

LIGHT OF THE EAST

"GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS."

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, YOUNGSTOWN-WARREN OHIO CHAPTER

VOLUME 9, NUMBER 1 January/February 2010

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FROM THE EDITOR...

Extending best wishes for a healthy and happy 2010. The first regular meeting of the New Year will be **Tuesday the 12th of January 7 P.M. at St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church in Struthers. Our speakers will be Father Bob Bonnot, pastor of St. Nicholas, and Father George Gage, pastor of St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Boardman.** Pope Benedict XVI has dedicated to the Priesthood the year-long celebration that spans from June 19, 2009 until June 19, 2010. It is the desire of our chapter to recognize and honor our priests serving people in the apostolic churches. Consequently, we have asked a priest of the Western Tradition and one of the Eastern Tradition to describe for us **"A Typical Week (If There is Such a Thing) in the Life of a Parish Priest."** During this official **Year of the Priesthood** let us celebrate by keeping all priests in our constant prayers of petition and of thanksgiving to the Lord. And, as we pray asking for more vocations to this call, let us thank Our Lord for the great gift of the Holy Orders - and in particular that of the Priesthood. (This icon (egg tempera and gold leaf on wood panel, 28" x 22") is "based on a fifteenth century Greek prototype; here Christ is shown in Latin Rite vestments with a gold pelican over His heart, the ancient symbol of self-sacrifice. The borders contain a winding grapevine and altar prepared for the celebration of the liturgy of the Mass; in the borders are smaller icons of Melchizedek and St. Jean-Baptiste Vianney." Incidentally, it is St. John Vianney whom Pope Benedict XVI, with the announcement of this special year, has declared the Universal Patron of Priests.)



The Orthodox Church has always talked in terms of a "royal priesthood" which encompasses all believers. However, it recognizes that the Lord set apart certain individuals for specific roles, some were Apostles, others healers, others teachers. In order to establish and maintain good order within the community of believers, certain individuals were specifically ordained by the laying on of hands to specific ministries, particularly that of bishop (elder) and deacon. The Lord gave the power to forgive and retain sins to the Apostles, not to all believers. The Apostles delegated this authority to the bishops, but not to deacons. In the fullness of time, as

congregations grew beyond the ability for a single bishop to administer, the office of presbyter was established. Specific men were chosen, ordained by the laying on of hands, to be the officiator in place of the bishop in the parishes for the Eucharist. These individuals we refer to as priests in English. In Greek they are called Presbyter, in Russian, Batushke. Even as there was a Levite priesthood and the priesthood of the order of Melchizedek for ancient Israel, we have the ordained priesthood and the royal priesthood in the New Israel.

PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

Lord Jesus Christ, bless and protect the priests who labor in your vineyard for the salvation of mankind. Give them humility and perseverance, prudence and patience. Enkindle in their hearts the burning ardor which consumed Your holy apostles. May their lives be as holy as the divine truth they preach. Make of them priests according to Your own will. Let their light so shine before men that they, seeing your good work, may glorify You: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and ever unto ages of ages. Amen.

Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission completes its work

17.12.2009 · DECR Chairman, Inter-Orthodox relations

The Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission, meeting in Chambesy, Switzerland, closed its work on December 16 with a thanksgiving.

The Commission, whose task is to elaborate the agenda of a Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church, continued to consider the problem of autocephaly and ways of declaring it – the discussion which began in 1993, and prepared proposals on autonomy and ways of declaring it. The documents prepared by the Commission will be submitted to a Pan-Orthodox Pre-Council Conference. They stipulate in particular that the ecclesiological, canonical and pastoral prerequisites for granting autocephaly to a particular church region, if requested, are to be assessed by the Mother Church at her Local Council. If the Council's decision is favourable, the Mother Church is to notify it to the Ecumenical Patriarchate which is in its turn to inform other Local Autocephalous Churches in order to find out whether there is a pan-Orthodox consensus expressed in the unanimity of Councils or Synods of the autocephalous Churches. Expressing the consent of the Mother Church and the pan-Orthodox consensus, the Ecumenical Patriarch is to declare the autocephaly of a petitioning Church by issuing a Tomos of Autocephaly to be signed by the Ecumenical Patriarch and verified by the signatures of the Primate of Orthodox Churches invited for it by the Ecumenical Patriarch.

The question of the contents of the Tomos and the signing procedure will be considered additionally by the next meeting of the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission.

The Commission has also prepared a document expressing a common position of Orthodox Churches on autonomy and the ways of declaring it, describing the notion of autonomy, the procedure to be observed in declaring autonomy and its consequences.

