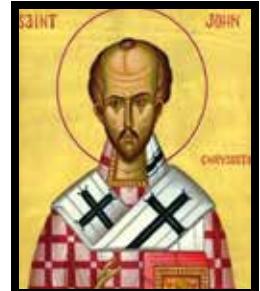


# Light of the East

Newsletter of the Society of Saint John Chrysostom  
Western Region Edition  
Website: [www.lightoftheeast.org](http://www.lightoftheeast.org)



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## Canon Law: Eastern, Western approaches discussed

By Anne Petach

An uninformed secular view sometimes portrays Canon Law as harsh, punitive and “one size fits all.”

In contrast, as speakers representing the Antiochian Orthodox, Ukrainian Catholic and Roman Catholic churches emphasized, it is “an instrument of mercy” that is always applied individually and with a flexibility that the Orthodox call “economia” and the Romans, “dispensation.”

The Feb. 14 program of the Society of Saint John Chrysostom - Western Region was held at Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Church in San Diego.

Fr. James Bankston of St. John the Baptizer Ukrainian Catholic Church in La Mesa noted that the flexibility is signaled in the Eastern Code by phrases allowing modifications at the discretion of the Eparch (Bishop) or even “according to local custom.” Though parish priests need to know the Code well enough to guide their flocks, individual cases are decided by the diocesan bishop, in consultation with his “canonist” experts.



Inside pages of an 18th Century Orthodox canon law as seen at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Public domain photo used courtesy of the WikiCommons

Each speaker stressed that the reason for the mercifulness of Canon Law is that it springs from the fundamental mission of the Church to bring men to salvation through and in Christ. “Canon” translates as “rule,” in the sense a builder would use it: an aid to getting lines straight. Thus, it is intended as a guide to the right path. The Orthodox version, “The Pedalion” (from which Greek our word “pedal” is derived), translates as “The Rudder” – that which keeps a ship on course.

Confusions about sin, error or heresy arose as the Church grew and developed that tended to draw the faithful away from Christ and His Church.

In response, “reactively,” as Fr. Antony Bahou of St. George Antiochian Orthodox Church in San Diego pointed out, episcopal synods (and, particularly, ecumenical councils) drew up guidelines (canons). Thus each canon has a historical context that is usually included in its phrasing.

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### Happenings!

#### SSJC-WR Presentation:

#### **Evangelization: East and West**

Presented by Patty Diaz, coordinator of Fellowship of Orthodox Christians United to Serve, and Chris O'Donnell, director of Cat-

echetical Ministry, San Rafael Parish, Rancho Bernardo. Presentation is at 10 a.m., Saturday, May 16, at Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church in Old Town San Diego (2540 San Diego Avenue). Archpriest George Morelli will moderate; information at 760-920-6530.

## The Society of Saint John Chrysostom

The Society of Saint John Chrysostom is an Ecumenical group of clergy and lay people that promotes Eastern Christianity and Ecumenical Dialogue between the Eastern and Western Churches. It has sponsored the Eastern Churches Journal and the annual Orientale Lumen Conference. It has been in existence since 1997 in the United States and for over 70 years in England.

### The Goals of the Society are to:

- Make known the history, worship, spirituality, discipline and theology of Eastern Christendom
- Work and pray that all Christians, particularly the Orthodox and Catholic Churches, will attain the fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires
- Develop educational programs that present information about the Eastern Churches
- Organize and conduct pilgrimages and conferences that encourage ecumenical dialogue
- Contribute to fundraising activities that support Eastern Christian communities and other programs in need of financial aid.
- Publish books, brochures and other information which help explain Eastern Christianity.
- Encourage and support the study of the writings and liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.
- Promote scholarships for the study of Eastern Churches and Orthodox Seminaries.

## Western Region

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## Light of the East

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## Message from the President of SSJC-Western Region



# Personhood: Disunion and union

*By the Very Reverend Archpriest George Morelli, PhD*

"And God created man to his own image: to the image of God he created him: male and female he created them." (Gn 1: 27)

"And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (Gn 2:7)

One would hope that the basis of union among those who acknowledge the transcendent personal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would be that of the worth and sanctity of personhood. It would appear, however, that rather than a re-establishment of cordial relations among those who acknowledge the sacredness of Scripture, and the Book of Genesis in particular, there is an ever-growing divide.

