 18, 2015
<b>Fr. Andrew Kolitsos</b>	Oct 7, 2014

## Constantinople, Moscow and Ukraine. Who is violating Orthodox unity?

By Fr. John Chryssavgis



*Patriarch Kirill of Moscow*

It is tempting, albeit naive, to consign a rift between Constantinople and Moscow—this time over autocephaly in Ukraine—to internal competition over power and jurisdiction. While not entirely inaccurate, the reality is far more complex than merely an inter-Orthodox feud. There are geopolitical ramifications beyond the religious intrigue, but the matter transcends any exercise of right or even exhibition of might.

Issues of autocephaly and authority in Ukraine, along with questions over validity of orders and sacraments, are vital to Orthodox unity, but these pale before the isolationism and nationalism plaguing Orthodox Christianity in recent centuries. That is the essential context of the church situation in Ukraine.

Moscow's recent response to cut communion with Constantinople should also be seen in the same light. Its profoundly demoralizing effect on the wider church—coercing bishops and synods to choose sides—only underlines how a handful of Orthodox hierarchs make decisions without concern for or consultation of the lay community, religious and civil. It would potentially dissipate unity in the diaspora, where churches of all jurisdictions work together on missionary and humanitarian work.

Of course, the Orthodox Church is hardly democratic, even at its most conciliar, instead resembling a mutual interdependence of hierarchy

and laity. The early church understood that the power to discern authenticity—what Orthodox liturgy calls “rightly dividing the word of truth”—does not belong to a bishop or synod, but to the church. So when Moscow challenges Constantinople for restoring millions of Ukrainian believers to legitimacy and communion, I wonder how it could brand an entire generation of believers as schismatics in the first place?

The Ecumenical Patriarchate's decision—issued last April and affirmed this month—to grant the requested autocephaly to the Ukrainian church estranged from Moscow years ago, may be debated in canon law and argued by historical precedent. But escalating threats and sweeping reprisals by Moscow bespeak a deeper rationale than territorial dispute. Russia stands to lose property; but Constantinople hardly stands to gain power. In the long run, for better or for worse, the Orthodox Church will acquire a new member—in eerily similar procedure as many other national churches, including Greece, Bulgaria, and the Czech Lands, were incorporated. How can a national church, only recognized as independent last century, complain that recognition of independent churches in new countries “could directly jeopardize the unity of the Orthodox Church”?

### Is unity an illusion?

Orthodox unity is as impenetrable in mystery as inaccessible in actuality. Orthodox congratulate themselves for oneness in doctrine and sacrament. It has long provided a lucrative selling point to outsiders, while persisting as a romantic notion for insiders. Yet, if unity and canonicity are anything but legalistic or pietistic, Orthodox Christians must admit their failure and hypocrisy. It is disingenuous to brandish unity as a defensive banner or offensive weapon when internal problems arise. And it is dangerous to associate Orthodox unity with territorial entitlement, as when Moscow blamed Constantinople for “crossing a red line and catastrophically undermining the unity of global Orthodoxy.” One wonders what unity there was in the first place.

While highly anticipated with hope, unity was revealed an illusion when the Holy and Great Council convened in Crete (June, 2016) under the Ecumenical Patriarch for the first time in a millennium. It became clear then that the Orthodox Church would stubbornly refuse to enter the twenty-first century without resistance, even resentment. This was strikingly encapsulated, for example, when Patriarch Bartholomew drew a line in document drafting sessions, declaring that bishops-in-council could creatively wordsmith about their relationship to other Christian communions, but not classify them as heretics. Incredulous deliberations ensued, with interminable reverberations to this day in conservative circles. The final resolution—skewed to appease Russia, Bulgaria and Georgia, who ultimately abstained—was that the Orthodox Church recognized “the historical name” of other communions that claimed to be churches!

Bartholomew’s conviction—that the virtually divided Orthodox Churches needed to think and act together to proclaim a more convincing contemporary message—encountered the same opposition (and defamation) he now faces with Ukraine’s autocephaly. The council provided the appropriate forum for venting religious concerns and vetting territorial contentions. By not attending, Russia missed a vital opportunity to demonstrate solidarity and leadership. Today, it vigorously petitions and pressures for pan-Orthodox consensus to resolve the dispute. Then, as now, the strategy and action plan were the same: threat of schism and severance of communion.

Councils are how the church should function. Yet, the Great Council was less about decisions made or documents signed and more about the willingness or readiness of the Orthodox Churches to initiate a more transparent conversation with the modern world, rather than remain in the cocoon of their medieval past.

### **An East-West Divide?**

When scandalmongering and paranoia—two years ago about the council in Crete and today about

autocephaly in Ukraine—suggests Constantinople is being coerced or controlled by the U.S. State Department, what surfaces is a latent hostility toward the West spearheaded by the Moscow patriarchate. Ideological rhetoric reinforces the sharp distinction between the sacredness of the Church and the sinfulness of the West. A prominent Serb bishop suspects “the West is trying to splinter the Orthodox Church, which is the last mechanism for uniting the peoples of the ex-USSR and the former Yugoslavia.”