It was agreed that the initiation and completion of the procedure for granting autonomy to a certain part of its canonical jurisdiction is exclusively under the competence of the respective autocephalous Church. It is noted that in church practice there are

different degrees in which an autonomous Church depends on the autocephalous Church that has granted autonomy to it. A petition for autonomy is considered by the autocephalous Church which, having assessed the prerequisites and reasons for this petition and taken a favourable decision, issues an appropriate Tomos defining the territorial boundaries of the autonomous Church and its relationships with the autocephalous Church to which it belongs in accordance with the established criteria of church Tradition. Then the primate of the autocephalous Church notifies the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other autocephalous Orthodox Churches on the declaration of an autonomous Church.

The draft document also provides for measures to find a canonical settlement of an issue in case of differences arising from two autocephalous Churches' granting the autonomous status to church communities in the same geographical church region.

The question of Diptychs of the Primate of the Local Churches will be considered by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission at its next meeting.

PETER GILBERT PAPER AVAILABLE

For anyone interested Dr. Gilbert's paper: An Introduction to the Filioque is available at his blog site; <http://bekkos.wordpress.com/>

TIME TO PAY 2010 DUES

Please send your check for \$20 (\$25 family) to the address in the masthead of this newsletter. Thank you for your membership.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The second regular chapter meeting will be Tuesday March 9, 7 P.M. Our speaker will be Bishop George Murry, Bishop of the Diocese of Youngstown. More information to follow.

PRAYER OF SOUFANIEH

Unity of Hearts, Unity of Christians, Unity of the Feast of Easter



Miracle of the Holy Oil.

COPTIC CHRISTIANS RALLY AND MARCH

This statement is from the American Copts at <http://freecopty.net/english/> who organized simultaneous rallies in several States to “express their resentment and rejection to what is taking place to their brethren in Egypt, including killings, destruction and looting of their property, displacement from their homes and the forced Islamization of their minor daughters.”



Their statement continues with, “Copts expressed their rejection of the collusion of the Egyptian State Security and other security authorities in all crimes taking place against the Copts in Egypt.”

Archbishop Hilarion answers questions from Der Spiegel (brief excerpt)

14.12.2009 · DECR Chairman, Inter-Christian relations, Inter-Orthodox relations, New documents, The Far Abroad

Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate department for external church relations, answered questions from Der Spiegel magazine. Below is the text of the talk His Eminence Hilarion had with the magazine’s correspondents.

The interview is published in Der Spiegel’s issue No. 51, 2009.

- How would you explain the difference between the Orthodox, the Catholic and the Protestant Churches?

- The Orthodox and the Catholic Churches have only some differences in theology and models of church order. Thus, we do not recognize the supreme authority of the Pope of Rome over other Churches. However, the differences between

Orthodoxy and Catholicism are not fundamental. We recognize the Sacraments of the Catholic Church. If a Catholic priest moves over to Orthodoxy we accept him as priest. As for Protestant churches, we do not recognize them as Churches, seeing in them only communities of Christians. We have fundamental differences in theology and ethics.

- What are they exactly?

- Many Protestant churches have liberalized their notions of ethics, giving a theological justification to

homosexuality and blessing same-sex couples. Some refuse to consider abortion to be a sin. We do not share the understanding of the Church and church order, especially as the Protestants, unlike the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, ordain women.



Moscow Patriarchate thanks Pope for not pressing on meeting with Moscow Patriarch

Moscow, December 16, Interfax - The Moscow Patriarchate is grateful to Pope Benedict XVI for understanding problems between the two Churches and not pressing on with visiting Russia and meeting with the Patriarch.

"Pope Benedict XVI perfectly understands the existing difficulties and therefore is not pressing on his meeting with the Patriarch, not to mention visiting Russia, as was done under his predecessor. We are grateful to him for this," the head of the Moscow Patriarchate Department for External Church Relations Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk said in an interview published in *Der Spiegel*, whose Russian translation the Department for External Church Relations has published on its website. The Russian Orthodox Church does not rule out the possibility of a meeting between the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia and the Pope, but believes that it should be preceded by the resolution of the problems between them rather than be turned into "just a protocol meeting and handshakes between TV cameras. (Continue next page)

"We want a breakthrough in our relations. When the situation in western Ukraine improves radically, when we, the Orthodox and the Catholics, agree once and for all that we are not adversaries gaining believers over from each other, then a meeting between the Pope and the Moscow Patriarch will be possible," he said.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Greek Catholics in western Ukraine "seized hundreds of Orthodox churches, and thousands of Orthodox believers were actually thrown out into the street," Archbishop Hilarion said.

Zizioulas defends the work of the Joint Commission for the Dialogue between the Orthodox and the Catholics

Metropolitan John of Pergamon and HH Pope Benedict XVI

Following the modest but solid progress to the renewed Orthodox-Catholic dialogue at Ravenna in 2007, the Joint Commission for the Theological Dialogue has met in plenary session at Paphos, Cyprus, October 16 to 23, 2009.