Understanding how the differing religious traditions view the genesis and development of the concept of personhood gives an insight of what fuels this great divide. Spiritual and moral values differ among those who all consider themselves followers of Christ, and the difference in the understanding of personhood is not only a good reflection of the chasm — but may be in part what is fueling the widening of it.

The Apostolic Churches' view is that persons are known by God outside of created space and time. The Prophet Jeremiah (1:5) tells us, "Before I formed thee in the bowels of thy mother, I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and made thee a prophet unto the nations." The traditional Christian Churches understand that God created body and soul, fused together at the moment of conception.

This is based on the Virgin Mary's response to the invitation from God delivered by the Archangel Gabriel: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most High shall overshadow thee." (Lk 1: 35) The "to be" Mother of God (Theotokos) responded her fiat ("let it be done"): "Behold the handmaid of the

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# A century later, genocide still being debated



**Armenian and other Christian refugee children fleeing from the Ottoman genocide are seen at an orphanage in Aleppo, Syria, in 1920. Men and older boys were often murdered, adult women and children sent on forced marches without adequate food or water supplies.**

By Jim Trageser

This year marks the 100-year anniversary of genocidal campaigns carried out against historic Christian communities by the Ottoman Empire.

Yet while the Armenian, Assyrian and Ottoman Greek communities and their supporters mark the somber anniversary with religious services, marches and lectures, much of the rest of the world either still denies the historic realities that occurred or simply ignores them — responses that have repercussions for contemporary assaults on minority Christian communities in the Middle East.

In Germany, the governing parties of the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats are trying to head off proposals from the Greens and the Left Party to officially recognize what happened in what is now modern-day Turkey in the days before World War I as a genocide.

A March 4, 2015 article on the German media web site Deutsche Welle attributed the hesitation to a fear of confrontation with Ankara on the part of the German administration, as Ankara has consistently and repeatedly rejected any description of the campaigns against the Ottoman Christians as a "genocide."

To date, Wikipedia reports that 22 nations have formally described the campaign as a genocide, a description backed by the International Association of Genocide Scholars.

## What we know

Beginning in April 2015, the Ottoman authorities became increasingly suspicious of non-Muslims in their borders — particularly large minority populations of Armenians, Ottoman Greeks and Assyrians. These Christian communities all predated the majority Muslim Turks by a millennium or more, and were well-integrated into the Ottoman society — serving in the military and the civil service.

As World War I began to unfold, the Ottomans suffered an embarrassing defeat at the hands of the Russians — after which, a small contingent of Armenian nationalists defected from the Ottoman army to Russia.

The Ottomans, fearful of civil war arising within its own borders during the larger European campaign, reacted with a brutal crackdown.

On April 23, 1915, the Ottoman authorities or-

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# Scholars say Armenians first genocide of 20th Century

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dered a mass arrest of some 250 Armenian intellectuals in Istanbul.

The U.S. government filed a formal complaint, but the Ottoman authorities dismissed it - and began accelerating efforts to impose their "Turkey for the Turks" campaign.

Assyrian Christians were forcibly removed from their ancestral homes in eastern Turkey, and moved toward Syria.

At the same time, Greek-speaking Orthodox Christians -

whose communities had existed in the area since Alexanderian times - found themselves forcibly removed from their historic homes, often sent to live in Greece. Others were sent to Russia.

It is estimated that 1 million to 1.5 million Armenians were either outright killed or exposed to such deleterious conditions that they died as a result. Ottoman Greek and Assyrian populations also suffered from similar treatment, with their deaths totaling in the hundreds of thousands.

## Who where they?

The Armenians, Assyrians and Ottoman Greeks (also known as Anatolian Greeks) were three distinct Christian communities that had lived in Asia Minor (the classical name for the area now known as Turkey) since before the time of Christ. The Armenians and Assyrians are still present in the Middle East, albeit in sharply reduced numbers.

The Assyrians are descendants of ancient Mesopotamians, and speak a dialect of Eastern Aramaic, similar to the language Jesus spoke. They

are located in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran, and are also known as Syriacs or Chaldeans. They belong to various Eastern Christian churches, but mostly the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church.

The population of Assyrians was estimated at about 1 million before World War I; with an estimated 275,000 deaths in the genocide, more than a quarter of all Assyrians alive at the time likely lost their lives to the anti-Christian ethnic cleansing.