It is convenient to dispute territorial boundaries rather than debate issues of social justice. There is security in taking pride on liturgy and spirituality instead of transcending parochialism and prejudice. It is even appealing to claim evangelical affinity with conservative Americans, such as US vice president Mike Pence and evangelical leader Franklin Graham.

In contrast, a culture of openness is fostered by bold initiative. Bartholomew has affirmed ecumenical and ecological conversation on all fronts—against unprecedented criticism—recognizing dialogue as a fundamental response to the Christian vocation. It is this larger, longer-term picture that he sustains from the unique vantage point of world leader of Orthodoxy. And he has an uncanny ability to remain focused on what matters most—keeping the Orthodox Church related and relevant to the twenty-first century.

Orthodox Churches have much to learn about tolerance—toward other faiths, other cultures, other churches, other communities. Bartholomew long assimilated this worldview from the unique history and legacy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. What entitles him to the privilege of leadership and responsibility of unity is, paradoxically, precisely where his antagonists find fault—the frailty of his remnant church, deprived of national protection—and not some former byzantine idol or idealistic future ideal.

Orthodox Churches will always contest territorial claims. But their hierarchs should display prudence and moderation. Stirring a frenzy of militant mistrust—by speaking of “enemies” outside Mother



Russia—is unacceptable. Threatening violent revolution—by fabricating analogies with Nazi Germany—is incendiary.

Any reassurance lies in the recognition that divine grace never abandons the church. Many millions are hoping that church and civic leaders in Russia and Ukraine can embrace the present moment as an opportunity of growth and enrichment for God's people in a region that has far more to gain from complementarity than conflict, both national and ecclesiastical.

*Fr. Chryssavgis is an Archdeacon of the Ecumenical Throne of Constantinople and advisor to Patriarch Bartholomew. He teaches Theology at the Holy Cross Faculty of Boston and coordinates the initiatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the protection of creation. He was director of the Press Office of the Pan-Orthodox Synod of Crete in June 2016. He is the author of numerous publications, while his biography of Patriarch Bartholomew is about to be published in Italian for the Dehonian editions.*

## Pope Francis Calls for Unity with Orthodox Churches



*Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*

Vatican City — On the feast of St. Andrew the Apostle, Pope Francis told the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople that while the Holy Spirit has in recent years prompted a “fraternal dialogue” between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, both Churches should work to achieve full communion with one another.

“While centuries of mutual misunderstanding, differences and silence may seem to have compromised [the relationship between the Catholic and Orthodox Church], the Holy Spirit, Spirit of unity, has enabled us to recommence a fraternal dialogue,” the pope wrote.

“This was definitively resumed by our venerable predecessors, Patriarch Athenagoras and Pope Saint Paul VI, and has enabled us to rediscover those bonds of communion that have always existed between us.”

“The search for the re-establishment of full communion is above all a response to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, who on the eve of his Passion prayed that his disciples ‘may all be one,’” the pope added.

The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the de facto leader of Orthodox Christianity, is believed to be the successor of St. Andrew. While the various Orthodox Churches around the world are not subject to his administrative authority, he is generally regarded as *primus inter pares*, or “first among equals” in relationship to the patriarchs of other Orthodox Churches.

The current patriarch is Bartholomew I, who has held the position since 1991, and is widely seen to have fostered collaborative dialogue with Pope Francis and his predecessors, Pope Benedict XVI and Pope St. John Paul II.

The pope’s greetings come amid a difficult year for Orthodoxy. In October, the Russian Orthodox Church, the largest of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, broke communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople, after a disagreement about the state of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine. While the Patriarch of Constantinople made moves to recognize the autonomy of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine, the Patriarchate of Moscow insisted that Ukrainian Orthodox Christians remain subject to its jurisdiction.

Russian Orthodox Christians constitute the largest plurality of Orthodox Christians around the world, according to the Pew Research Center.

While Pope Francis did not specifically address the Orthodox rift, he did write that “in a world wounded by conflict, the unity of Christians is a sign of hope that must radiate ever more visibly.”

Pope Francis also wrote that, despite theological differences, “both Churches, with a sense of responsibility towards the world, have sensed that urgent call, which involves each of us who have been baptized, to proclaim the Gospel to all men and women. For this reason, we can work together today in the search for peace among peoples, for the abolition of all forms of slavery, for the respect and dignity of every human being and for the care of creation.”

“With God’s help, through encounter and dialogue on our journey together over the last fifty years, we already experience being in communion, even though it is not yet full and complete.”

## **Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East holds its third meeting**



On 23-27 October 2018, the third meeting of the Commission for Dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East took place at the Novodevichy Convent of the Holy Resurrection in St. Petersburg.

The Moscow Patriarchate’s delegation included Bishop Kliment of Krasnoslobodsk and Temnikov, co-chairman of the Commission; Archimandrite Stefan (Sado), chief librarian of the St. Petersburg Theological Academy; Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov), secretary for inter-Christian relations of the Department for External Church relations; and Mr. Sergei Alferov, DECR staff member. Representing the Assyrian Church of the East were Bishop Mar Awa Royel of California, secretary of the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East, co-chairman of the Commission; Cor-Bishop George Kanon Toma, cleric of St. Andrew’s Church in Glenview, Illinois, USA; Priest Ephraim Alkhas, personal assistant to the secretary of the Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East; and Deacon Roland Bidzhamov, cleric of the Assyrian diocese of Northern Iraq and CIS.