Several points to note:

1. The Russian Orthodox Church withdrew from the 2007 Dialogue, partly owing to a disagreement over the inclusion of Orthodox from Estonia and the canonical justification for their doing so. Nevertheless, the Russian Orthodox Church has taken part in the Commission's subsequent work while the controversy is resolved and have played a full part in the Dialogue up to and including the Cyprus meeting.

2. The Ravenna meeting deliberately approached the question of primacy in the Universal Church not in terms of later and current disagreements from the second millennium, but through an examination of common practice and agreement on the role of a figure who is protos in the first millennium, which was recognised as belonging at the universal level to the bishop of the Church at Rome. This exploration was mandated by the primates and synods of all the participating Orthodox Churches in concert. The Cyprus meeting takes the subject of primacy at the Church's universal level forward to meet some of the difficulties experienced in the second millennium, but on the basis of what can be recognised as agreement over what was accepted in the first.

3. Metropolitanans in the Church of Greece during summer 2009 denounced ecumenism and especially conversations with the Roman Catholic Church as if the integrity of Orthodox faith was at stake and the Dialogue was an error leading to the subjugation of the Orthodox

Church direct to the Roman primacy. In fact the Dialogue is not with the Roman Catholic Church but with the Holy See, represented by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, on behalf of all Catholics - Latin Catholics and Eastern Catholics of various Churches and rites. Furthermore, Metropolitan John of Pergamon (John Zizioulas) has written to the Metropolitanans concerned insisting that the Commission is founded on the express and canonical mandate of all the local Churches of the Orthodox Church, as are the particular terms and scope of the Dialogue itself.

4. The Joint Committee of Catholic and Orthodox Bishops in the United States have recently issued a critical response to the Ravenna Statement. This is however an important part of the process by which the Dialogue is received and the progress towards unity based on agreement in doctrine is achieved in the years ahead.

5. Demonstrations interrupted the proceedings of the 11th Plenary Session of the Dialogue Commission in Cyprus, again focusing on suspicion of the threat to Orthodox faith from Catholic error and of the motivation of Catholics seeking to undermine the integrity of the Orthodox Church. Metropolitan John of Pergamon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate has however strongly defended the Theological Dialogue as part of the agreed objective of the all the Orthodox Churches towards the recovery of communion between the Catholics and the Orthodox - and the value of the Dialogue to Orthodoxy.

AsiaNews carries this report by Nat da Polis, dated 19 October, of an interview given to Cypriot journalist Aris Viketos, with Metropolitan John of Pergamon (John Zizioulas), Orthodox Co-Chairman of the Commission. He strongly defends the value of the Dialogue and the progress it has been made, together with its value for Orthodoxy, whatever the reactions of a small minority: "The second meeting for dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox, taking place in Cyprus, sees strong protest and progress at a standstill for fear of "subjugating the Orthodox to the Pope in Rome." Even among Catholics there is dogmatic resistance. A call to all from Johannes Zizoulas, Metropolitan of Pergamon, tenacious advocate of the value of dialogue.

Paphos (AsiaNews) - The 2nd round of dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox is being held in Paphos (Cyprus) from October 16 to 23. Progress, however, appears a distant goal. Two days ago, groups of traditionalist Orthodox monks and Orthodox priests from Larnaca interrupted the meeting of the Joint Commission, asking Archbishop Chrisostomos to stop it. They believe that dialogue between the two Churches is designed to "subjugate the Orthodox to the pope in Rome". Yet it is to this very island, a martyred land of ancient Christian traditions, **(Continue next page)**

divided by the last wall in Europe, the one between Greece and Turkey, that Benedict XVI will come on a papal visit in June 2010.

The dialogue of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches began in Ravenna in 2007 where a road map for process towards full unity was signed. The Ravenna document, of great importance, is based on the ecclesiology of the first millennium, when the two churches were in full communion, although even then differences arose from time to time.

The Ravenna document was not signed by the Russian Orthodox Church, which withdrew over differences with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople on the question of the Church in Estonia. But these days it was involved in the work. Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople confirmed two days ago that "engaging in dialogue is our duty and obligation. Dialogue is a road of no return".

The issue of dialogue is the theme of an in depth interview that the Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizoulas, gave to Cypriot journalist Aris Viketos. Zizoulas is Co-chairman - along with the card. Walter Kasper - of the Joint Commission, an eminent theologian and a charismatic figure, as well as a strong supporter of dialogue.

