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OCL LAUNCHES ITS EIGHTH YEAR AT CHICAGO MEETING

PROBLEMS AT THE PATRIARCHATE

A TROUBLED CHURCH IN THE HOLY LAND

The OCL pilgrimage to the Holy Land revealed, through first-hand experience and observation, that all is not well there. While pleased to learn that 67% of the shrine is under the control of the Greek Orthodox Church through the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre which under its Abbott, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, has safeguarded the shrines through the centuries, it was disheartening to observe that many of the over one hundred shrines, including some fifty monasteries, are in a deplorable state. This, in contrast to the Roman Catholic shrines which constitute only 16% of the holy places.

Of course, the passage of nearly 2,000 years of history since Christ and the repeated inroads of invaders and their destruction of these shrines only to have them rebuilt and re-destroyed again, have taken their toll. In addition, the falling off of vocations, the fact that few young men enter monasticism today, has also aggravated the situation.

Today, there are only about seventy monks in the Brotherhood, not enough to man all the shrines, hence, the employment of local Arab Orthodox Christians as caretakers. But this has not prevented many of these sites from remaining unclean and garbage-infested. It seems, however, that the convents maintained by nuns are in better condition than the monasteries maintained by monks.

LACK OF FUNDS AND FISCAL ACCOUNTABILITY

But the real problem seems to be the lack of funds to maintain these shrines. As the largest landholder in Israel, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem is reputed to have an annual income of approximately \$1,400,000. These are funds that accrue from commercial properties owned by the Patriarchate throughout the land, including contributions from the faithful and an annual \$25,000 from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in America. But since 1984, under Patriarch Diodoros, who assumed the Throne of Zion in 1981, there has been no fiscal accountability of income nor an annual budget.

It seems that the Patriarch has been penurious in providing funds for these shrines and monasteries, forcing the monks therein to provide for themselves. In some instances, they have been successful as we saw at the monasteries of Bethpage and Bethany, where the abbots were successful in raising funds to restore their monasteries. But several monasteries visited, like those on Zion Hill and in the Judean wilderness, reflected extreme shortcomings.

This has not prevented the Patriarchate, however, from spending huge sums of money building shopping centers and parking facilities only to abandon them as building costs escalated.

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A PICTORIAL REVIEW OF THE OCL PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

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For the third time in its brief existence, the Orthodox Christian Laity held its annual meeting in the Chicago area. Members from throughout America gathered at the North Shore Hilton and Towers in suburban Skokie and at neighboring SS. Peter and Paul Greek Orthodox Church in Glenview during the weekend of October 28-30.

Reports were rendered of OCL's multifaceted activities in the past year with reference to spiritual renewal and the restoration of the laity's historic role in the governance of the Church. Members participated in religious workshops on the annual meeting's theme of "Faith, Language and Culture: Embracing Our Spiritual Identity," to worship and pray, to plan future directions and finally, to elect new directors and officers.

The annual event was hosted by the OCL Council of Metropolitan Chicago and chaired by Nicholas E. Nicholaou, with the assistance of Roula Karcazes, co-chairman, Estelle Kanakis, registrations and the organizing committee, putting together an inspirational and edifying program for those in attendance.

THEME: "EMBRACING OUR SPIRITUAL IDENTITY"

Following an all-day meeting of the Board of Directors, the program began on Friday evening, with a dinner and reception at the hotel which featured keynote speaker Demetra Velisarios Jaquet, Director of Hope Care and Counseling Service in Denver and Chair of the Women's Orthodox Ministries and Education Network (WOMEN), who spoke on the theme "Embracing Our Spiritual Identity."

A graduate of several theological schools including Holy Cross in Brookline and founder of Orthodox People Together (OPT), Ms Jaquet held her audience spellbound by her erudition and knowledge. The evening ended with a presentation of liturgical compositions of the newly organized Chicago-based Orthodox Concert Choir under the direction of John Sutko.

The next day, Saturday, found participants at SS. Peter and Paul Church where morning prayer services were held and the Second General Session opened with a series of three workshops. The first workshop, conducted by the pastor of the church, Fr. George I. Scoulas, a leading theologian and musicologist, addressed the theme, "Faith and Spiritual Renewal."

FOCUSING ON LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND MISSIONS

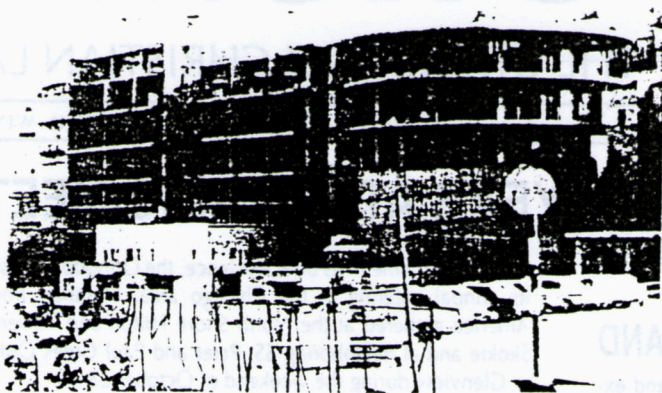
The second workshop on "Language and Culture," was conducted by Fr. James Doyle of the Orthodox Church of America (OCA). A graduate of St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute in Paris and former professor at St. Tikhon Seminary of the OCA in South Canaan, PA, Fr. Doyle is currently pursuing post graduate studies at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