Those remaining after the war were primarily clustered in Iraq, Syria and Iran

The Armenians are an ancient people who trace their roots back to the Hittite Empire in Old Testament times. The Armenian language is related to ancient Greek and

Macedonian.

Most Armenians belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church, an ancient branch of Christianity likely founded by the apostles Bartholomew and Thaddeus.

The modern-day Republic of Armenia - lying just east of Turkey - has a population of just over 3 million, 98 percent of whom are Armenian.

The Anatolian Greeks (also known as Pontians) first settled what is now Turkey during the flourishing of the golden age of Greek culture. When the Roman Empire fell in the west, Christianity's center of teaching and power moved to Byzantium, headquartered in what was known as Constantinople (now Istanbul).

The Greek genocide was largely successful at

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A monument to the victims of the Armenian genocide in Turkey now stands in Pasadena, California.

# Religious genocide an ongoing problem in Middle East

*Continued from Page 4*

eliminating the Greek-speaking communities from Turkey. Most were murdered, the rest were forcibly removed to or fled to Greece and Russia. Today, only a small remnant of Greek speakers who support and serve the Ecumenical Patriarchate remain.

## Turkish response

The Turkish government, which inherited the shrunken remains of the former Ottoman Empire after World War I, has rejected any and all suggestion that the campaign against the Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks was genocide — insisting that all actions by the Ottomans were consistent with legal moves to preserve the empire in time of war.

However, the historical evidence seems clear: Forced relocations, summary executions without trial, mass killings, forced marches without adequate food or water, and officially sanctioned mass rapes are all today widely accepted as instruments of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

What concerns many human rights organizations, however, are the similarities between the disinclination of governments 100 years ago (and now!) to condemn the Armenian-Assyrian-Greek genocide, and the muted international reaction to today's campaign by the Islamic State against historic Christian communities in Syria and Iraq, primarily Assyrians.

As Pope Francis pointed out during his Holy Week sermons and pronouncements, there is a cu-

rious silence on the world stage and in the popular media regarding IS targeting of Christians.

And at an Armenian Catholic liturgy in Rome on April 12 attended by Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, and the Armenian president, Serzh Sargsyan, Francis specifically referred to the killings as "genocide" — leading Turkey to immediately recall its ambassador to the Vatican.

In his remarks, the pope said, "Concealing or denying evil is like allowing a wound to keep bleeding without bandaging it."

## Analogies to present

Human rights groups note that the international community's unwillingness to protect Christian communities in Turkey during World War I not only likely encouraged the Nazis' genocide against Jews in the 1930s and '40s, but offers evidence to other totalitarian regimes ranging from Stalin (Ukrainians) to Mao (Tibetans) and ISIS (Christians and Yazidis) that there is little risk to be had in slaughtering or expelling unpopular minorities.

As former Christian strongholds in Western Europe and North America undergo radical, rapid cultural change, with growing public resentment of and animosity toward Christian faith, there are few overtly Christian nations with the capability available to intervene on behalf of beleaguered Christian communities in the Middle East today.

# Historical contexts affected Canon Law, East and West

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Some historical contexts no longer have practical application and new challenges have arisen, so the Code(s) have needed revising.

A revised Roman Canon, begun after Vatican II, was promulgated in 1973. A separate Code for the Eastern Catholic Churches was promulgated in 1990. Significantly, this latter clarifies that these must not be designated "Eastern Rites" as formerly. They are, rather, Churches in their own right — *sui juris* — that use a particular liturgical rite (e.g., Byzantine).

Orthodox Canon Law still needs revision, said Fr. Antony, but is awaiting an unfortunately delayed unanimity among the various Orthodox jurisdictions in our times.

Some of the differences in the canons of these Codes, especially on Baptism and Marriage, stem from their differing historical contexts and some from differing theological approaches.

For a fuller understanding, please watch the YouTube video(s) :<http://youtu.be/m6LmO96J5V0> (Q& A session: <http://youtu.be/cO-qWyaUSiY>).

# Catholics, Oriental Orthodox hold meeting



**Attendees of the 12th meeting of the International Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches gather for an official photograph.**

By Jim Trageser

Representatives of Catholic and Oriental Orthodox Churches gathered in late January in Rome as part of an ongoing series of meetings intended to improve relations between the branches of historic Christianity.