In ecumenical circles it is said that with this interview Zizoulas is sending an important signal to certain areas of the Orthodox world. They, although a minority, are loudly contesting the dialogue, because they themselves are victims of a traditionalist narcissism bordering on infallibility. The interview also criticizes certain sectors of the Catholic Church who impose a disproportionate dogmatic rationalism, and who want nothing to change. With acuity, the same Zizoulas, commenting to AsiaNews on the situation of the "Christian world" of today, said: "The Christian world today has many bishops, a few theologians and even less ecclesiological knowledge".

Dialogue and the Ecumenical Patriarchate

Returning to the interview, Zizoulas immediately clarifies that "the decision to participate in dialogue with the Catholic Church was 'unanimously' made by all Orthodox churches. Therefore inveighing against dialogue, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and my person is unfair. All Orthodox churches were in agreement on the importance of dialogue and the fact that it must continue".

"The Ecumenical Patriarchate – he continues - as in all other Orthodox matters, has only a coordinating role and we, like the other members of the Commission, are the engaged executors, according to our own conscience, of the mandate that was assigned to us. We are open to criticism because we are not infallible, just as our critics

are not infallible. Those who do not want dialogue, are opposed to the common will of all Orthodox Churches." Regarding the positions of the monks of Mount Athos – staunchly opposed to dialogue - the Metropolitan of Pergamon is explicit: "I respect their opinion and their feelings on matters of faith. But why should they have the monopoly of truth on matters of faith? Are the other leaders of the churches perhaps lacking this sensitivity? All the faithful of the Church have the right to express their thoughts. But all opinions should be subject to scrutiny of the synods. If the great Father of the Church St. Basil put his opinion to the judgment of synods, we can do no less!".

Petrine primacy

The monks of Mount Athos and some conservative sectors of the Orthodox world accuse the Ecumenical Patriarchate of yielding to Rome on the question of Petrine primacy. Called upon to answer this question, Zizoulas says, "to the monks, whom I consider no less infallible than my own modest self, I would like to reply that the question of primacy is an ecclesiological one. And ecclesiology as we know, is part of dogma, part of faith. When we dialogue on this issue, we look at our own dogmatic divergence. There is no intention of neglecting other matters of dogma ... Quite simply, our experience has shown us that we must first agree on basic issues of ecclesiology, because the question of primacy has been fatal and tragic in relations between the Catholic and Orthodox world. "

"The Ravenna text - continues Zizoulas - is very important, but unfortunately it has not received due attention and disclosure. It was agreed that the primacy at any level it is exercised, should be understood in its synodal character. This is what the Orthodox Church maintains and applies and it has its roots in the 34th Apostolic Canon ... The Orthodox Church also has its primus, but they can not decide without the synod, nor the synod without them. This focal point was accepted at the Ravenna meeting, although it does not agree with [the concept of] the primate, as monarch. The second point of the Ravenna document is that the primate is linked to the concept of the pentarchy of the patriarchates [1]. This was true during the first millennium, and this should apply even if the remaining assumptions of the first millennium will retain their validity. Which is why their [the monks of Mount Athos] opposition to dialogue is incomprehensible. We all have to accept [these findings] and where the pope accepts the canonical structure of the Church as it was configured in the first millennium, we should all be happy ... The Ravenna text adopts the basic principles of the Church of the first millennium".

The Uniates (Continue next page)

Regarding the Uniate question and the resulting differences that emerged with the Catholic Church, the Metropolitan of Pergamon responds that the Uniate question "has never ceased to be a serious issue for us Orthodox. There has been much discussion in the context of dialogue and we agree with the Catholic Church not to take uniatism as a model towards unity and not to use it as a model of proselytism. The Uniate issue will be taken into account when the issue of the primacy in the 2nd millennium is addressed, when in fact the phenomenon was born".

Ecumenism: Heresy?

Asked whether ecumenism is a heresy, Zizoulas replied: "In defining someone as a heretic, one must consider if that person rejects the principles endorsed by ecumenical synods. Among those Orthodox participating in the ecumenical dialogue I have not found any deviation from the principles of faith. Moreover knowing how to dialogue with those who oppose your beliefs does not make you a heretic. Ecumenical dialogue has nothing to hide and our journey is still a long one".

On the prospects of dialogue, Zizoulas concludes by saying: "History is guided by God. Those who proclaim that the Church's unity is impossible, are trying to take the place of God. Who are we to predetermine the future? We are called to tirelessly work so we all may be one. If we do not enact this, or we do so at the expense of the faith of our fathers, then we will be called to answer to God. The final outcome is in His hands. He will find a way to see His will is done, so we may all be one. We simply have to work for unity".

[1] The Church of the first millennium was administered by 5 Patriarchs: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch. Rome held primacy."