The third workshop, "Missions and Outreach," was conducted by Fr. William Caldaroni, pastor of Holy Transfiguration Church in Wheaton, IL, of the Antiochian Orthodox jurisdiction. A graduate of Oral Roberts University, he converted to Orthodoxy when the "Evangelical Orthodox Church" was accepted into the Antiochian jurisdiction. Since then, he has been involved in mission work among students at the Evangelical Protestant Wheaton College, chrismating and baptizing many into the Holy Orthodox Church.

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PROBLEMS IN THE HOLY LAND

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One of several investment properties undertaken by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and then abandoned due to escalation costs. This was a projected shopping center and parking facilities located near the Church of the Nativity, built by St. Helen on the site of Christ's birth in Bethlenem. Reputedly, over a million dollars of church funds were lost in this endeavor.

We saw the results of this folly in Bethlehem and elsewhere where only the superstructures of these buildings stand. Nor apparently has this hindered the Patriarchate from erecting villas for the Patriarch in Jericho, Amman, Jordan and even in Athens.

It has been reported also that the Patriarchate is selling off large tracts of its land or leasing them on a long-term basis with no accountability to the Holy Synod--the governing body of the Church of Jerusalem. This has caused much consternation among local Arab Orthodox Christians who feel that their patrimony is being eroded. Also, members of the Holy Synod have become concerned.

ETHNIC FRACTIONALISM WITHIN THE CHURCH

One such member, Bishop Nikiphoros of Constantine, has attempted to persuade the Patriarch to amend his ways, resulting in his expulsion from the Synod. When he went public, writing in the printed media, this courageous man was detrocked and returned to the ranks of the laity on October 31st, shortly after our departure from the Holy Land.

Another serious problem is the on-going conflict between the Arab Orthodox Christians who comprise over 95% of the Orthodox faithful and the Greek-dominated hierarchy and Brotherhood which controls the Church in the Holy Land. Reports have it that the Patriarchate is reluctant to ordain Arab Orthodox bishops for fear that the Greek-dominated hierarchy will lose control. Young Arab Orthodox men aspiring to the priesthood are urged to get married so that they become ineligible for the episcopacy.

This ethnic irrationalism within the Church of Jerusalem is undermining the unity of the largest Christian denomination in the Holy Land.

These conditions were mentioned by OCL pilgrims to Metropolitan Vassilios of Caesarea who received us in audience at the Central Patriarchate in the absence of ailing Patriarch Diodoros. It was suggested that the Patriarchate institute a "Peace Corps" program inviting young Orthodox Christians from abroad to come to the Holy Land and help them in the nearly empty monasteries in return for work in upgrading these properties. In fairness, Metropolitan Vassilios responded that was very difficult to maintain the shrines due to enormous difficulties posed by the fragile state of affairs in the Holy Land.

CONDITIONS EXIST DESPITE DENIALS

He denied that patriarchal properties were being sold but that they were leased and that the proceeds raised by these long term leases were being used to help provide schools and much needed aid to the Arab Orthodox. He denied that the Church was reluctant to ordain Arab bishops, there were several of them in the episcopacy. Contrary to reports, the Patriarchate was fulfilling its important role as the guardian of the Holy Places in the face of great difficulties.

Upon the pilgrimage's return home, George Matsoukas, a vice president of OCL, submitted a report to OCL at its Seventh Annual Meeting in Chicago, calling for the establishment of a "Pan Orthodox Foundation" to help the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in its mission, in view of the fact that the "Patriarchate can no longer exercise its stewardship responsibilities in isolation and by itself."

Prayers were offered that His Beatitude, Patriarch Diodoros, together with his Synod, recognize the short-sightedness of their policies and that sound fiscal and managerial principles are adopted in order to prevent the further deterioration of the Church in the Holy Land, especially with reference to the preservation of these irreplaceable shrines before they become lost to Orthodoxy and to the world in general.

Andrew T. Kopa

"CHRISTIANS LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

Christians love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save orphans from those who would hurt them. If a man has something, he gives freely to the man who has nothing. If they see a stranger, Christians take him home and are happy, as though he were a real brother. They don't consider themselves brothers in the usual sense, but brothers instead through the Spirit of God. And if they hear that one of them is in jail, or persecuted for professing the name of the redeemer, they all give him what he needs. If it is possible, they bail him out. If one of them is poor and there isn't enough food to go around, they fast several days to give him the food he needs....This is really a new kind of person. There is something divine in them.

Arstides, a non-Christian, defending the Christians before Hadrian

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