Attending were members of the Orthodox Churches of the Coptic, Armenian, Syriac, Indian and Ethiopian traditions, as well as different branches of the Catholic Church. No representative from the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahdo Church was able to attend the conference.

The discussions focused on the nature of communion between the different communities of the early Church.

While the Oriental Orthodox and Catholic churches are not in communion — theological differences over the nature of Christ as stated in the Council of Chalcedon continue to divide us — relations have improved greatly in recent decades. May theologians today even hold that it was not a difference of opinion that led to the division at Chalcedon, but poor translation that led to a misunderstanding of what was being proposed.

In remarks to the delegates during a meeting Jan. 30, Pope Francis said a lack of theological unity is no barrier to nor excuse for a lack of spiritual unity,

particularly with all Christians under siege in much of the Middle East today.

"So many past controversies between Christians can be overcome when we put aside all polemical or apologetic approaches, and seek instead to grasp more fully what unites us, namely, our call to share in the mystery of the Father's love revealed to us by the Son through the Holy Spirit..."

"In this moment of prayer for unity, I would also like to remember our martyrs, the martyrs of today. They are witnesses to Jesus Christ, and they are persecuted and killed because they are Christians. Those who persecute them make no distinction between the religious communities to which they belong. They are Christians and for that they are persecuted."

"This, brothers and sisters, is the ecumenism of blood."

"May the intercession and example of the many martyrs and saints who have borne courageous witness to Christ in all our churches sustain and strengthen you and your Christian communities."

Before the meeting ended, the delegates wrote a proposed common declaration, "The Exercise of Communion in the Life of the Early Church and its Implications for our Search for Communion Today." The proposal will now go to each of the Churches for discussion.

# Morelli

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Lord; be it done to me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her." (Lk 1:38)

Spiritual Church Father Nikitas Stithatos (c. 1005 – c. 1090 AD) provides the patristic, and thus the traditional and orthodox Christian, understanding of the meaning of personhood. An individual "is an image of God manifest in a spiritual, immortal and intelligent soul, an intellect that is the father of ... consciousness and is consubstantial with the soul ... and is regal and sovereign."<sup>i</sup>

Some Christian communities not in communion with the Apostolic Churches have not dealt directly with the issue of personhood. However, their understanding of personhood can be inferred by their stance on, for example, the issue of abortion. The view of such communities on this issue, placed under the guise of a "human right," is euphemized as a "right to choose" or a "reproductive right" instead of an act of murder — which, of course, it is. One ethicist put it this way: "Most Christian denominations center their support for reproductive rights on the grounds of a woman's personal responsibility to make moral decisions in accordance with her faith."

Thus we have the desecration of the human person by individuals identifying themselves as Christians.

The critical importance of understanding the worth of personhood can be seen in the various interpretations or perspectives on personhood within Islam.

Islamic scholar Peter Riddell points out that there are various interpretations or perspectives on personhood in Islam. One view is that "Islam holds that Man consists of two essential elements, one material which is the body, the other spiritual which is the soul." This interpretation would respect the free will of the individual in following Allah's (God's) guidance.

On the other hand, "non-formally trained" radical fundamental Islamists would say that "Islamic scripture allows for some humans to change from 'person' to 'non-person' ... because they turn away from the guidance God has given them, and corrupt His word and thus their execution is justified."<sup>iii</sup>

The brutal barbaric killings by ISIS, at this writing now including the beheading of the 21 Coptic Egyptian martyr-saints so widely publicized in the media, would be justified in that they consider that their victims are "non-persons."

In this regard, our duty as Christians, and certainly as committed members of the Society of St. John Chrysostom, is to despise the evil deed but maintain our love of the person. Consider the words of the angel of the Apocalypse who transmits Christ's words to St. John the Evangelist: "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaites, which I also hate." (Revelation 2:6).<sup>iv</sup>

Thus we can strongly disapprove of the nefarious works or actions of others while still maintaining their worth or personhood.

Let us also consider the moral context in which any ongoing ecumenical efforts should occur. Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, Chairman of the Department for External Church Relations of the

Moscow Patriarchate, recently said: "The task of restoring unity will always be the goal to which Churches and communities ought to strive.

At the same time, however, we must remember that the

**'Our duty as Christians, and certainly as committed members of the Society of St. John Chrysostom, is to despise the evil deed but maintain our love of the person.'**

attainment of unity is possible not by rejecting the fundamental norms of Christian morality, not by attempts to accommodate oneself to social currents and an ever-changing social establishment, but is possible only on the foundation of [Christ]"<sup>v</sup>

As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus." (1 Cor. 3: 11).