Joint Commission: Further Progress and Next Meeting in Vienna 2010

Nat da Polis of AsiaNews reports from Paphos, 27 October:

"The work of the first phase of meetings post Ravenna 2007, between Orthodox and Catholics for the unity of two churches concluded in Paphos, Cyprus with a common assertion of willingness to go forward "at all costs". In Ravenna, Catholics and Orthodox had signed a text which recognized that primacy and collegiality are interdependent concepts. For this reason, the primacy in the life of the Church at all levels - regional and universal - must always be seen and examined in the context of collegiality (synodal) and at the same time, the collegiate (the Synod) in the context of the primacy.

As was agreed in the Ravenna meeting, where, as rightly pointed out by the Catholic Bishop Dimitri Salachas for the first time after centuries of misunderstanding serious discussion about the unity of the two Churches began, the commission discussed the role of the Bishop of Rome in the first millennium based on a text prepared by the Joint Committee in October 2008 in Crete, Greece. The text, entitled "The Role of the Bishop of Rome in the Communion of the Church in the First Millennium " tries to address the attitudes of the personalities who marked the history of the Church of the first millennium, united at the time, and investigate it in light of the historical, social and cultural context of that period.

The reason for starting discussions with the examination of the status of the Church in the first millennium, as agreed by all, lies in the fact that there is the intention of both sides to start from what historically unites the two Churches, in order to then come to a better understanding, in the socio-cultural historical context, of the reason for the division, despite the need for unity of the two Churches.

Of course the road is long, it was commented in Paphos, but there is the will of both sides to move forward at all costs, trying to soften the fears of those in their flock opposed to the prospect of unity. In the Orthodox world there are some areas that delight in their independence, however, characterized by a provincial culture, whereas in the Catholic world some sectors languish in a exaggerated dogmatic rationalism, which blocks a greater willingness to address the various issues. We suffer from an exaggerated Popery, a Catholic prelate revealed, at a time, he said, where even Benedict XVI himself often refers to the texts of the great fathers of the United Church. No small number in the ecumenical movement agree on the fact that in the management of Church affairs a more despotic rather than Episcopal notion has prevailed. Which is why we arrived at a catastrophic second millennium, with all its consequences for the universal Church.

In short, attempts are being made to address the nefarious second millennium - that of division and excommunication - as late as possible, by taking on the considerations of the great German physicist Max Planck, as maliciously observed in Cyprus, who maintained that new theories are accepted not because their creators accept them, but because new generations grow and are formed in these. In other words, time is the best doctor.

And there were those who recalled the words spoken by the **(Continue next page)**

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I in Rome in 2004 during a meeting with a crowd of young people in the church of the Apostle Bartholomew on Tiber Island, organized by the Community of St. Egidio. Responding to their question as to when there will finally be unity between the two Churches, Bartholomew said, to resounding applause, that "if unity depends on us priests the road will be long. But it will be you, the faithful of the Church, who will force us to speed up the process".

The Joint Commission, finally, has announced the next round of discussion and correction of the text of Crete, for September (20-27) 2010 in Vienna. It will be organised by Cardinal Christoph Schönborn."

Pope Benedict XVI--Apostolic Constitution

Anglicanorum coetibus

"The Church, a people gathered into the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, as "a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all people." Every division among the baptized in Jesus Christ wounds that which the Church is and that for which the Church exists; in fact, "such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages that most holy cause, the preaching the Gospel to every creature." Precisely for this reason, before shedding his blood for the salvation of the world, the Lord Jesus prayed to the Father for the unity of his disciples.

It is the Holy Spirit, the principle of unity, which establishes the Church as a communion. He is the principle of the unity of the faithful in the teaching of the Apostles, in the breaking of the bread and in prayer. The Church, however, analogous to the mystery of the Incarnate Word, is not only an invisible spiritual communion, but is also visible; in fact, "the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church and the Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On the contrary, they form one complex reality formed from a two-fold element, human and divine." The communion of the baptized in the teaching of the Apostles and in the breaking of the eucharistic bread is visibly manifested in the bonds of the profession of the faith in its entirety, of the celebration of all of the sacraments instituted by Christ, and of the governance of the College of Bishops united with its head, the Roman Pontiff.

This single Church of Christ, which we profess in the Creed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic "subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of

Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.... Since these are gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, they are forces impelling towards Catholic unity.""

Session of St. Irenaeus of Lyon Working Group held



Kyiv November 4, 2009 (UOC-MP) - The working group of St. Irenaeus of Lyon opened its session on November 4. The organization was established when in 2000 the official dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches was paused. Since then, every year 25 best theologians of the orthodox and catholic world gather in one of the European cities for discussion of topical issues. The working group focuses its attention on theological issues which may in certain way facilitate conducting official dialogue between the

Orthodox and Catholics. In spite of the fact that the official negotiations resumed, the leading theologians continue their dialogue. The working group has two co-chairpersons - the Catholic and the Orthodox, the latter now being the representative of the Orthodox Church of Antioch in Paris Bishop John.