As the Commission members noted, the academic contacts between the two Churches have been successfully developing. As part of the student exchange project, in autumn 2018 an Assyrian student was admitted to the Moscow Theological Academy. On 5-11 October 2018, the Ss. Cyril and Methodius Theological Institute of Postgraduate Studies organized in Russia the first Summer Institute for a delegation of young representatives of the Assyrian Church of the East.

The coordination of inter-Christian cooperation aimed at rendering aid to the suffering Christians in the Middle East remains a major aspect of the bilateral relations. Having emphasized an important role of the Working Group for Rendering Aid to the Population of Syria of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the President of the Russian Federation, the Commission members acknowledged as a task of great significance the promotion of cooperation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the traditional religious communities of Iraq, including the oldest one – Assyrian Church of the East. A practical step towards this goal was a working visit of Hieromonk Stefan (Igumnov) and Cor-Bishop Samano Odisho, rector of the Assyrian church of St. Mary in Moscow, to

Baghdad and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on 25-30 March 2018.

The participants in the meeting expressed their deep concern over the alarming developments pertaining to the ecclesial situation in Ukraine and emphasized that it could only be settled in strict compliance with the canons of the Orthodox Church. The Commission members expressed their hope that the problems would be peacefully resolved in the spirit of fraternal Christian love, as was stated in a joint communiqué adopted at the results of the meeting.

On October 24, a colloquium on theology, history and modern life of the Assyrian Church of the East was held at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy. Taking part in it were the Commission members, as well the faculty and students of the Theological Academy.

Addressing all those present, Bishop Kliment of Krasnoslobodsk and Temnikov told about the current state of bilateral relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. Among the reports presented at the colloquium were: “Historical Contacts between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Russian Orthodox Church” by Bishop Mar Awa Royel; “The Sacrament of the Holy Leaven in Assyrian Church of the East” by Cor-Bishop George Kanon Toma; “Mar Babai the Great and St. Maxim the Confessor: Christology in the Byzantine and East Syrian Traditions” by Priest Ephraim Alkhas; and “Assyrian Church of the East in Russia in the Modern Times” by Deacon Roland Bidzhamov.

A joint communiqué was adopted at the conclusion of the colloquium. The Holy Synods of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Assyrian Church of the East will be informed of the results of the meeting.

The Commission will hold its next meeting in the territory of the Assyrian Church of the East in 2019.

## Pope prays for peace in Middle East with head of Assyrian Church

By Devin Watkins



Pope Francis spoke about the “great suffering” that many Christians are enduring in the Middle East, and prayed for peace in the region, especially in Iraq and Syria.

The Pope was meeting Friday with Mar Gewargis III, the Catholicos Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East.

He said many Middle Eastern Christians are following in the footsteps of Christ, as they are forced to leave their homelands to escape violence.

Pope Francis noted that the Christians fleeing persecution belong to different communities. “They are forging fraternal relationships among one another,” he said, “and thus becoming, for us, witnesses of unity.”

He joyfully recalled Mar Gewargis’ presence at the Day of Reflection and Prayer for Peace in the Middle East, held on 7 July in the Italian city of Bari.

### Thanksgiving for theological dialogue

Pope Francis then turned to relations between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East. He said the two Churches share a “particular reason for thanksgiving to God”, which is the Joint Committee for Theological Dialogue.



The two Churches signed a Common Statement on “Sacramental Life” on 24 November 2017, which set out a shared vision of sacramental theology.

Pope Francis said the Committee “shows that practical and disciplinary differences are not always an obstacle to unity, and that certain differences in theological expression can be considered complementary rather than conflicting.”

The Committee is beginning its work on the third phase of dialogue concerning ecclesiology. The Pope prayed the next stage of study “will help us to take one more step on our journey towards the much-desired goal of being able to celebrate the Sacrifice of the Lord at the same altar.”

### **Pillar of Syro-Oriental tradition**

The Holy Father recalled the 700th anniversary of the death of Abdisho bar Berika, Metropolitan of Nisibis, whom both the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church celebrate as a pillar of the Syro-Oriental tradition.

“May the study of this great theologian help to make better known the richness of the Syriac tradition and to receive it as a gift for the entire Church,” the Pope concluded.

### **Prayer for peace**

Following the audience, Pope Francis and Mar Gewargis III, along with his entourage, prayed together in the Redemptoris Mater Chapel for peace in the Middle East and for an end to the suffering of Christians, especially in Iraq and Syria.

## **Easter 2019**

- **Gregorian**            **April 21, 2019**
- **Julian**                **April 28, 2019**

**DISCLAIMER:** Please note that in the interest of inquiry and dialogue, our newsletter sometimes presents articles with points of view with which we do not necessarily agree.

If you have ideas or suggestions for upcoming issues of this newsletter, please send the information to the Editor at [mattiussi52001@yahoo.com](mailto:mattiussi52001@yahoo.com).