I. Palmer, G.E.H.; Sherrard, P.; and Ware, K. (Trans.) (1971, 1981, 1988, 1990). Philokalia, I-IV. London: Faber and Faber. (V.4, p.116)

II. <http://www.northernplainsethicsjournal.com/NPEJv1n1/janeahlin.pdf>

III. [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/2005-1\\_047.pdf](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/2005-1_047.pdf)

IV. A 1st Century AD heretical Christian group.

V. [mospat.ru/en/2015/02/08/news115201/](http://mospat.ru/en/2015/02/08/news115201/)

## Briefly ...

### Assyrian Patriarch falls asleep in the Lord

His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East, fell asleep in the Lord on March 26, 2015 at the age of 79.

Mar Dinkha had served as Patriarch since 1976, when he was elected to replace the assassinated Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII.



**Mar Dinkha IV**

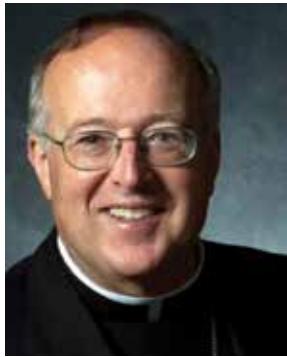
Born Dinkha Khanania in Darbandokeh, Iraq, he was ordained a deacon in 1949. Eight years later, he was ordained a priest. He was consecrated bishop of Teheran in 1962.

Among his notable accomplishments in office were abolishing the hereditary requirement for office within the Assyrian Church of the East, and an emphasis on ecumenism, including a joint declaration on Christology issued with the Vatican.

He also worked with Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas to improve relations between the two historic Churches, as well as with the Ancient Church of the East.

### New bishop in San Diego

On March 3, 2015, the Vatican named Robert W. McElroy the sixth bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego. He replaces the late Bishop Cirilo Flores, who fell asleep in the Lord on Sept. 6 after just less than a year after being appointed.



**Bishop Robt. McElroy**

Bishop McElroy was previously auxiliary Bishop of San Francisco.

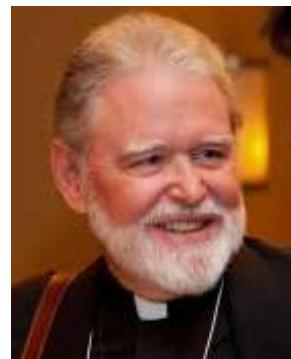
He grew up in the Bay Area, and was ordained in 1980. He holds a bachelor's degree from Harvard, master's degrees from Stanford and St. Patrick's Seminary, and a doctorate from Stanford. In 2010, he was named auxiliary bishop of his native diocese.

As Bishop, McElroy will lead a flock of nearly 1 million Catholics, covering 98 parishes.

He is set to be installed April 15, 2015, at a Mass at St. Thérèse of Carmel Catholic Church.

### Ecumenical writer falls asleep in the Lord

Orthodox priest and longtime columnist for Catholic publication, Commonweal magazine, Archpriest John Garvey fell asleep in the Lord on Jan. 20, 2015, in Puyallup, Wash. He was 70 years old.



**Archpriest John Garvey**

Raised in a Roman Catholic family, Father Garvey was received into the Orthodox Church of America in 1984. In 1992, he was ordained a priest.

In addition to his articles for Commonweal, he was also author of several books, including "Seeds of the Word: Orthodox Thinking on Other Religions" (2006); "Death and the Rest of Our Life" (2005); "Orthodoxy for the Non-Orthodox: A Brief Introduction to Orthodox Christianity" (2002); and "Saints for Confused Times" (1976).

### New Church, Metropolitan for Eritrea

In January, Pope Francis formally separated the four dioceses in Eritrea from the Ethiopian Catholic Church and placed them in a newly formed Eritrean Catholic Church. (In 1998, the Eritrean Orthodox Church amicably separated from the Coptic Orthodox Church.)



**Metropolitan Menghisteab Tesfamariam**

To oversee the roughly 155,000 Catholics in Eritrea (as compared to the 1.5 million Orthodox, and 5 million Muslims), the pope appointed Bishop Menghisteab Tesfamariam as first Metropolitan of the new Church.