The Kyiv meeting of the St. Irenaeus of Lyon Working Group will last three days and will be over on Sunday.

Posted by Josephus Flavius

India: Ecumenical agreement between Eastern Catholics, other 'St. Thomas Christians' December 18, 2009

The bishops of Kerala-- the home of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church-- have reached an agreement with Syrian Jacobite and Syrian Orthodox leaders to share churches outside Kerala for Sunday Mass and to consider sharing cemeteries and the use of priests at funerals. All four churches trace their origin to the evangelization of St. Thomas the Apostle.

Orthodox Christians in U.S. face obstacles before unifying

Friday, October 30, 2009

By Ann Rodgers, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Pam Panchak/Post-Gazette

Sister Sara Elisabet Oftedal, the co-founder and Housemother of Martha and Mary House, an Orthodox Christian Maternity Home for pregnant women choosing life and adoption in Escondido, Calif., participates in the panel discussion on the "New Face of American Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century," at the Orthodox Christianity in North America conference at the Antiochian Village Retreat Center in Ligonier.

As Orthodox Christians in the United States seek a new unity out of ethnic fragmentation, they must grapple with the fact that many who say they cherish the faith nevertheless ignore its teachings and practices.

"They see the Orthodox Church in an unorthodox way," said Alexei Krindatch, research director of the Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute at the University of California-Berkeley, who conducted an in-depth study of Orthodox Christians in the United States.

He spoke in Ligonier at a national conference of Orthodox Christian Laity, church activists from across all ethnic jurisdictions. They welcomed this year's call from the patriarchs of all of the Eastern European and Middle Eastern Orthodox churches to begin forming united Orthodox churches in places such as North America and Australia. The patriarchs instructed all Orthodox bishops in North America to begin meeting

together to deal with the issues of their own regions. Groups such as Orthodox Christian Laity want to help the bishops along that path.

Orthodox Christians have a high sense of identification with their faith, Mr. Krindatch said. Eighty-seven percent said they couldn't imagine being anything but Orthodox, compared to 70 percent of Catholics who felt the same way about their church. But although more than 70 percent of Orthodox identify themselves as conservative or traditional -- wanting no or slow change -- many also consider key teachings of the faith optional.

Mr. Krindatch found that 60 percent believed they could be good Orthodox Christians without going to church every Sunday -- and they attended less frequently than Catholics or evangelical Protestants.

More than a quarter believed it was unnecessary to give time and money to either the church or to help the poor. Another study found that 62 percent of Orthodox Christians believed abortion should be legal in all or most cases.

Metropolitan Jonah, national leader of the Russian-rooted Orthodox Church in America, reacted strongly to the abortion findings, telling the assembly, "If 60 percent of our people support abortion, then we have failed miserably in our teaching."

But he praised a panel of speakers who he said were laying the practical groundwork for unity by bringing people from all jurisdictions together to aid women in crisis pregnancies, assist the poor and start schools.

Sister Sara Elisabet Oftedal, co-founder of Martha and Mary House in Escondido, Calif., a small home for women who choose adoption over abortion, said her board has members from the Serbian, Antiochian, and Greek jurisdictions and is incorporated in the Orthodox Church in America.

"As a convert, I'm blind to the differences. But I do think it would be wonderful if we were all together because it would be a much more powerful witness," she said.

The Rev. Justin Mathews, director of FOCUS North America, a pan-Orthodox ministry to aid poor Americans with food, shelter and employment, said global Orthodoxy has a long tradition of social service, but it has been neglected in America. **(Continue next page)**

Ministry to the poor "is the responsibility of our church and perhaps the beginning of the tangible fabric of unity," he said. Paying homage to food festivals, he said Orthodox churches in America are ideally suited for soup kitchens because "our churches are full of these commercial kitchens that are used primarily to serve ourselves."

Achieving administrative unity would benefit social service ministries because they wouldn't have to approach a half-dozen ethnic bishops for permission each time they wanted to start a project in a given city, he said.

Right now "it's just difficult to access the faithful. I can't get the names of everybody. They don't all subscribe to the same magazines. So just in the area of being able to reach people with a vital message, there would be an economy of communication that would be greatly effective," he said.

Correction/Clarification: (Published Oct. 31, 2009) Sister Sara Elisabet Oftedal spoke Oct. 29, 2009 at a meeting of Orthodox Christian Laity in Ligonier. Her name was misspelled in this story as originally published Oct. 30, 2009.

Ann Rodgers can be reached at arodgers@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1416.

A Transfigured Faith An Account of a Latin Rite Catholic's Retreat in the Eastern Christian Monastic Tradition

Our Lady of Solitude Cloister and Retreat – Warren Center, PA

It is not customary that a Roman Catholic would decide to make his much overdo retreat at an Eastern

Catholic monastic foundation. What would prompt a man to depart so from his tradition and to seek spiritual nourishment in a liturgical setting so foreign to his own? What benefit apart from the usual objectives of a retreatant would one expect to derive in a world that is so apparently alien to his native one? These would be reasonable questions -- questions in fact that I, a Latin Rite Catholic, asked of myself as I was about to make a retreat at the Melkite-Greek foundation of Our Lady of Solitude in northeastern Pennsylvania in early August of this year. The best answer, and perhaps the only

necessary answer, can be summed up in one word: perspective. Perspective is something that many of us Christians woefully lack, whether we be Orthodox or Catholic. We naturally become myopic, viewing the rest of the Christian world using our comfortable and familiar surroundings, liturgical and spiritual, as the standard against which all others should be measured and judged. This is not necessarily a condemnation of such behavior, but, recognized for what it is, it does tend to limit us frail creatures and hinder the man from breathing with both lungs. Nor is this to say that we should extend so far out of ourselves in an unrestrained ecumenical fervor as to embrace everything every tradition has to offer. What we as Christians, or, what is more to the point, what I as a Christian needed to do was to not only take a break from the world, but to take a break from my theological and liturgical rut and to step out, experience, and breathe the fresh air of a fuller Catholic perspective recognizing that God is infinite and beyond the limitations of my limited human and theological expression. This opportunity came to me by way of an invitation from heironomk Father Angelus, superior of Our Lady of Solitude Cloister & Retreat. The timing was perfect. I would not only make my retreat during the Dormition fast, but I would be able to celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration while on this retreat, a feast that leaves many of us Latins scratching our heads in bewilderment in spite of the fact that we as well annually commemorate this solemnity (though with less fanfare than our Byzantine and Eastern brethren). Without further ado, I made my 19-hour drive to the cloister to begin my spiritual adventure. I found a most gracious host in Fr. Angelus who invited me in to live, as fully as possible, Eastern Christian monasticism for one week -- and live it I did. Typically many people advise those who come and witness a different liturgical tradition to not over exert oneself in attempting to follow all the parts of the ritual celebration, but to simply observe and passively absorb the new richness to which they are being exposed. This was a luxury in which this retreatant was not able to indulge. **(Continue next page)**

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| Pray for the unity of the Apostolic Churches! |
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I was thrust into the roles of sacristan and reader for the Divine Liturgy from the beginning and was obliged to involve myself in the public recitation of the Divine Office. The whole experience was foreign to me at first. My familiarity is with the Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms of the Roman Rite. I know the Order of the Mass, the use of variable Propers, the Order of the Divine Office with its accompanying rubrics. The traditional Roman and Gregorian tones are ingrained in me. Now I was forced into learning the most fundamental tones of the Byzantine liturgical tradition (for the week I was on retreat, we were in Tone 8). I had to quickly assimilate the schema of the Divine Office, especially Vespers. I had to quickly catch onto the regular hymns and melodies used in the Melkite version of the Divine Liturgy. The whole Order of the Divine Liturgy was in itself something new to me, or so I thought. In short, I was lost for the first couple of days. Then it clicked. Praised be God, but it was at the

Great Vespers for the Feast of the Transfiguration that it all began to make sense for me, that I began to see the inestimable treasures contained in this ancient liturgy, and that what I was experiencing was not so foreign after all. Not only did I see a common root between the Roman and Byzantine traditions as expressed in the most fundamental aspects of the Order of Vespers and the Order of the Divine Liturgy, but I sensed, in such a way that it was almost tangible, the unbroken root with our early Christian forefathers of the epoch of the Church prior to her emancipation under the glorious Emperor Constantine. That sense was especially tingled during the Lete and the Artoclasia which occurred at the end of Great Vespers in Our Lady of Solitude's dimly lit but profoundly intimate retreat chapel. My newfound appreciation of the theology of iconography came heavily to bear as I witnessed, during the Lete, the solemn procession of the festal icon, that portal into heaven by which we feeble men can touch and be touched by the

divine. That experience was further driven into my soul with the veritable reenactment of the blessing of the five loaves with wine, oil, and wheat in the Artoclasia. Truly, what a blessing it was for me to experience this -- to participate in a sacramental (as we Latins call it) that conveys grace and health to the faithful and so vividly reminds us of the Mystical Supper through which our Redeemer first gave us His most sacred Body and Blood as spiritual food! We celebrated the Divine Liturgy in honor of the Transfiguration in the morning, but today was different than the previous mornings. The hymns came more easily. The reading went smoothly. The tones (my intonations, that is) actually sounded Byzantine and not Gregorian (so I was told). One might object that that could have naturally come with continual exposure. However, I would respond that today was more than the **(Continue next page)**

acquisition of a correct note. Rather it was more of sense of intimate comfort, for I still butchered some of the hymns. There was an experience of a slight epiphany, and my faith felt fuller, endowed with a depth and profundity that it previously did not possess. Was I, on this holy day of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, experiencing a transfiguration of faith? That might be an overenthusiastic claim, but, nonetheless, something was different. I continued my retreat at Our Lady of Solitude with a renewed vigor. I walked the bucolic and verdant acreage of the monastic grounds with Fr. Angelus and received the patient and wise counsels of the type that seems to only be able to come from a monk of many years. I helped our wizened heironk on his monastic farm, which consists primarily of goats and chickens, by feeding and watering the animals. A recognizable but inexplicable harmony was obvious in this life between the Sacred Mysteries, the Sacred Liturgies, and the cultivation of nature. Grace builds upon and perfects nature, and nature, as a necessary

result, becomes more beautiful as man journeys towards his original and first intended state. Albeit, I received no miraculous aids from God's creation as did St. Antony the Great, but Elias, the kid goat of Our Lady of Solitude Farms, certainly appeared to have greatly warmed up to me. Between prayers and work on the monastic farm, I perused the wonderful gift shop on the monastic grounds. There before me was a cornucopia of beautiful, certified icons from Greece and Russia as well as literature of both the Eastern and Western traditions. From here, Fr. Angelus helped me to pick the first icons that would comprise my new icon corner when I returned home. They were subsequently blessed and heard the Divine Liturgy the next day. To bring the liturgy home, to grace the Domestic Church with these windows into heaven so that the faithful of my family could be continually reminded of the Sacred Mysteries and the unutterable love of God -- what wonderful aids in one's quest for theosis!

Retreats. Transfiguration. Theosis. Interlinked and inseparable. Whether one calls it sanctity or saintliness as it is in the West or illumination and theosis as it is in the East (I grant that I am using illumination in a limited sense here), all these appellations call for us to be Transfigured in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Is that not the proper and final end of a retreat? Is that not the proper and final end of life? We, however, so often forget our final end in the tumult of the world, and it often takes a retreat to reacquire the proper bearings. This is all the more amplified in the context of a feast such as that of the Transfiguration which drives home the words of St. Athanasius that we should become by grace what God is by nature (On the Incarnation). Well, thanks be to God for retreats, and thanks be to God for monastic foundations like Our Lady of Solitude who offer them. This past Feast of the Transfiguration was a spiritual watershed that I believe God willed
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to occur in no other setting than that of an Eastern Catholic cloister. It furnished a fresh perspective, a perspective of greater depth as with seeing with two eyes, a perspective that was not so much less Latin and more Byzantine as it was less insular and more Catholic.

Epilogue

Retreats are of priceless value for these and other ends. Whether one seeks to recollect himself or to discern a vocation to the angelic life of a monk, there is hardly a better means than a monastic retreat. †

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Summer 2009 • SOPHIA 19

*****A CHANGE*****

DUE TO THE FACT THAT WE NO LONGER HAVE A PRINTER AVAILABLE FOR OUR NEWSLETTER WE ARE FORCED TO CHANGE ITS DISTRIBUTION. FROM NOW ON THE NEWSLETTER WILL BE SENT TO MEMBERS AS AN EMAIL ATTACHMENT WHICH THEY CAN DOWNLOAD, SAVE, AND PRINT IF THEY WISH. ALSO, MEMBERS WILL BE ABLE TO VIEW OUR NEWSLETTER ON THE NATIONAL SITE OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM. <http://www.ssjc.org/index.htm> GO TO THE "CHAPTERS" SECTION. THIS LEAVES US WITH THE PROBLEM OF A DOZEN MEMBERS WHO DO NOT HAVE EMAIL ADDRESSES. THESE PEOPLE WILL BE CONTACTED BY PHONE AND PERHAPS SOME ARRANGEMENT CAN BE MADE WITH MEMBERS THAT THEY KNOW TO ACQUIRE A COPY OF THE NEWSLETTER. WE ARE SORRY FOR ANY INCONVENIENCE THAT THIS MAY CAUSE. IF MEMBERS HAVE OTHER SUGGESTIONS PLEASE LET US KNOW.

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- **TUESDAY, JANUARY THE 12TH, 2010, 7 P.M.**
- **ST. NICHOLAS ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, 764 FIFTH STREET, STRUTHERS, OH 44471**
- **SPEAKERS: FATHER BOB BONNOT AND FATHER GEORGE GAGE**
- **TOPIC: LIFE OF A PRIEST: EAST AND WEST**
- **PRAY FOR THE UNITY OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES!**

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